



ITALY/CALABRIA

**A STORY OF THE MAFIA  
AND AN INEFFICIENT  
HEALTH SERVICE**

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Rosarno (Reggio Calabria), the hospital whose construction started towards the end of the 1960s, it was completed in 1991 and cost more than 7 billion lire. It was originally intended as a trauma and orthopaedic centre with a capacity of 120 beds, but it never opened.

## **Calabria in Southern Italy has some of Europe's worst hospitals**

The Italian healthcare system is one of the worst in Europe. Or rather, the healthcare system in Calabria, one of its southern regions. Sadly infamous for one the world's most powerful mafias: 'Ndrangheta. As the famous public prosecutor and champion of the fight against the mafia, Nicola Gratteri, once said, "'Ndrangheta and deviant freemasonries control entire sectors of the Calabrian healthcare system", fomenting one of Europe's biggest healthcare disasters. Calabria, despite not recording many Covid cases, is still considered to be a high-risk region due to the terrible state of its healthcare system. The situation is so bad that the Italian Government has had to call Emergency, the NGO usually found providing assistance in war zones like Iraq and Afghanistan, to manage the pandemic emergency and increase the availability of sub-intensive care units.

The Calabrian healthcare system is a poisonous cocktail of waste, corruption and mafia infiltration, but also of incompetence, negligence and indifference. The numbers are brutal: there aren't enough doctors, nurses, ambulances, or A&E units; the appointment of a temporary administration in 2010 led to the closure of 18 hospitals and since then the system has amassed debts of more than € 225 million. Many hospitals can only provide a limited service, others have been built but never opened, and in some areas of Calabria the number of hospital beds per 1,000 inhabitants is a depressing 0.8 (the Italian average is approximately 3.7). When the ex-Italian Minister of Health, Giulia Grillo, visited some local hospitals in 2019, she said: "in Locri the situation is almost impossible to believe, in the pneumonia ward 1,765 out-of-date medicines were discovered". Nowadays Calabrians (one in five) go elsewhere for their treatment, particularly to northern Italy. Like Angelo Bevilacqua, who underwent surgery for prostate cancer in Bergamo in 2019: "I worked in Germany for years before returning to live in Cariati six years ago. I've regretted it ever since".



Crotone, San Giovanni di Dio Hospital: Eleonora Dotti, 31, a nurse from Genoa who's worked with Emergency since 2015, being helped to get dressed before entering the second Covid ward, opened by Emergency at the beginning of December 2020.



Nicotera (Vibo Valentia), the entrance of the enormous hospital, open to anybody who wants to go in but now almost completely closed and semi-abandoned.



Polia (Vibo Valentia), Pino Ruscio standing in front of his daughter's grave; Eva died in 2007 after being admitted for tonsillitis when she was 16 years old. The trial, which lasted 8 years, found the Head of ENT and an anaesthetist guilty.



Cariati (Cosenza), a meeting of the "Le Lampare" movement in a room they're occupying at the local hospital, which is now largely disused. The movement is campaigning for an A&E unit for the city (between Crotona and Policoro, a distance of 173 km, there's just one in Rossano) as well as the complete reopening of the hospital.



Catanzaro, Giovanna Scerbo, 51, lying on her sofa at home. Suffering from cancer and heart disease for years, she only started receiving disability benefits (for being 100% disabled) in September 2020, after a lengthy legal process. Her daughter Nadia – who suffers from Graves' disease – had her parathyroid glands removed by mistake during an operation, and as a result was granted benefits for being 80% disabled.



Crotona, San Giovanni di Dio Hospital stands very close (according to some too close) to the Ezio Scida football stadium: when the local football team plays there's a sharp rise in patients admitted, so they can watch the match from the hospital's windows.



Catanzaro, Antonio Jaritano, a representative from the trade union Unione Sindacale di Base (USB), in discussion with a number of employees of the Sant'Anna Hospital – a private clinic threatened with closure – during their permanent occupation of part of the clinic.



Cariati (Cosenza), medical files and health documents discarded in a hospital warehouse that anybody is free to enter. The hospital, totalling 13,000 m<sup>2</sup> and with a catchment area covering 100,000 people (tripling in summer), has been mostly disused for the past 11 years: it has a potential capacity for 120 beds but 75% of this is unused and the A&E unit has been downgraded to a Minor Injury Unit.



Reggio Calabria, Nicoleta Sirca, 52, a Romanian living in Italy for 14 years, on her balcony at home. Thanks to the help of the Emergency administrative office in Polistena, Nicoleta won her case against the Local Health Authority in Taurianova, which for years denied her an exemption from paying the costs of medical equipment she needs to self-monitor her diabetes and her sleep apnoea which could lead to heart failure.



Rosarno (Reggio Calabria), the inside of the hospital whose construction started towards the end of the 1960s, it was completed in 1991 and cost more than 7 billion lire. It was originally intended as a trauma and orthopaedic centre with a capacity of 120 beds, but it never opened.



Catanzaro, a patient in the section where Covid patients at the "Pugliese Ciaccio" Hospital are treated. Having already experienced many cases of healthcare mismanagement, the hospital – explains the A&E Service Director, Peppino Masciari – "is under stress due to constant cuts. We've got so few beds yet everyone comes here, from all over Calabria. They're slowly destroying us".



San Ferdinando (Reggio Calabria), the makeshift camp mostly populated by farm workers. Not entitled to healthcare and frequently exploited to work in the fields, these people often suffer musculoskeletal pain and a variety of other conditions that the Calabrian healthcare system wouldn't be able to treat. So the workers sometimes go to the medical centre opened by Emergency near the town of Polistena.



Catanzaro, the A&E Service Director, Peppino Masciari, walking in the corridors of the "Pugliese Ciaccio" Hospital. Having already experienced many cases of healthcare mismanagement, the hospital – explains Masciari – "is under stress due to constant cuts. We've got so few beds yet everyone comes here, from all over Calabria. They're slowly destroying us".



Polistena (Reggio Calabria), farm workers who live in the San Ferdinando makeshift camp heading to the clinic which was opened in the town by Emergency in 2013. Frequently exploited to work in the fields, these people often suffer musculoskeletal pain and a variety of other conditions that the Calabrian healthcare system wouldn't be able to treat.



Cariati (Cosenza), during a meeting of the "Le Lampare" movement in a room they're occupying at the local hospital, which is now largely disused, a blackboard shows the actions that need to be carried out. The movement is campaigning for an A&E unit for the city (between Crotona and Policoro, a distance of 173 km, there's just one in Rossano) as well as the complete reopening of the hospital.



Catanzaro, Sara Riccelli at the Sant'Anna Hospital – a private clinic threatened with closure – during the permanent occupation of part of the clinic. Sara, 64, has worked at Sant'Anna for 23 years: she has just three years left before retirement but she's worried, like many of her colleagues, about being laid off.



Locri (Reggio Calabria), rubbish piled up for days inside the hospital grounds. The ex-Minister of Health, Giulia Grillo, in 2019 described the situation at the hospital as "almost impossible to believe: medicines out of date, non-approved lifts, non-compliant sterilisers and electricity generators".



Reggio Calabria, Alfonso Scutellà, 60, embarked on a legal battle to draw attention to the death of his son Flavio, who died in 2007 at 12 years of age following a traumatic brain injury. Following a trial lasting more than 7 years, five doctors were found guilty, all of whom were convicted.



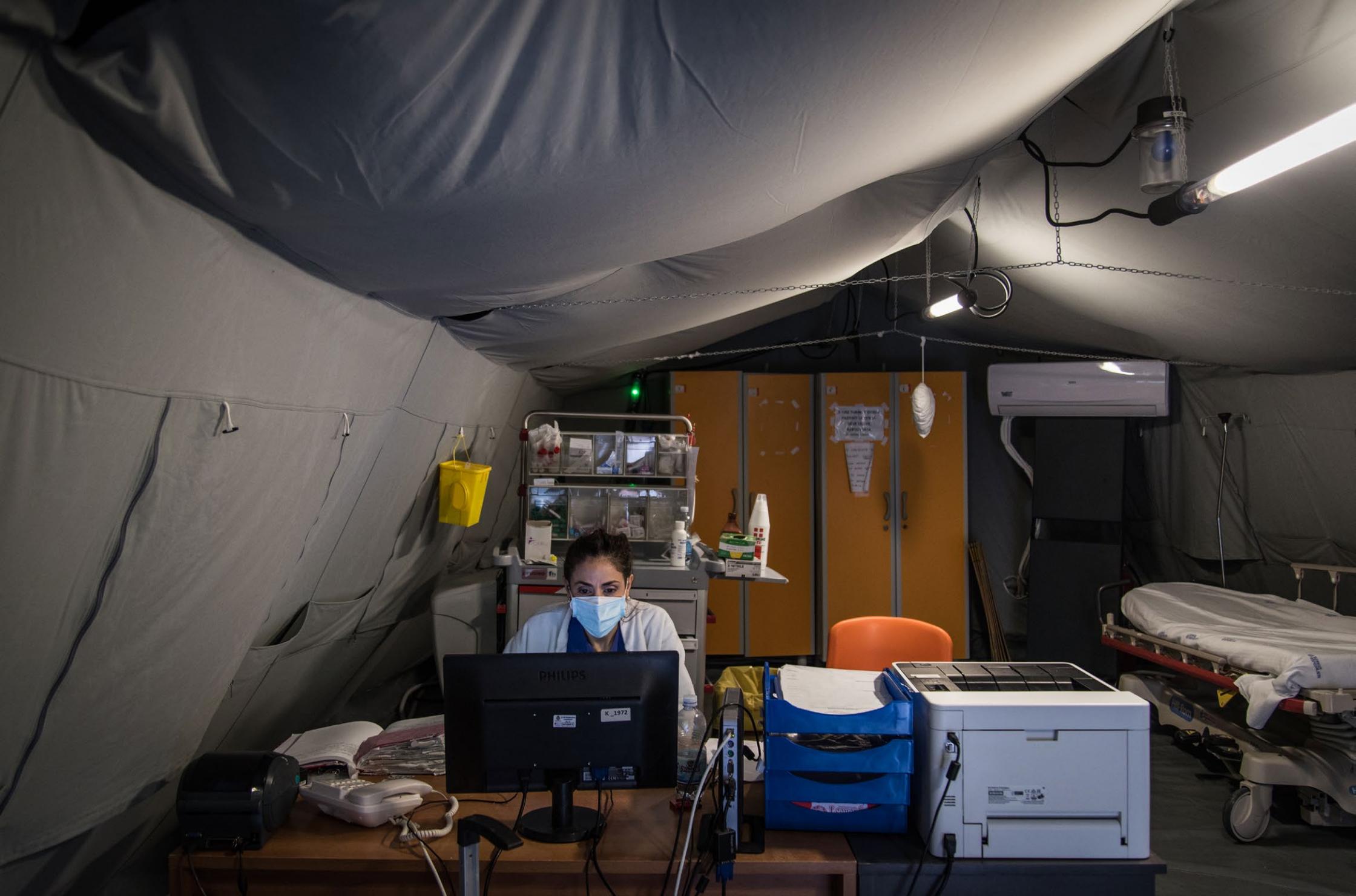
Mammola (Reggio Calabria), a stretch of the 682 "Jonio-Tirreno" State Highway, nicknamed "death highway" as a result of the high number of fatal accidents caused, among other reasons, by speeding but also due to a lack of – in some cases – adequate lighting, traffic barriers, average speed cameras, and porous asphalt to enable draining. Add to this that there is also a lack of an adequate ambulance service, and all of this is made even more dangerous.



Polistena (Reggio Calabria), at the Santa Maria degli Ungheresi Hospital, employees of a funeral directors load a coffin into a hearse. According to prosecutors from the DDA (District Antimafia Department) in Reggio Calabria, the relationships between 'Ndrangheta and this hospital are "thick".



Gioia Tauro (Reggio Calabria), the entrance of the Giovanni XXIII Hospital, practically inactive and where severe shortages in personnel have been reported: today it just houses a Covid centre.



Catanzaro, the Civil Protection Service tent being used as a Covid triage unit at the “Pugliese Ciaccio” Hospital. Having already experienced many cases of healthcare mismanagement, the hospital – explains the A&E Service Director, Peppino Masciari – “is under stress due to constant cuts. We’ve got so few beds yet everyone comes here, from all over Calabria. They’re slowly destroying us”.



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