

# Music to Strike A Harmonious Note on Irregular Migration

For the fifth year, the Italian island of Lampedusa rocked to the music of famous Italian artists to promote a better understanding of irregular migration. The annual event, organized by the O'Scià Foundation, has grown not only in size over time, but also in scope. Recognizing the power of music to change hearts and minds, IOM has joined up with O'Scià for the first time this year to help sponsor its activities. IOM's Flavio di Giacomo reports from Lampedusa.

*La Guitgia* is Lampedusa's most crowded beach, but at the end of September, instead of its usual sunbathers, it is thronged by thousands of people who flock to hear several days of concerts featuring Italy's most famous singers. It's no ordinary music

festival. Organized by the popular Italian singer, Claudio Baglioni, the O'Scià event is dedicated to changing the way people think about and react to irregular migration.

It all began in 2003, when Baglioni realized that the island had become the destination of thousands of migrants who

◀ Claudio Baglioni during the concert  
(Photo: © Alessandro F. Dobici, 2007)



put themselves in the hands of smugglers to cross the part of the Mediterranean that separates Libya and Tunisia from southern Europe. The flimsy and overcrowded boats used to transport desperate migrants have been the cause of thousands of deaths and human tragedies.

The Roman singer, who owns a holiday home on Lampedusa, decided to put his star power to use to raise awareness on what was going on in Europe's backyard and to help change some of the attitudes and reaction towards the phenomenon. Over the years, the island had witnessed a decline in the number of tourists coming there, a situation locals blamed on the reporting of irregular migration there.

Using *O'Scià*, a Lampedusa greeting meaning "my breath" in the local dialect, he held a concert performing his own songs. Its success led to the decision to take the initiative further. For the following year's concert, he invited additional singers to join him in an effort to gain visibility. A landscape of Italian artists joined Baglioni and even international stars such as Bob Geldof and Khaled wanted to participate.

Now in its fifth year and having built up a serious reputation, *O'Scià* has been formalized into a foundation with broader objectives, including taking its messages to other Mediterranean countries. Lampedusa this year followed hard on the heels of another event in Malta, also a destination point for irregular migrants. Here, Baglioni performed with two other popular Italian artists, Gianni Morandi and Riccardo Cocciante.

▼ IOM's Gina Villone with newly arrived irregular migrants at Lampedusa's harbour (Photo: © Peter Schatzer/IOM, 2007)



However, this year, the Foundation decided to mix roundtable discussions and cultural performances during a week-long event, including a showing of films on migration issues in cooperation with the Italian Ministry of Social Solidarity.

The Foundation's broader objectives reflected in the expanded events led to a request to IOM to help sponsor *O'Scià's* festivals this year. IOM has a presence on the island which last year saw nearly 19,000 irregular migrants washed up on its shores. The Organization works together with the Italian Red Cross and UNHCR at Lampedusa's migrant reception centre where it provides migrants with information on their rights, status and the realities of irregular migration and stay in Italy.

For IOM, there was no hesitation in teaming up with *O'Scià*. Baglioni is managing to get the local population on Lampedusa to understand the complexities of the phenomena that make people risk their lives to reach Europe – a very important but extremely difficult thing to achieve. And through his concerts, he has contributed to making the island a destination for thousands of music fans, thus reversing the trend of shrinking tourist arrivals.

"Claudio Baglioni has the ability to effectively draw public attention to the disasters that continue to take place in the Mediterranean," says Peter Schatzer, IOM's Chief of Mission in Rome. "It's a delicate situation and it's critical that correct and balanced information is provided to the general public on migration issues and an event like *O'Scià* can go a long way in doing just that."

With its festive atmosphere, approximately 10,000 people gathered at the Lampedusa event's three main concerts, where Baglioni spread messages of tolerance for those who come to Europe in search of a better life.

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**One of our goals is to free words like “clandestine” and “immigrant” of their negative connotations,” the singer says. And support the rights of others in order to support our own rights. Since we can no longer search for a new world, we have to construct our own new world.**  
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Among the crowd were 50 or so immigrants, personally greeted by Baglioni. Most of them were Ivorians, shipwreck survivors who had been picked up a few days earlier by an Italian fishing boat off the island's coast. They appeared slightly puzzled by the friendly atmosphere that greeted them after their perilous journey, some of them repeating "*O'Scià*" again and again.

Broadening horizons and bringing diverse worlds together in order to spread the message of solidarity and tolerance – Baglioni's "new world" – is starting to take shape in Lampedusa, thanks to efforts by humanitarian organizations such as IOM working together with Italian institutions.

*O'Scià* Lampedusa is over for 2007 and the Foundation has its eyes fixed on the future – a future filled with greater ambitions. A concert in Libya whose shores are a departure point for the hundreds of boats that do or don't make it to islands such as Lampedusa and Malta, is being discussed with authorities in Tripoli. It would be another step forward in bringing people from the Mediterranean closer together. **M**