The 19th of March, at 20.30. Yet another one of the Italian navy’s ships is coming into port in Sicily. On board the vessel: 380 people who have been rescued from the sea on their way to Europe.

A JOURNEY OF LIFE AND DEATH

Many of the passengers have burns after having been pinched against the motor of the boat they were rescued from. Others have hypothermia. Several have wounds and injuries from war and torture.
I can’t swim," I only had
with a pair of white slippers in size 43
ning on the quay. After being equipped
the narrow gangway with dazed, wobbly

They walk down
and make their first check-up of the
Equipped with masks in order to prevent
kets that look like large sheets of foil.
They are wrapped in thermal blan-
squeezed together, many without shoes.

through the cold night.
atically organized on the quay. They
ambulances, volunteer organizations,
and interpreters, are all waiting, system-
atically organized on the quay. They are
warmly dressed to sustain working
through the cold night.
The 380 passengers aboard are tightly
squeezed together, many without shoes.
They are wrapped in thermal blan-
kets that look like large sheets of foil.
Equipped with masks in order to prevent
infections from the ocean were
Those who were saved
from the ocean were
rescued and brought ashore in Italy. 13026 were unaccomp-
ained children.

In January this year 3528 migrants
arrived to Italy. About 50 percent more
than during the same period last year.
During the first quarter of the year about 12 000 people
have landed in Italy, of which 2000 are unaccompanied minors.

It is nine


with an adult

the Mediterranean, a significantly higher
traumatized by everything they have
through a lot of suffering, many children
are overwhelmed by war and politi-
cal instability. These children, says Micaela,
have come alone, without any adult
and injuries from war and torture. A
young mother with a newly born baby is
hurried past the other passengers.

Micaela Messina, a lawyer employed
by Save The Children Sicily, moves
confidently amongst the new arrivals
on the quay. She has seen many similar
scenarios during the last year.

– We have hundreds of landings every
week here in Sicily. The majority of
the passengers are originally from countries
that are overheated by war and politi-
cal instability. These people have been
through a lot of suffering, many children
come unaccompanied, and many are
traumatized by everything they have
been through during their journey, not
least through Libya.

Ouly in the first three months of this
year over 10 000 migrants have landed
in Italy after a dangerous journey across
the Mediterranean, a significantly higher
number than last year. Close to 1000 of
them are children, of which two thirds
have come alone, without any adult
to take care of them. The majority, 82
percent, has landed in Sicily; the remain-
ing 18 percent have landed in Lampe-
dusa, in Calabria, and in Apulia.

– Our team, a cultural mediator and
me, are amongst the first people that
they meet who can actually speak their
language, and know their country, says
Micaela. Our job is to identify minors,
and give them legal information about
their basic rights. We also talk about
Italy – many have no idea where they
have landed. Then finally we follow them,
and make sure that they get placed in
the correct transit centre, and that they
receive any further support that they
need.

Which is the most frequently asked
question at the landing?

– The first question asked is almost
always the same – “Where am I?”. I
usually show them on a map. Here we are,
this is Sicily, Italy. The second question is
usually about their rights.

The interior ministry commissions
the work that is done in cooperation
with UNHCR and IOM.

– We are valued as partners for our
experience with children, says Micaela.

Most of the people that are saved at sea
have been traveling by boat from Libya.

– The steady stream of migrants we
are seeing now is linked to the war there,
says Admiral Nicola De Falco, who is
responsible for the Italian Navy’s surveil-
lance of Europe’s southern border.

– The ethnic groups that are tight-
ing their finance their warfare through
the incomes gained from these boats.
The average price for a ticket on one of
these barely seaworthy ships is 1500
dollars. Some quick math shows that just
the evening’s load of migrants has made
the smugglers about half a million dollars.

– The new thing right now is that they
use a “mothership” that tows the boat
containing the refugees from the Leba-
nese coast, and then lets it go adrift,
whilst returning to the coast itself. All
of these precautions are taken so that
the smugglers wont get caught, says
the admiral. Beau-Flis, 17, fled from Guiney
in 2013, when the war erupted, and is one
of that people who survived the journey
across the Mediterranean.

– If I would have known how danger-
ous it was I would never have done the
journey across the sea, he says.

After almost two years of wandering
through the Sahara desert, working to
get money for the day, and for his boat fare,
he arrived at Tripoli, and got a space on
a boat.

– When I saw in how bad shape it was, I
didn’t want to get aboard. But everything
happened really quickly, it was aggres-
sive, people pushed each other aboard
the boat. I was in the front and was
nailed towards the bow of the boat. There was no
way to get off. – I could only think one thought: I
can’t swim. I realized that I had a 50/50
percent chance of survival.

He objectively tells us about the jour-
ney. There were 125 people on a small
inflatable boat. Water was leaking in so
that their feet and legs were submerged
for several hours. There were tail waves.

– People screamed and wept, prayed
to god. Others just sat in silence.

Many vomited.

– What I have seen is too horrible. . .
I would not advise anyone to make
my journey.

The operation was mandated to actively
search for and rescue boat refugees in the
Mediterranean’s international territory,
this was an extension from what earlier
had only been patrolling the border along
the Italian territory, i.e. the E.U’s southern
border. Admiral Nicola De Falco is proud
over this operation.

– We really saved lives, he confirms.

Around 156714 lives were saved when
the operation was active between the
15th of October 2013 and the 31th of
October 2014. During the same period
366 smugglers were arrested. Simultane-
ously more than 3000 people lost their
lives in the Mediterranean during 2014.

Since Mare Nostrum “Our Ocean” lost
its funding from the EU another opera-
tion has taken its place, Triton. Triton is
financed by the Frontex and has a
substantially reduced mandate. Their
boats main mission is to survive the Euro-
pean border rather than to rescue people
in need outside of it. The boats are only
authorized to move 45 kilometers away
from European soil.

– But we try to save as many people as
we can, says Nicola De Falco.

His colleague, lieutenant Berardino
Amodio, is a captain on one of the navy’s
rescue ships. Since he took over the
command, the 9th of September he has
been at sea for 150 days.

– Every week, when we are at sea, we
encounter these ships, he says. This
September we found a sinking inflatable
boat. They were seen from the ocean
were
MIGRANTS THAT ARRIVE TO ITALY
• Last year 170 000 migrants stepped
ashore in Italy. 13026 were unaccomp-
ained children.
• In January this year 3528 migrants
arrived to Italy. About 50 percent more
than during the same period last year.
• During the first quarter of the year about
12 000 people have landed in Italy, of which
2000 are unaccompanied minors.

ike a warship, with a heli-
copter on deck, the fleet’s
boat Libra slowly moves into
the Augusta Harbor in east Sicily. It is nine

barn  24  nr2.2015

November 2014.

barn  25  nr2.2015

November 2014.

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November 2014.

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November 2014.

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November 2014.

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November 2014.
boat with 89 people aboard. When we handed over the lifejackets they started fighting for them, and some people even fell overboard. My crew jumped in the water and saved them.

The condition of the people who are saved depends on the weather, he explains, if it rains, if there are large waves. – Sometimes they are in really bad shape. Children, elders, you can see it in their eyes, that they have stood on the brink between life and death. Sometimes it is very hard to get them aboard our boat, as they have no energy left. – I try not to think about it too much, because if I do it gets in the way of me properly doing my job, giving orders, saving as many people as possible. In the evening though, when I go to bed, I can let out my personal feelings. – It is hard to understand! In our western society this all seems like a nightmare. I feel a great deal of sadness over the situation that the migrants and refugees are in. The only thing I can think about is what I can do to help. After the arrival, the medical checkup, a meal, distribution of resources, and a few hours of sleep on bunks in a hangar-like tent, the migrant go through the process of identification. Among the passengers on tonight’s boat there were 20 women and 13 unaccompanied children. They were originally from Nigeria, Gambia, Mali, The Ivory Coast and Cameroon.

– Right now there are less Syrians on the boats, but if you look at last year as a whole, Syrians account for a large amount of the total number of migrants, says Carlotta Bollani, from Save the Children. Among the passengers on the boat, as they have no energy left.

They are placed in substandard housing, like cars in a garage.»

Il minors that arrive to Italy are legally permitted to stay in the country until they are 18 years old, regardless of whether they apply for asylum or not. When a person turns 18 a special assessment, based on among other things, whether they study or work, takes place to decide if they can stay in Italy. After their arrival they are placed in temporary transit centers where they are to wait for a more long-term placement.

– Many of these shelters are substandard, says Carlotta Bollani. The children are placed there like cars in a garage, without love and care, with no opportunities to interact with other people who speak their language, and with none to help them obtain vocational training. There are no interpreters, no legal representatives, and no psychological support.

– There is no system that ensures that these shelters offer the support required on a fundamental level. The situation is treated like it is an emergency, even though we knew that it will continue for several years. In Siracusa, 14 families and 40 unaccompanied children are currently staying in the Transit accommodation Lazagara. The head of the center, Giuliana Garaffi, is deeply involved and does what she can with limited resources.

– It is difficult to find the right placement for them when an overall system is lacking, she says. It feels frustrating, like a failure, even if I do everything in my power. – A lot of the minors remain here for more than 90 days, which is supposed to be the limit. One of them is Blessing, a young mother with a joyful four-year-old son who loves to dance. Despite everything his family has been through, they fled from Nigeria and the growing threat of Boko Haram. Like many others Blessing and her husband took on the way to earn enough money for the boat to Italy. She also describes horrible abuses, especially in Libya.

– Our last job was at a farm where they wouldn’t pay us. When we complained we were brutally assaulted. They threatened all of us, and locked us up. – After a few weeks they agreed to let our son and me go to Italy in order to collect money and pay a ransom for my husband, who is now their hostage. She sighs deeply; says that she cannot cope with talking about it anymore. She has no idea of how she is supposed to get a job and make money.

Here in Sicily the unemployment rate is 40 percent among people under 30. And xenophobia is increasing in the wake of the economic crisis. – Right now we are waiting for the decision on a legislative proposal that we have been working on, says Carlotta Bollani. It details how we should establish an integrated system for reception and protection of unaccompanied children. – I believe that all of Europe should make it a priority to save the people who risk their lives to cross the Mediterranean. It is our shared responsibility.

Today there are hundreds of unaccompanied minors placed in different transit centers in Italy. Many of them try to escape as a result of the poor conditions and lengthy processes. The lack of activities, and the missing prospects of a future, is also contributing factors.Each week about 100 migrants arrive at the mosque at Piazza Castelli in central Catania, about a half an hour drive from the docks in Augusta, to get shelter and something to eat. – We do our best, says one of the employees. Not least do we pray together for those who didn’t make it all the way. The ones who died. As there is no Muslim cemetery in Sicily, they are buried in cemeteries such as the one in Ponzia, a dovecote town about an hour south by car. On a hill, overlooking the sea, with gigantic gulls circling overhead, the graves stand on rows, grand, and gaudy, like small temples. Wealthy Italian families are buried here. Further into the area there is a wall with plaques of marble for those who couldn’t afford their own mausoleum. Their names are engraved, ornate. And then lastly we have the simple squares, which consist of pure plaster, for those who didn’t have any money. Their names are not even engraved. Instead, someone has painted with wobbly strokes on the concrete; Moussa, Alakasby, Unknown. There is a hierarchy even amongst the dead.»

WHAT SAVE THE CHILDREN DOES
• Save the Children Italy has a nation wide program.
• They are stationed at the ports of arrival in Sicily, Lampedusa, Calabria, and Apulia, to monitor the reception of the arrivals, and offer advice and support to minors, with a particular focus on their rights, not least in legal procedures.
• They run day centers, and night shelters in Rome and Milan where undocumented children can shower, do laundry, use the internet, get advice and support, and participate in various activities.
• They conduct outreach missions to established contact with “invisible” children that risk exploitation.
• They collaborate with the nations home offices, and other organizations such as the IOM and UNHCR, to provide a better long term reception of the migrants.
• They are Influencers, Who are involved in making legislative proposals and spreading knowledge.