

WORLD NEWS

Bitter Harvest for Migrants in Italy's Groves

Collapse in orange prices forcing illegal migrants to compete for shrinking pool of jobs

By PIETRO LOMBARDI
AND DREW HINSHAW

ROSARNO, Italy—In Italy's orange belt, a crash in citrus prices is colliding with Europe's migration crisis.

Thousands of young migrants are getting stuck in Italy and trying to find work. The problem: Container ships full of cheap foreign oranges are also coming in, driving the price of the fruit so low that farmers aren't bothering to harvest their crops.

Wages are falling and new-comer migrants arrive, but many can't find fruit to pick. Those who don't find work are idle, living in tent cities, where residents say frustration and substance abuse are growing.

"In Sicily, we didn't live in huts like this, this lived in dignity," said Mohammad Thiam, an unemployed orange picker riding out his fourth Italian winter in a sprawling shantytown outside Rosarno, a Calabrian town on the toe of Italy's boot.

The immigration fatigue sweeping Europe has left Italy to deal with hundreds of thousands of migrants from West Africa and Eritrea who have landed on the peninsula since 2014. French and Austrian governments, both battling rising native sentiment, are blocking their migrants from leaving Italy. European Union plans to distribute them across the bloc have stalled.

The Milan research institute ISMU Foundation estimates there were about 350,000 illegal immigrants in the country, up nearly 50% since 2013.

To ease Italy's migration problems, the new government of Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni is trying to step up deportations. At the same time, courts are rejecting more and more asylum requests.



Members of a fair-wage agricultural cooperative picked clementines in mid-January in Rosarno, where many migrants live in tent cities.



That is leaving migrants with little to do, forcing them to move into a growing mass of illegal immigrants. Many are spreading out to farms, competing for jobs whose wages are sinking. Italy, with its dual nation-wide system, has a long history of hiring foreign workers—legal and illegal—to till fields or pick oranges. But the collapse in citrus prices has left few jobs to be had.

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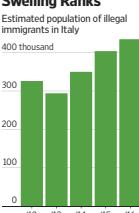
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to let the oranges rot in the sun, or cut back on plantings, according to Pietro Molinari, president of Coldiretti. Over the past 15 years, farmers planted a third of their orange trees and overall the country lost about a third of its acreage of citrus, the association estimates.

Those migrants who find work during the November-to-March picking season are often paid under the table, earning as little as €15 (\$16) a day and putting in hours that are double the legal limit, without pay overshoes for food, water, and transport to the fields.

Those practices have at times earned opprobrium both for the farms and the multinationals that buy their produce, including Wal-Mart, which sell lemons, Italian olives and the country's huge tomato indus-

Swelling Ranks



Source: Fondazione ISMU (Initiatives and Studies on Multi-ethnicity)
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

try have all been called out for using underpaid migrant labor.

Last year, Co-op, Italy's biggest supermarket group, overhauled its supply chain and shifted 200,000 boxes of tomatoes, grapes, oranges and strawberries to weed out exploitative farm labor. It has severed relations with nine over the past few years.

"In Italy, you can no longer eat a box of spaghetti that was not produced by an exploited migrant," said Flavio Di Giacomo, spokesman for the International Organization for Migration.

Migrants come to harvest one of Italy's most valuable citrus fruits, the bergamot, whose skin provides essence for more than half the world's perfumes, according to the International Federation of the Cosmetic Industry.

Indian migrants in recent

years dominated the ranks of

pickers, who make €30 a day

under the table, according to

interviews with more than a

dozen farmers and migrant

farmers who have made the

passage from Libya and are

willing to work for even less

or nothing.

They include Bouba

Mandé, a Senegalese who makes

€25 a day: "It's better than

begging, doing nothing."

Ethiopian Premier Seeks Closer Relations With U.S.

By MATINA STEVENS

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia—The prime minister said in a rare interview that President Donald Trump's "America first" message following the lead of his Ethiopian ally China in looking to stimulate domestic job growth.

"China has become a model not only for Ethiopia but now even for the administration of the United States," Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn told The Wall Street Journal on Wednesday, in an interview in which he urged President Trump to renew a key trade deal and bolster cooperation against terrorism.

"They are focused on bringing back jobs and manufacturing to the U.S., which obviously means the Chinese drive to manufacture at home has become a model as well to the U.S."

Ethiopia's size, rapid economic growth and strong military have in the past two decades elevated Africa's second-most populous nation, which once depended on international aid for its famine-stricken populace. Thousands of its troops play a leading role in managing regional conflicts, while close ties to China, the Gulf states and the U.S. make it a power broker in a region marred by turmoil and poverty.

Stills its ascent has come with a strict control of the economy and, critics say, ever-tighter controls over dissent and human rights.



Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in Addis Ababa on Wednesday.

The 51-year-old leader, who took power after the death of Meles Zenawi in 2012, said his government wanted to bolster cooperation with Washington and criticized his predecessor's human-rights record.

"We have never been colonized because of our attitude...We have the confidence, the mind, and attitude, and our people are also enough to tell us what they want to tell us," Mr. Desalegn said.

New York-based Human Rights Watch says the state of Emergency is an extension of the military's "state of exception" of 40 years and offends human rights norms.

Mr. Desalegn said he hoped to work with Mr. Trump to deepen collaboration against jihadism.

But the prime minister, who

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