

SYSTEMATIC HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS



Border violence, pushbacks and containment in Ceuta and Melilla

A special report from members and collaborators of the Border Violence Monitoring Network



Border Violence Monitoring Network



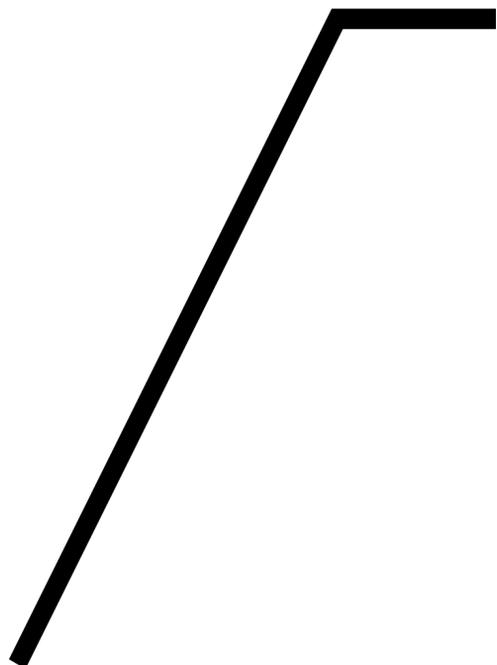
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IN THIS REPORT

Introductory overview



Considering the impacts of recent border violence during May 2021, and placing this within a context of historic pushbacks and rights violations from the Spanish enclaves to Morocco, this publication analyses the situation in Ceuta and Melilla, looking at continuities and expansions in state repression against people-on-the-move.

The report looks at the context of the enclaves as transit sites, analysing developments around the fence, maritime crossings and local border mobility. Combining first hand accounts from people subject to violent expulsions, as well as an overview of the actors and surveillance technologies involved, the border architecture of the enclaves is highlighted as a tool of deterrence and abuse.

The publication primarily focuses on the events from May onwards, when thousands of sub-Saharan Africans and people from neighbouring Moroccan towns crossed into Ceuta and Melilla via land and sea. Looking at the way Spanish and Moroccan authorities dealt with this large scale transit revealed existent patterns in collective expulsion and police brutality.

For those who evaded pushback, the arrival conditions (whether in reception facilities or sleeping rough) represented a further extension of border violence within the interior of the enclaves. The report looks at how this precarious situation became a staging ground for further illegal removals to Morocco, as well as violent urban policing and raids against documented and undocumented persons.

Viewing this repressive dynamic in tandem with the deployment of additional authorities from the Spanish peninsula, as well as a new joint mission with Frontex in the Port of Ceuta, the report explores the wider implications of these events within the securitisation of the EU external border.

This report was researched and written by [Disinfo Collective](#), [No Name Kitchen](#) and [Solidarity Wheels](#), and published by the [Border Violence Monitoring Network](#). The data collection was carried out via interviews with people-on-the-move, on-field observational research, as well as photographic and video documentation.





Glossary of terms

Enclave - a part of the territory of a state that is enclosed within the territory of another state.

Breakwater - a barrier built out into the sea to protect a coast or harbour from the force of waves.

Risky - crossing to the Spanish Peninsula via ferry while hidden in trucks or by boarding vessels themselves (known at other European borders as “the Game”).

Pushback - Pushback describes the informal expulsion (without due process) of an individual or group to another country. This lies in contrast to the term “deportation”, which is conducted in a legal framework.

People-on-the-move - a collective term for people transiting borders which encompasses migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and other mobile demographics.

Abbreviations

EU - European Union

ECtHR - European Court of Human Rights

CETI - Centros de Estancia Temporal de Inmigrantes (Centers for Temporary Stay of Immigrants)

UNHCR - The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

History of the border

Ceuta and Melilla are small enclaves on the North coast of Morocco which are administered by the Madrid government as official Spanish territories. Their presence within the Spanish administration is inherently connected to European colonial history as Melilla was conquered by the Spanish and Ceuta was conquered by the Portuguese and then passed into the control of Spain following a treaty between the two states in the 17th Century. Both are harbour (port) cities which face out onto the Mediterranean, in Ceuta's case directly onto the Strait of Gibraltar where it meets the Atlantic Ocean; thus bearing strategic interest to Europe for centuries. Ceuta and Melilla remain the only EU territories on the African mainland, and as such their past and present have been sculpted by colonial settlement and bordering. Today the enclaves are still a contentious point within Spain and Morocco's bilateral relationship; however, Spain's current governance of Ceuta and Melilla is rarely contested internally, although such tensions do contribute to racialized discourse and anti-immigration rhetoric.

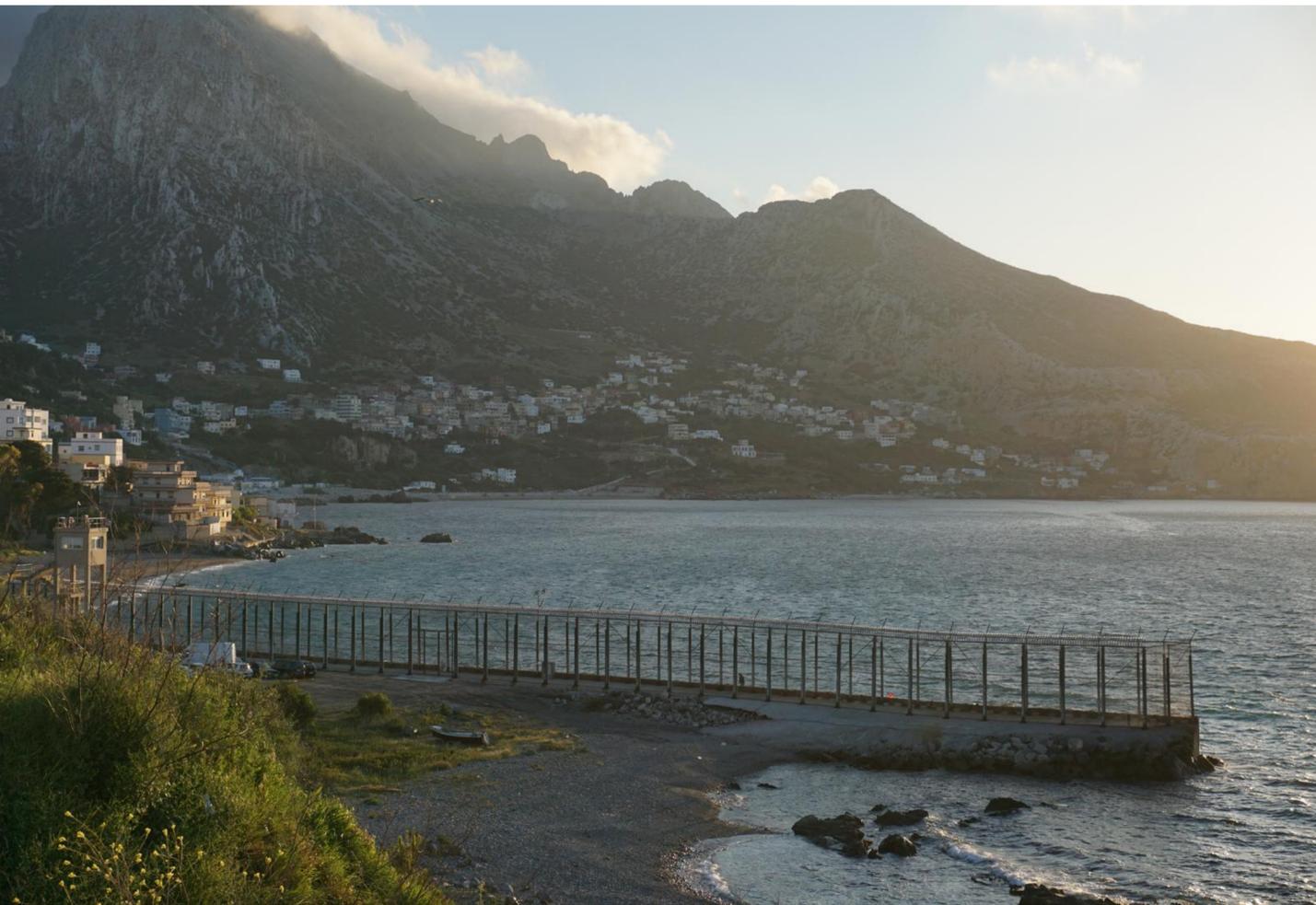
As border cities on the African continent that separate Spain from Morocco, EU and non-EU space, and divide Spain internally between its Peninsula (Schengen) and enclaves (non-Schengen), they have always been host to movement and the associated impacts of bordering. On a local level, as entire cities geographically cut by fences they pose as unique and ruptured locations, as well as consistent hotspots in the history of transit from Morocco to Spain, Africa to continental Europe. Whilst we witness what is predominantly a broader public silence from European authorities regarding

these territories it's important to highlight that the EU has been the primary funder of border advancement (in terms of technology, infrastructure, and people on the ground) [since the end of the 1990s](#); connoting a silence that exists only in the public realm.

Historically, the population that has attempted to reach the enclaves have mostly been sub-Saharan African men, from minors to adults, highlighting the connection of the ports to wider transit routes across Africa. However, since the beginning of COVID-19 and hence the unprecedented closing of the land border between the two enclaves and Morocco, many attempts to enter Ceuta by these treacherous means for the purpose of migrating to Spain, and Europe more broadly, have begun to be led by Moroccan citizens themselves who, before the pandemic, used to enter the Spanish territories on a daily basis and relied on the economic relationship, particularly regarding trade and domestic labour. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Moroccan citizens residing in the neighboring provinces - Tetouan and Nador - were exempt from visas to enter Ceuta and Melilla respectively and Moroccan tourism was one of the main sources of wealth for the two autonomous cities. This overlay of local and regional transit displays not only the shifting impacts of the pandemic, but also the way bordering in the enclaves demarcates through a range of means, including: race, nationality, class and legal status.



Map of the enclaves (Source: Wikipedia)



Sea border between Benzú in Spain and Belyounech in Morocco (Source: No Name Kitchen)



Sea border in Tarajal, Spain (Source: No Name Kitchen)

The land border that circumscribes Ceuta is approximately 8km long, beginning in Tarajal beach on the East side and ending in the town of Benzú – Belyounech in Morocco –on the West side; similarly, the land border of Melilla is 11km long. The enclaves are enclosed by multiple high security fences, and attempting to jump these barriers or swimming into the territories from the neighbouring towns of Morocco are the most common ways of arriving to Ceuta and Melilla. If done from the West sea side of the border, the entrance to Ceuta can also be accessed via the breakwater.

As well as arrival points, the enclaves also represent transit spaces, with people boarding commercial ferries from the two harbours in the hope of reaching the Spanish mainland in a

process referred to by people-on-the-move as “risky”. An increasing number of people have also been attempting to cross to Ceuta and the Spanish mainland by swimming or kayaking, especially from the neighbouring Moroccan coastline, following the cessation of transit across the land border due to the pandemic. In recent times, higher numbers of crossings were witnessed on days with bad weather, as under such conditions it is less likely to be caught by police forces. Regardless of which territorial waters people-on-the-move are located in, authorities intercept and return them to Ceuta or Melilla. However, this tactic has resulted in numerous documented fatalities and disappearances at sea, which remains a stark reminder of the precarity of these routes across the EU external border.



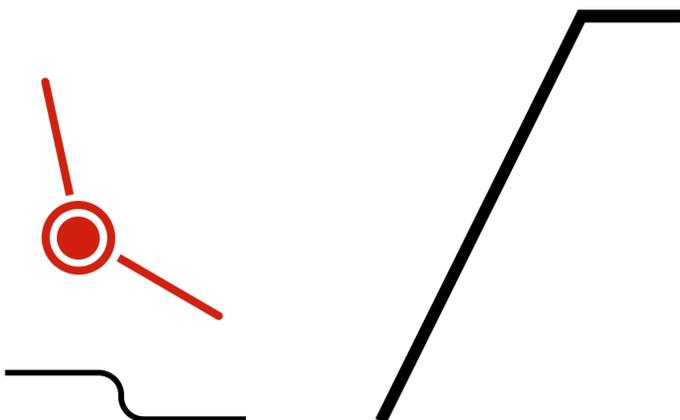
Fenced border between Spain and Morocco, in Ceuta. (Source: No Name Kitchen)

Ongoing construction at the land border between Spain and Morocco in Ceuta (Source: No Name Kitchen)





These two images show a successful crossing in treacherous conditions during the beginning of May (Source: Disinfo Collective)





Border Infrastructure (Architecture, Assets, Actors)

Architecture

The fences that surround Melilla and Ceuta are a visual symbol of the border violence enforced from the enclaves, coupled with the open sea which protects the Northern borders. This geography has created a crude dilemma for people seeking safe passage to Spanish territory which balances both the risks of drowning and scaling dangerously high barbed wire barriers. Sections which are frequented for border crossings are currently built 20 feet in height, with plans to increase them to 33 feet in future. Plans have also been in place to increase the total height by 30% since 2020, and to replace the razor wire which has led to severe injuries and fatalities for people-on-the-move. Serious questions remain as to how higher fences can improve safety, when a large proportion of injuries are caused by people falling during these precarious crossings.

Taking the example of Ceuta, crossings from Moroccan into Spanish territory are hampered by three different fences:

1. Approximately two-meter fence completely covered in barb-wire. Controlled by the Moroccan Kingdom, it separates Morocco from the irregular neutral area between the countries.
2. Ten-meter fence. It separates the neutral area from the first Spanish fence. It is controlled by Spanish Guardia Civil and is currently under construction: the inverted combs are being substituted and hence the fence is made taller with fixed tubes. After this fence it is officially Spanish territory.
3. Ten-meter fence. Parallel to the previous fence, It creates an enclosed space between both fences where Guardia Civil agents often patrol, preventing people from coming down and automatically pushing them back through specialised doors in the fence if they successfully do so.

Assets

Furthermore, the border zones in both Melilla and Ceuta are highly securitised and constantly under development, installed with [various technologies](#) such as motion activated sensors, CCTV cameras, and facial recognition detectors. Most of this technology is [EU funded](#) and incurs huge amounts of investment; from the beginning of construction (1993 Ceuta, 1996 Melilla) up until 2012 a total of 133.6 million euros had been spent on the border, followed by further investment such as the [32.7 million euro](#) 'strengthening and modernisation' plan as begun in 2019. This huge amount of investment draws attention to the increasing risk and difficulty being produced in regards to crossing the border, as well as the neo-liberal interests at play in the region.

SURVEILLANCE OF THE SPANISH-MOROCCAN BORDER

Morocco

- Fifteen drones tendered via ICMPD
- Ships with radars to detect boats and dinghies
- Twin-engine aircraft equipped with technology for surveillance missions
- Two military satellites

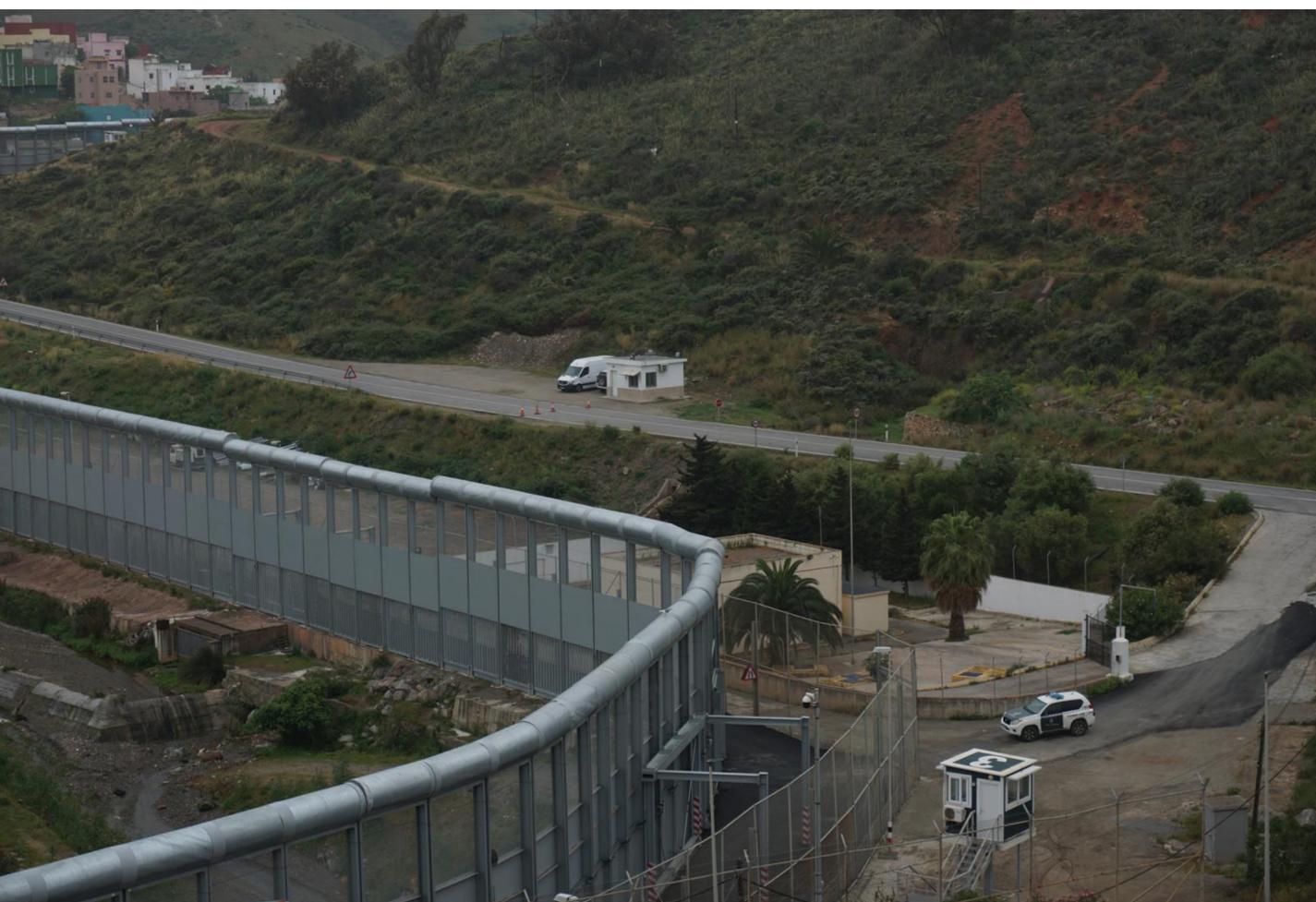
Spain

- 14 new state of the art CCTV cameras
- Facial recognition cameras
- 4x4 vehicles
- Thermal cameras with positioner and night vision scopes
- Nautical telecommunications equipment

*Just some of the assets deployed by national authorities at the borders of Ceuta and Melilla (Source:[20bits](#))



Surveillance cameras on the Ceuta border fence (Source: No Name Kitchen)



Actors

The borders are controlled by Moroccan and Spanish security bodies both at land and sea, including several guardhouses on both ends of the fences. The Guardia Civil is the national security body in charge of the surveillance of Spanish sections of the EU border, and it cooperates with a range of other agencies in application of border controls. The convergence of terrestrial and maritime forces, along with an armoury of surveillance technology and physical barriers, gives a clear insight into the securitised nature of the enclaves.

Guardia Civil:

One of the two national Spanish security troops. Of military nature, they function under the remit of the Ministry of Interior and Defense. They are the police body with the highest number of agents in Spain and with the most diverse remit in policing. In Ceuta and Melilla they are in charge of controlling the land border as well as the sea border, Gibraltar strait waters and general surveillance in the city. There are also Guardia Civil agents inside both ports.

Cuerpo Nacional de Policía (CNP- Policía Nacional):

One of the two national Spanish security troops. Of civil nature, the CNP is responsible to the Ministry of Interior and is the main body for police surveillance in all determined Spanish cities. They are additionally in charge of immigration matters such as residence permits. Fighting 'illegal immigration' and controlling entry and exit from Spanish territory also fall under their scope. In Ceuta they are in charge of general surveillance of the city and inside the Port they are involved in the joint operation with FRONTEX. Since the events of May, they have been observed patrolling in riot police vans.

Policía Portuaria:

Special administrative police body which depends on the autonomous community. Among other basic competences, their areas of focus are in Ceuta, its surroundings and the inside of the Port.

Policía Local:

Police body of civil nature, its dispositions are dictated by the autonomous community. In Ceuta they are in charge of general surveillance of the city and in Naves del Tarajal, where both minors and adults are being 'hosted' by SAMU Foundation and the Red Cross respectively.

Spanish Army:

National military body with air, naval and land components. Deployed with tanks to the enclaves during the events of May.

FRONTEX:

European Border and Coast Guard Agency, operating under operation "JO MINERVA 2021" in Ceuta.

Moroccan Border Police:

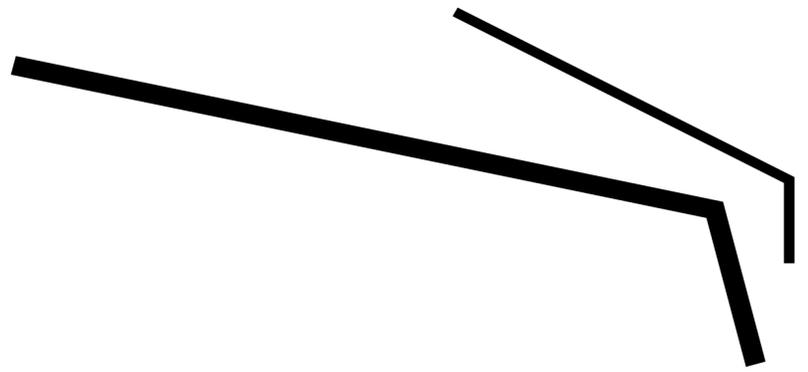
Division of the Sûreté Nationale (National Police in Morocco) responsible for border security and immigration matters.

Royal Moroccan Gendarmerie:

Body with civil policing, administrative and military scope. The force was deployed in May at sections of the border fence, particularly by the breakwater where the border fence meets the open sea.

Royal Moroccan Navy:

Branch of the national military conducting naval and coast guard operations. Engaged in surveillance and enforcement in the Mediterranean and Strait of Gibraltar, including the return of transit groups to the coast.



License to differentiate

Similar to other European border zones, testimonies from people-on-the-move illustrate that attempts to enter Ceuta and Melilla are systematically constrained and controlled by pushbacks. Testimony from those who have arrived narrate that they made multiple attempts to enter Ceuta or Melilla before success due to interception by security forces.

Even though these regions are internationally agreed to be Spanish, thus part of the European Union, people-on-the-move are treated differently within the enclaves, creating a greater legal pretext for forced removals, and the subsequent violence connected to these processes. A particular case that was taken to the ECtHR (2020) regarding the [deaths of 14 people at the hands of the Guardia Civil](#) effectively legitimised 'devoluciones en caliente' (pushbacks) from the enclaves. Whilst this ruling was made in 2020, the Spanish Government had already sought to build legal grounds for pushbacks through the application of the highly questionable '[Organic Law 4/2015 of 30 March 2015 on the Protection of Citizen Security](#).'

National and international legitimisation of violent bordering practices, alongside increased spending on security infrastructure, form the backdrop to which bodies of governance continue to prioritise "border protection" over mobility and human life. Yet it is important to note that asylum seekers do have the right to claim international protection under European law within these territories. With this considered, no pushback can be completed (legally speaking), and removals from the enclaves cannot be executed without respecting and assessing each individual's claim; this includes people recognised as Moroccan due to the fact they are entitled to claim asylum on grounds such as political or sexual orientation, as these factors result in persecution in Morocco.

However, monitoring teams constantly witness authorities ignoring these rights, with interceptions resulting in illegal and often violent returns. According to collected testimonies, the interception of transit attempting to jump the first fence in Moroccan territory often entails the forced displacement to the Southern border of Morocco, at the feet of Sahara desert. A specific testimony also mentions how a group of sub-saharan african people who had been pushed-back after the May entrances were chain pushed-back to Mauritania.

I know of people who were brought to Mauritania. They were apprehended here, in Benyounes. Moroccan police put them on a bus all the way to Mauritania.

- E. 19 from Cameroon

This example echoes other processes of chain-pushbacks and lateral returns observed across the EU external border between [Italy, Slovenia and Croatia](#), and at the [tri-border](#) between Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey. Alongside this weaponisation of geography, on other occasions, people-on-the-move also report long periods of incarceration in Moroccan **prisons**. The European Union finances Moroccan police forces role in the maintaining of these borders, as the testimony of two Cameroonian men collected on the 26th of June by No Name Kitchen volunteers outlined:

(B) I was sent to prison in Tetuan for trying to cross the border.

(E) In Morocco, they catch you near the border and they put you in prison.

(B) [I was in prison for] Four months. That's illegal. Me, I did not do anything. In Morocco there are no human rights. They do not respect human beings.

Another testimony collected by Disinfaux Collective illustrates the returns that take place in the waters between both continents, usually near the Strait of Gibraltar.

The Moroccan coast guard managed to find us and caught us before we reached the Spanish international waters. They took us back to Morocco and we were imprisoned for 48 hours and then we were released... ' I came back after two days to try to enter again, but this time not through the border fence, but across the sea swimming and the police arrested me before I reached Melilla and detained me and three of my young friends.'

- S.

Within these events, people-on-the-move also recite their experience of violence at the hands of Moroccan officers.

(S) I tried to enter through the border fence, but the Moroccan police caught me and beat me.

Successive years of evidence around pushbacks and state violence (on both sides of the border) provide an insight into the enclaves and their geographic role in EU border violence. Combining recent testimony with the legal and political manoeuvres around 'devoluciones en caliente', the context in Melilla and Ceuta brings forth continuities with other sites of border violence, such as in the Balkans. But the enclaves also present ruptures and deviations, acting as testing grounds for the Spanish state to embed novel legal grounds for expulsion.

THE EVENTS OF MAY 2021

Ceuta



Map of border between Morocco and Ceuta, and the neutral area (Source: Wikipedia)

An increased number of crossings into the enclaves began on the early morning of the 17th of May through the Atlantic Ocean waters of the Western border of Ceuta with Morocco. People from a range of different backgrounds scaled around the breakwater, while some others swam round and even entire families took dinghies in order to reach Spanish soil.

While this continued, the same began to occur on the Eastern sea border some hours later, this time in higher numbers. Observers witnessed how within a time frame of ten minutes a group of perhaps a hundred people would enter swimming. At this point, Spanish authorities attempting to stop transit were insufficient and nothing could be done in order to stop people from coming into Ceuta.

Children, young girls, groups of teenage friends, women, and some of more elderly ages were walking up the promenade of Ceuta, completely soaked with water. Many marched all the way up the hill near the border up to the Príncipe Alfonso neighbourhood. It is important to highlight that most of the people who entered had previously visited or lived in Ceuta. Many had direct family bonds with Ceuta or economic relations with the enclave which were directly affected by the unprecedented closing of the border due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

While sea entrances on both ends continued, on the 18th of May Ceuta saw the striking image of dozens of sub-Saharan Africans climbing on top of the 10m tall border fence, just a mere leap from Spanish soil. However, down below a huge number of Spanish Guardia Civil agents soon assembled (as shown in this [video](#)), dressed in riot gear, making it impossible to successfully climb down for risk of being subject to an automatic pushback. As one testimony from the day states:

Many of them came down on the Spanish side and were pushed back. They were beaten up by the Guardia Civil when they came down and then sent back through the door. Some others fell back from the fence onto the Moroccan side.

- E. 19 from Cameroon

Besides performing illegal pushbacks on those who managed to scale down from the fence, Spanish authorities used several mechanisms to keep people from climbing the obstacle in the first place. As understood by information gathered from testimonies and the teams on the field's experience, these "deterrent" methods include plastic bullets and tear-gas bombs ([as detailed graphically in this video](#)). The plastic bullets are allegedly aimed at the hands and neck of people trying to scale the barriers, and as one account explained:



Dozens of people sitting on top of the fence on the 18th of May 2021. (Source: No Name Kitchen)

When we were on top of the fence, they threw “bales blanches” at us. They threw them against me before I came down. They throw them against us to destabilize us and make us fall down. [...] When you get hit with this, you fall down or end up coming down. [When you land on Spanish soil] the police catch you and beat you to push you back. If you don’t move, and just remain static, they will continue beating you and then push you back.

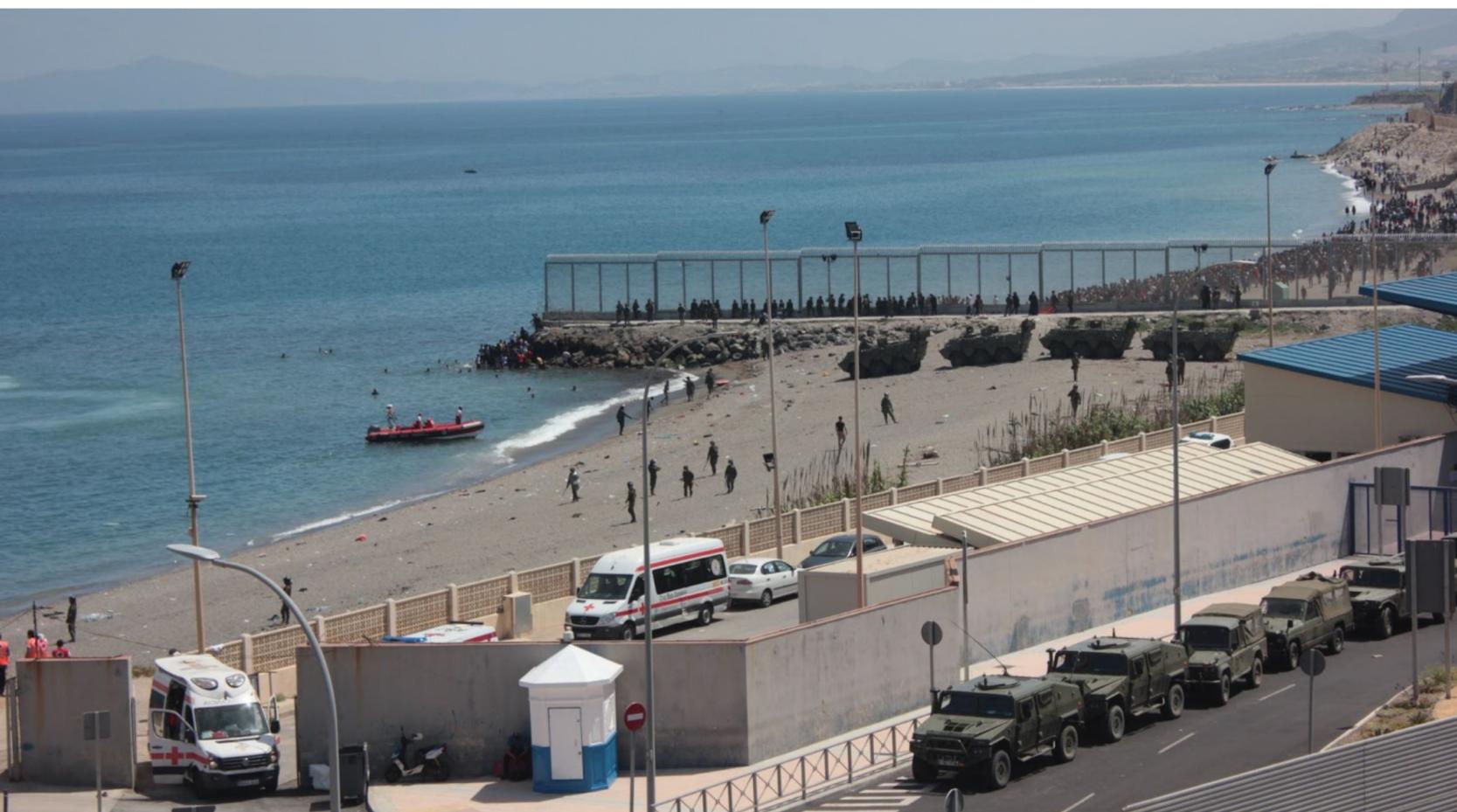
- E. 19 from Cameroon

The Spanish Army was deployed on the 18th of May. Tanks were circulating around the city and an intimidating number of different police bodies were sent from the mainland to the small territory of Ceuta. Military bodies were placed on the Tarajal beach; they actively prevented people from exiting the sea and entering Ceuta, on some occasions doing so by holding people in the water for hours before pushing them back to Moroccan territory.

Both the military and the Guardia Civil used abusive force in order to systematically perform the pushback of hundreds, among other forms of

national or international legal frame. During these coercion and intimidation which fall outside any dates where high numbers of crossings occurred nobody was given individualised treatment or had their right of asking for asylum respected.

On the 19th of May, Spanish security bodies were visibly and continuously throwing tear gas canisters into the crowds assembled in the neighbouring town of Castillejos in Morocco. Simultaneously, both adults and minors were brought to Las Naves del Tarajal –industrial warehouses alongside the border–, where they were reportedly attended to by the Spanish Red Cross. Within just one day of its use as an arrival space the site became overcrowded and there was a notable lack of water, food, hygienic facilities and blankets provided. Among the people taken there were entire families and unaccompanied minors, some of whom were very young. While the facility was entirely inadequate, it also functioned as a staging ground for swift pushback operations, as detailed in one testimony:



Spanish Military presence on 18th May (Source: Disinfo Collective)

People held in the sea
by Spanish military
on the 18th of May
2021 (Souce: No
Name Kitchen)



Spanish authorities
firing teargas at
people on the
Moroccan side,
morning of the
19th of May 2021
(Source: No Name
Kitchen)





Group pushed back to Morocco after their reception by the Red Cross in Ceuta. They are currently in Tanger (Source: Anonymous)

This is my friend, he got “boza”¹ from the neighbouring town and he was here with the Red Cross. They were all pushed-back. You see them, with the Red Cross blanket? Well, they are currently all in Morocco, in Tanger. All pushed-back, re-sent to Morocco by the Red Cross and the police.

- E. 19 from Cameroon

For most arrivals to Ceuta in late May, this was rarely their first time on Spanish soil. On the one hand, the movement of people between neighbouring cities of Morocco and Ceuta before the pandemic was a day-to-day occurrence for both personal and professional motivations. The cross border economy, particularly of goods and service sector employment, meant many already had extensive ties to the enclave. On the other hand, many sub-Saharan Africans and people of Middle Eastern origin, including those from Yemen and Syria, seeking to claim asylum in Ceuta had been pushed back by Spanish authorities previously, including in the period in which the border was open prior to COVID-19.

“Six times I have jumped the fences. Five times I’ve been pushed back, the sixth time, I am here.”

- E. 19 from Cameroon

Spanish authorities perform the pushback of transit groups systematically, something which is self-evident due to the fact that the vast majority of sub-Saharan Africans who are now in Ceuta are those who escaped from Spanish authorities – including the Red Cross– once they stepped onto Spanish soil.

Because I was pushed back before, when I finally entered this time, I did not trust anyone. I did not want to go to the police, nor to the Red Cross, or to the CETI.

I said I wanted to stay in the street. Because every other time I had entered, they had pushed me back. The police would push me back, la Guardia Civil would push me back, the military would push me back. I did not know who I should trust when I entered. That’s why when I entered this time, I ran into the city.

- E., 19 from Cameroon

An 18-year-old boy from Senegal testified being pushed-back on the 17th of May through the fence, before successfully entering Ceuta again. According to his testimony, he was pushed back along with other sub-Saharan Africans through a door in the fence. They were not asked whether they wanted to seek asylum and neither did they have a chance to do so. He testifies to being beaten and injured during the pushback.

The police were throwing things at us when we managed to get on top of the fence. [...] There are a lot of deaths there. People jump the barriers and fall.

- C., 18 from Senegal

B., a 28-year old man from Cameroon was also pushed-back on the 17th of May; he had been attempting to cross via the breakwater in the Benzú border. He claims being forcefully returned to Morocco through the border door by Guardia Civil:

(B) When I managed to cross, I had the police in front of me.

(Interviewer) And they took you?

(B) Yes. They opened the door and forced me out.

Unlike probably many others, B. tried to enter again, that time jumping into the Atlantic Ocean waters even though he did not know how to swim. He was rescued by the Red Cross:

(Interviewer) But you did not stay in the Red Cross...

(B) No, they saved me and I pretended I was dead/fainted. Then when they were not looking I stood up and began to run away (laughter).

(E) If he had not done this, he would be in Morocco again. You need to use your head.

Those who made it into Ceuta and were caught by Spanish authorities and/or brought to the Red Cross did not have their right to ask for asylum respected. Through the use of force, physical and verbal abuse, large numbers of military officers and several police bodies dressed in riot gear carried out mass pushbacks, forcing people to exit from Las Naves del Tarajal into Morocco via a door in the fence. Flaunting national and international legal obligations regarding asylum, the process was carried out with no individualised treatment, impacting a wide demographic of people, not least local Moroccans at risk of persecution upon return for political grounds and sexual orientation. This treatment was also applied to entire families, as [this video testimony](#) from a person from Sierra Leone states.

¹ Term used by sub-saharan africans when they make it to a European country after their journey. It implies success and freedom.



The unprecedented entry of almost twelve thousand people to Ceuta beginning the 17th of May, the enormous reaction in the press and on social media, as well as the ongoing diplomatic tensions between Spain and Morocco triggered a week of parallel attempts to jump Melilla's border fence. These attempts were accompanied as always by extreme violence from authorities, which was exacerbated by the collaboration of security forces on either side of the border. While in Ceuta it would appear that, at least initially, Moroccan police allowed large groups to cross the border, in Melilla, collaboration between Spanish and Moroccan forces ran smoothly, both in preventing access to the fence and in conducting pushbacks.

On the 18th of May, for example, a group of 300 people-on-the-move, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, attempted to enter Melilla at *Dique Sur*, the furthestmost point of the breakwater which carries the fence out to sea and divides Melilla's beaches from the Moroccan port of Beni-Enzar. A total of 86 people managed to enter Melilla, among whom was one woman, and they were accepted into the CETI. The local newspaper [El Faro de Melilla](#) reported on the crossing and subsequent border violence:

"More than 300 people from Sub-Saharan Africa attempted to enter the city, but thanks to the anti-intrusion mechanism deployed by the Guardia Civil, in which the Policia Nacional also participated, and thanks to the active collaboration of the Moroccan security forces, more than 200 people were successfully denied access to the city, according to Delegacion [de Gobierno]."

What the *Delegacion de Gobierno* press release did not mention was their method of "successfully denying access". Many among the group were violently beaten back from the border by the Guardia Civil, who used their clubs in order to prevent the entry of those people on and around *Dique Sur*, some of whom were in the surrounding water. Organizations on the ground, including Solidary Wheels, [recorded footage](#) of a group of between 10 and 20 people, once inside Spanish territory, were driven in a Guardia Civil van from their point of entry to a gate in the border fence 200 metres away, and forced one by one through the gate, where they were met by Moroccan security forces. This pushback operation occurred twice on the night of the 18th of May, involving an unknown number of people on the move, although the *Association Marocaine des Droits Humains - Section Nador* announced that 40 people were pushed back that evening.

Activists on the ground working for Solidary Wheels affirm that it would have been impossible for the police to conduct an individualised assessment of each person's age and eligibility for an asylum claim, given the violence and speed of the operation. This kind of fast tracked forced removal, which does not take into account the personal circumstances of each individual, is illegal under national and international law.

The primary mode of border fence jumping observed over the last year has seen large groups from sub-Saharan Africa attempting to scale the barriers, with only a small number successfully entering Spanish territory. These crossings, and the violent response of authorities, has been an ongoing occurrence in Melilla, occurring roughly once a month since the beginning of 2021. This has occurred at different points along the border, although in recent months often at *Dique Sur*, the *Beni-Enzar* checkpoint and at *Rio Nano*, where building work on the fence is not yet complete. However, the tension at the border triggered by the events in Ceuta broke with this pattern. Suddenly, attempts to jump the fence were nightly, not monthly, and many of the people-on-the-move involved were Moroccan, not sub-Saharan, some from the neighbouring towns of Mariguari and Farhana. On the night of the 20th of May, a group of around 100 young men from Mariguari managed to cross the first two of the three fences dividing them from Melilla. They were then intercepted by the Guardia Civil, brought through a gate into Spanish territory and then forced one by one back through the fence to Mariguari, again with the collaboration of the Moroccan police. The local newspaper *El Faro de Melilla* reported on the incident and published a [video](#) showing how dozens of people became trapped between the last two fences.

"Past three o'clock in the morning, and once the attempt to fence-jump was under control, around thirty people were taken to the part of the bridge over the river Nano, where there is a door through which the border "return" was to take place. However, it did not take place straight away, as there was not a trace of Moroccan police presence, only an ambulance in the distance."

Again according to witnesses from Solidary Wheels, the pushback operation was not completed until almost six o'clock in the morning, by which time the group of people on the move had been in Spanish territory for nearly three hours, and during which no individual assessment of their cases took place. Once the Moroccan security forces arrived, the pushback was conducted as intended, through the door in the fence mentioned by *El Faro de Melilla*.





On the 21st of May, a large group of people gathered on the Moroccan side of the border in the neighbouring town of Mariguari, while Spanish security forces gathered on the Melilla side (Source: Solidary Wheels)

The large and active presence of Moroccan police forces and their smooth collaboration with the Spanish security forces was further witnessed by activists of Solidary Wheels the following day. In the night of the 21st of May a large group of people had gathered at the Moroccan side of the border fences, moving along the fences over a distance of about one kilometer near the village of Farkhana looking for a spot to cross. The interaction of transit and surveillance was captured in two videos from the incident, which portrays the endless cat-and-mouse-play with the Moroccan and Spanish police forces that ran throughout the night.

The first [video](#) shows the Spanish border fences in the foreground. Behind the fence, on the Moroccan side, people that are trying to approach the fences are crossing the street. A Moroccan police car drives towards these people while a gunshot can be heard very clearly. Over the course of the night, a total of 8 shots were heard by activists from Solidary Wheels.

The second [video](#), shot shortly after the first, shows the Spanish side in the foreground, with national police forces, *Guardia Civil* and military forces present. In the background, on the other side of the fences, a long line of cars of Moroccan police forces are arriving at the location where the group of people is trying to approach the fences.

Throughout the week beginning the 17th of May, Melilla's border fence experienced unprecedented pressure from all sides. Whereas those who fence-jump in large groups were typically of sub-Saharan origin (Morrocan's often preferring to enter

individually, either by climbing the fences or by swimming around them), the events in Ceuta triggered a far higher frequency of efforts to fence-jump by Morroccan people living close to the border fence than seen before. This particularly included people who, before the border closure in March 2020 brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, could previously cross into Melilla daily for education, work, and to visit friends and relatives (although they were not permitted to stay the night in Spanish territory).

Before March 2020, the border between *La Cañada* (the Melilla neighbourhood closest to the northern part of the fence) and the Moroccan town of Mariguari was far more permeable, at least for those with local identification documents. What distinguished the fence-jumps in late May is that the imposition of violently coordinated border deterrence from Spanish and Moroccan security forces suddenly became a pressing reality for Morroccans in the border area themselves. Abruptly it was the cousins and close friends of people born and raised in Melilla who were facing the full force of pushbacks and border violence, which had so far disproportionately impacted sub-Saharan Africans and other transit demographics.





Residents of La Cañada watch residents of Mariguari attempt to fence-jump on Friday 21st of May while Guardia Civil use tear gas to deter fence-jumpers. (Source: Solidary Wheels)

After the week in May when hundreds of Moroccan's from the neighbouring area to Melilla tried to cross the fences, the situation around the border reverted to previous patterns, with occasional mass attempts by mainly people from Sub-Saharan Africa to enter the city. Spanish security forces responded to these attempts with what they call “*dispositivos anti-intrusión*”, anti-intrusion devices. This translates in practice to authorities arriving at the crossing point and physically trying to stop the people from entering Spanish territory, using batons and pepper spray amongst other weapons, often with the support of a helicopter monitoring the scene from above. In the early morning of the 15th of June for example, about 150 people from sub-Saharan Africa tried to enter Melilla by climbing over the rocks that surround the border fence, ending up in the sea at *Dique Sur*. This [video](#) published by local newspaper El Faro de Melilla, shows how the Spanish security forces actively push the people back into Moroccan territory, not shying away from using heavy violence to do so.

In the morning of the 22nd of July, a group of about 300 people tried to cross the border fences. Both Moroccan and Spanish security forces went to the scene, as 238 people - all men from Sub-Saharan Africa - managed to climb the fences and enter the city of Melilla. Local radio station Onda Cero Melilla published a [video](#) shot from the Moroccan side of the border on their twitter feed which showed how the group scaled the high fences using hooks. All 238 were admitted into the CETI where they were placed in quarantine. Dozens of people meanwhile did not make it into Spanish territory and it remained unclear how far the remainder had got in their attempt to cross: if they were

stopped by the Moroccan police or if they managed to climb the fences and were pushed back by the Spanish police forces. Onda Cero Melilla published a [picture](#) showing three detained people lying face down on the ground surrounded by a *Guardia Civil* officer with a baton in his hand. In the background, a further person can be seen on top of the last fence, while two *Guardia Civil* officers wait poised below. It is unknown whether these three people were admitted into the CETI or pushed back to Morocco.

Besides the mass attempts to climb border fences with dozens or hundreds at a time, many also attempted crossings into Spanish territory alone or in small groups. They either climb the fences, swim around them, or crawl through the sewers underneath the barriers. Those who choose to swim usually get into the water at the neighbouring Moroccan town of Beni-Enzar (see map below). To avoid detection, they swim around both the ferry and industrial harbours of Beni-Enzar/Nador and of neighbouring Melilla, reaching the shores of the Northern part of town. Depending on which route they choose, on weather conditions, on physical conditions and swimming skills, the crossing takes several hours (up to six or more). This precarious route poses multiple physical risks, not least because of exhaustion and drowning. The passage of ships also marks a fatal hazard and swimming across open water also attracts surveillance and interceptions from the Moroccan Coast Guard and Spanish *Guardia Civil*.

I entered Melilla swimming. At sunset. It took me 4 hours, I saw the dead in my eyes. But I made it. This was the second time I tried. The first time they caught me. The guardia civil saw me. They came in a big boat, they made me swim back to Beni-Enzar. They stayed along my side, they were laughing at me, saying that I have to swim harder, telling me that Morocco is very good. Then, Moroccan military took over. They hit me a lot with the baton. But the second time they didn't see me. My friend also tried to swim to Melilla, the guardia civil found him, but he drowned.

- A. 19 from Morocco

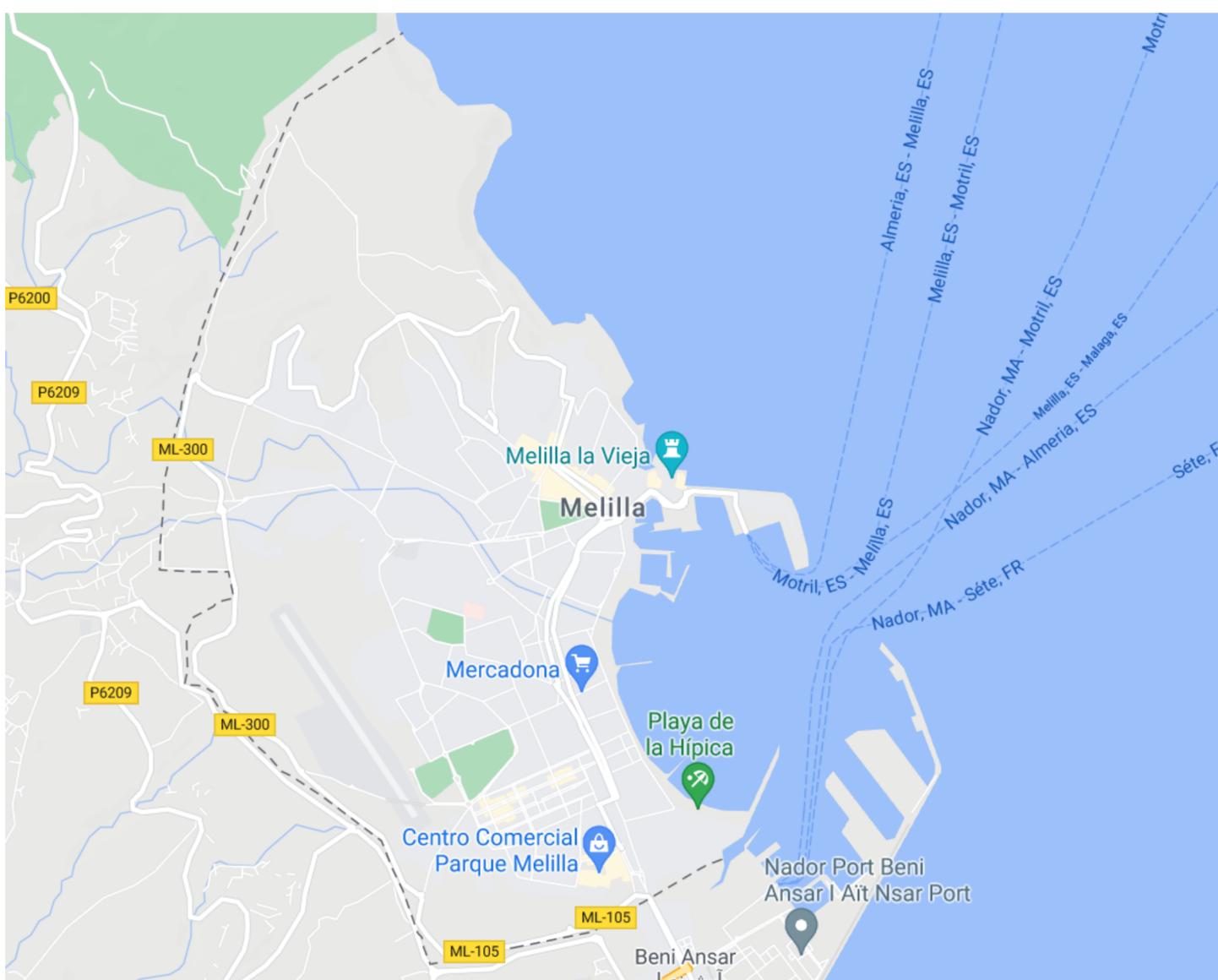
In the early morning of the 26th of July four young Moroccans, two of them minors, arrived swimming on the northern shores of Melilla. The Nador unit of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH-Nador) [reports](#) that the Guardia Civil found them as soon as they climbed out of the water onto the rocks and took them immediately to a gate in the border fence. Although on Spanish territory, the Guardia Civil denied their right to request asylum and failed to identify the two youngest as minors. The Guardia Civil led the group through the gates in the fences where they were handed over to the Moroccan police. This [video](#) published by El Faro de Melilla details the event. It mentions that upon calls from AMDH for an investigation, the local government of Melilla responded that the ECtHR has endorsed the rejections at the border and that therefore, if they occurred, they would be a lawful action by the Spanish security forces in the safeguarding of

territorial integrity and the protection of Spanish borders against irregular entry attempts.

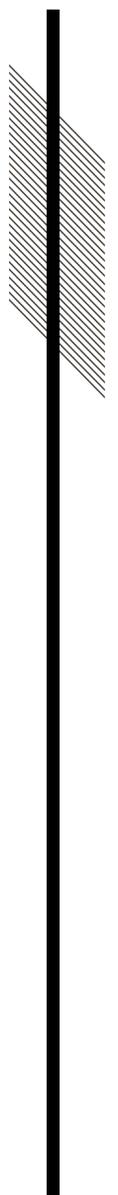
Crawling through the sewer system in order to circumvent the border is a less common tactic. However, this diversification of transit represents the exhaustion of all possible options in the face of closed borders. Because of the high risks of trying to climbing the fences or swimming around the harbours, and the cycle of capture, violence and removal, people are coerced into ever more dangerous routes:

We entered Melilla by going through the sewers. Me and five friends. We opened the lid that closes off the sewer and got in. The Moroccan port security saw us, so we had to be fast. It was my second time, so I had to lead the group. We went went went... Very fast because the security knew we were in there. We didn't want to get caught. Each of us had a torch. In our mouths. Because we needed our hands for crawling. The first part we went on hand and feet, the second part we had to move like a snake because the pipes are very narrow. And they are full of dirt, shit, urine, bottles, waste, rats, cockroaches. It smells very bad. And it's dark, so dark. I was very scared. After 5 hours we made it. We came out in Melilla. I was so happy. This time they didn't catch me.

- A. 21 from Morocco



Map of Melilla and the harbour (Source: Google Maps)



CONTAINMENT AND VIOLENT INTERNAL POLICING

Gatekeeping of asylum and police violence in Ceuta

The CETI are Temporal Stay Centres for Immigrants, an establishment found only in Ceuta and Melilla controlled by the public administration. They are intended to host people-on-the-move before they are relocated to other centers in mainland Spain, however they function very differently in practice. Historically only sub-Saharan Africans have been granted access to them, and are regularly kept longer than supportable in the given conditions, which often leads to overcrowding and exacerbates conflicts between residents due to cultural and political differences. In May this year, arrival conditions worsened, coupled with a rise in street homelessness. For example a group of approximately 130 sub-Saharan Africans who entered Ceuta were given access to the centre, but only after spending ten days sleeping rough.

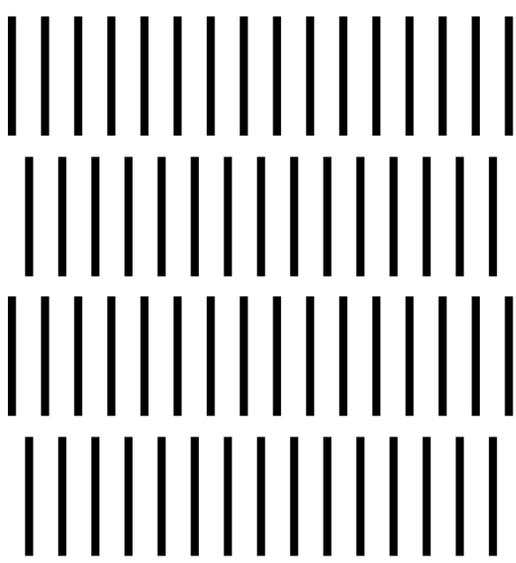
Even weeks after the mass number of arrivals, authorities in Ceuta continue to limit the process to claim asylum and access the services available to asylum seekers in Ceuta. In one case an individual with grounds to claim asylum remained in hiding for two weeks before initiating a claim due to fear of the authorities. When he went to initiate his claim at the border he was denied access to the asylum system for one week and it was only after UNHCR staff members initiated pressure that the Spanish authorities processed his claim. Considering the backdrop of pushbacks and forced removals which spiked in Ceuta across May, and continue to this day, such bureaucratic limbo leaves

asylum seekers extremely vulnerable to the authorities prerogative for expulsion. In the particular case of this applicant, it took a further three days to get access to the CETI, as he was constantly being directed to different authorities without resolution.

Over two months have gone by and even if most people were pushed back during the first week of crossings in May, approximately 2,000 adults of mostly Moroccan nationality are still sleeping rough in Ceuta in dire conditions. While [poor, late and ineffective measures](#) have been provided for minors in the city, young adults and other demographics have been provided with no solution for accommodation and support. These people have remained unattended for months, as no representatives from the Spanish government, or entities linked to it, have built bridges to communicate with them. Many have not been informed of their rights or options after arrival in Ceuta. The only recourse that has been made visible for transit communities is their access to “voluntarily” return to Morocco, reflecting Spain’s position on new arrivals. In response to this cycle of repression, and the lack of responsibility taken by Spanish and Moroccan authorities, young adults took to the streets in a [self-organised action](#) that took place in front of the Government Delegation in Ceuta on the 17th of July. Demonstrations took place simultaneously across different points of Spain in solidarity, including Bilbao, Madrid, Málaga, Jaén, Canary Islands and Melilla.



“Are we only victims of their politics?” banner at the 17-J demonstration in Ceuta (Source: No Name Kitchen)



Alongside containment and administrative limbo, the ever present threat of police violence and arbitrary detention are routine for people navigating their arrival to Ceuta. While these abuses stretch back years, aggression by authorities has been made more visible due to the number of people who remained hiding in the streets and forests of Ceuta since the spate of large arrivals in May. While no administration or social workers were officially transferred to Ceuta, a significant number of security agents from different bodies were called by the Ministry of Interior to transfer from the peninsula in May, many of whom remain in Ceuta to this day.

Several testimonies collected by volunteers on the ground attest to the abuse of power and violence the Spanish security bodies are applying to the transit population. Most of the aggressions include intimidation, verbal abuse and threats during first encounters with law enforcement. Secondly, officers are reportedly quick to escalate these situations by using their batons, not only against people's extremities but also against vital parts of their bodies.

"We were walking at night looking for a place to buy food. Three Policia Nacional vans appeared and rounded us up. They took out their batons and began to hit us. They hit my friend in the head with a baton and he had to spend five days in the hospital, unconscious". [...]"They hit me with the baton in my mouth. But I did not go to the hospital for fear of being brought to the border and being brought back to Morocco." [...]"There were three Policia Nacional vans and lots of police agents. When they hit my friend, he fell on the ground. There was a lot of blood all over his body coming from his head."

- R., 26 years old from Morocco. The incident happened on the 22nd of May of 2021 in the city centre of Ceuta.



Wound of R. on the 22nd of May some hours after the aggression (Source: Anonymous)

Often the attacks by authorities occur in seemingly benign situations, furthering the argument that state violence in Ceuta fall under the category of unprompted hate crimes, merging racial profiling and an apparent void in accountability for offending officers.

"We were walking down Marina street in Ceuta, eating a sandwich when two police officers approached us from behind, one of them strongly kicking my feet."

- A. 28 from Morocco

As well as racialised violence, another testimony highlighted Islamophobic abuse, with a minor under protection of the Red Cross being forbidden to complete prayer, and beaten up by private security and police officers when he tried to continue. This religious discrimination sits within a host of different aggressions impacting people in Ceuta. It is also a reminder of the variety of urban and institutional spaces where authorities stage violence against people-on-the-move. For example, a further incident occurred on the 15th of May at approximately 8pm, targeting a 28 year-old asylum-seeker residing in the CETI who had been in Ceuta for over a year. The person was severely injured in an assault and left on crutches, proving that state violence in the enclaves impacts people in and outside of the asylum system, and reception institutions.



Injuries incurred during the attack on 15th May (Source: Anonymous)

Containment in Melilla and “risky”



As in Ceuta, containment of people-on-the-move in Melilla takes place on multiple levels, by means of both administrative and physical violence. Both the asylum system and the documentation system for unaccompanied minors continuously fail to protect vulnerable groups and children. For asylum seekers, disproportionate waiting times, overcrowding in the CETI or difficulty and even denial of entry to the accommodation centre are exacerbated by the fact that the *Policia Nacional* are the principal port of call for those seeking international protection. In order to initiate an asylum claim, it is necessary to queue for days in the police station in *Frontera*, the border-crossing checkpoint connecting Melilla with Beni-Enzar.

People often decide to sleep at the entrance gate hoping that they will get the opportunity to go get an appointment. Meanwhile, the police officers that are responsible for allowing potential asylum seekers to initiate their claim often refuse those who “look” Moroccan in a crude process of racial profiling. Officers turn people away with misinformation, falsely stating that people cannot claim asylum without a valid passport. At other times, officers confiscate the passports of asylum seekers who do make it into the asylum interview process. Activists on the ground have regularly witnessed violence at the entrance to the *Frontera* police station, with police officers insulting, pushing and slapping those queuing in order to deter them from making a claim.

Since the publication of this [Supreme Court sentence](#) in February 2021 affirming an asylum seeker’s right to travel to mainland Spain by presenting their initial asylum claim document, the police have systematically refused to return the confiscated passports of dozens of people. This barrier impacts both those who live on the streets in Melilla, but also asylum seekers living at the CETI. Although they can travel, these people decide to stay in Melilla until they get their passports back, which often takes hours waiting at the police station, a process that often requires returning days or even weeks in a row. Asylum seekers whose asylum claim document states they do not possess ID should, according to the guidance, be allowed to travel. However, as it is yet again the same *Policia Nacional* who conducts the security controls in both the port and the airport, they systematically abuse their power in order to prevent asylum seekers, particularly those from Morocco, from travelling.

A volunteer with Solidary Wheels witnessed an asylum-seeker being turned away at passport control because the police officer “mistook” them

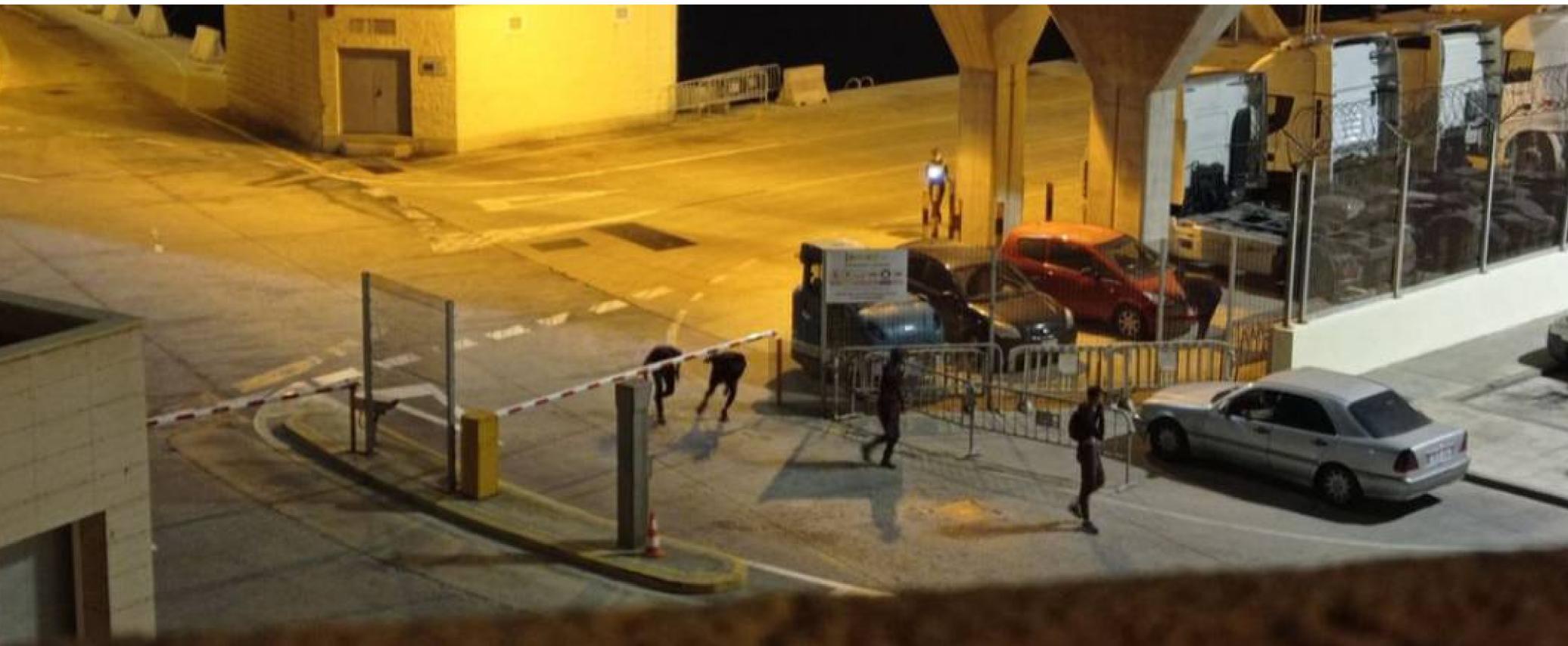
for an ex-unaccompanied minor, using racial profiling to assume that any young “Moroccan-looking” man does not have the right to travel. In this way, those with and without documentation are trapped in Melilla. Some of them resort “risky”, trying to transit covertly via the port of Melilla because of the limited possibility of a legal pathway to the Peninsula. The containment strategies in Melilla produces situations in which asylum-seekers with temporary legal residency and the right to travel to the Peninsula continuously risk injury and police beatings during *risky*, because the *Policia Nacional*, acting on nebulous orders from above, refuse to respect their right to freedom of movement.

Unaccompanied minors and young adults also suffer from the complicated documentation system. Their situation is a complex one, since the responsibility over these children and young adults is divided over different city councils and state offices. The Autonomous City of Melilla has guardianship over unaccompanied minors. The City Council for Youth Care is responsible for providing shelter and food. The Foreigners Office (which is a unit of the national government) is responsible for organising and processing all documents and papers to ensure that the minors can show their legal status in the country and can proceed with the procedures as soon as they turn 18 years old.

While this division of responsibility may seem clear in theory, in practice communication and collaboration between these different entities often does not work smoothly and efficiently. This results in many children leaving the reception centre for unaccompanied minors on the day they turn 18 without the relevant documentation, leaving them unable to cross to the peninsula and trapped in Melilla.

Since this demographic of young adults cannot travel to the peninsula by buying a ticket, they try to enter the ferries by hiding in trucks as they board, or directly inside the ferry itself. In order to do “risky”, as this process is colloquially known, people-on-the-move must navigate the port which is highly surveilled by the *Guardia Civil*, the *Policia Nacional* and the *Policia Portuaria*. Attempts are made by a spectrum of individuals, including undocumented people, unaccompanied minors and some asylum seekers, mostly from Morocco. The violent architecture of the port poses a significant physical threat to people-on-the-move attempting to enter. The far end of the port is itself surrounded by a 9-metre high wall, which people regularly scale

Four boys managed to climb over the barbed wire fences surrounding the harbour of Melilla. They hid behind trucks, but the Guardia Civil discovered them and chased them out of the harbour. (Source: Solidary Wheels)



using make-shift ropes made of clothes tied together. In February 2021, two 17 year old boys, therefore unaccompanied minors under the care of Melilla's local government, climbed this wall trying to enter the port. One of them fell and snapped his spinal cord, paralysing his lower limbs. The other remained uninjured and was able to tell volunteers of Solidary Wheels what happened. However, the greatest threat of physical violence comes from the police forces, in particular the *Guardia Civil*, who are known for their extreme violence towards any person discovered inside the port. The *Guardia Civil* systematically use batons as a weapon for beating, as well as tactics of humiliation, such as forcing people to strip to their underwear or destroying their shoes.

They [Guardia Civil] threw the clothes that I had in a bag into the water.

- A. 18 from Morocco

A Guardia Civil did it to me twice, when I was in the port he told me: take off shoes and I'll throw them in the water, and you will leave the port barefoot.

- H. 18 from Morocco

Yesterday, when we climb over the fences, we jump and another friend, he's broken his foot. An ambulance come to take him away to help him. Then, I see another friend. A cop hits him in his head with a baton. Nobody come to help him. There was blood. Blood, in his body, all his body. Then they hit him again. So, it happens like that, maybe every day. Guardia civil, guardia civil. No mercy, they have no mercy. Every day, they hit us.

- H. 20 from Morocco

However, violent policing is not only contained to the port. Undocumented people, unaccompanied minors, ex-unaccompanied minors and asylum seekers suffer disproportionate violence on the streets, including indiscriminate arrests, removal notices and exaggerated use of force by police in urban areas of Melilla. Unlike in Ceuta, the border in Melilla has not officially been opened in order to conduct removals, but the police mobilise the fear of pushbacks to target and control movement within the city.

For example, on the 10th of April, the *Policia Nacional* entered the Melilla's bullfighting ring without warning, which, since the start of the pandemic in April 2020, had been an emergency accommodation centre for people living on the streets, the vast majority of them from Morocco. The *Policia Nacional* forced all the residents of the bullfighting ring to line up in the arena, numbering them on their hands with a pen. The operation was carried out completely indiscriminately, without any attention given to the individual circumstances of each person.

These raids expand to other smaller improvised shelters. Two asylum seekers from Algeria who were denied access to the reception centre spoke to activists about their experience. Despite having put in a request for international protection, and completing their first interview in June, they were still to be accepted in the CETI and instead sleep in a shack close to the centre which was attacked by police.

In the middle of the night, the police woke us up. We were sleeping in our shack, it was maybe 2 'o clock. The police took down one of the curtains and started beating us with the batons, on our legs and backs. They told us to go out. Then they destroyed our shack. We asked them why they do this. They tell us that we cannot be here.

- S. 32 from Algeria, asylum seeker

Beyond the authorities, violence from the local community was also reported in recent months. In mid July, an undocumented person was harrassed by a group of young locals from Melilla. They hit him with sticks and a chair. The assailants then called the police and accused the person they'd attacked of robbery. Officers from both Poicía Nacional and riot police came, physically assaulting the person, both on the shores of downtown Melilla and at the police station. Speaking to activists on the ground the next day, the respondent showed bruises on his back and stomach, and a swollen and wounded knee (see picture below), echoing some of the many incidents of police brutality occurring across Melilla on a daily basis.

They pushed me up the rocks, and then I fell in the sea. They told me to climb out of the water and they said that they wouldn't do anything. When I climbed out of the water, they started hitting me with a baton and again I fell in the sea. I almost drowned. They took me out and brought me to the jail in the police station. There, three policemen hit me. Again.

- M. 25 from Morocco, undocumented

Swollen knee of M. after being hit by the police (Source: Solidary Wheels)



Ongoing pushbacks from Ceuta

After the events of May, a high number of security bodies remained in Ceuta in charge of executing forced returns to Morocco of both individuals and groups. Without clear communication channels among the bodies and with complete lack of transparency towards the civil society, Guardia Civil, Local Police and National Police have continued to carry out raids through the city, persisting into June and July. Below are some of the cases of forced returns volunteers on the field have documented first hand, while others were [captured on video](#). The real list would be exhaustive and arguably incalculable (due to the informal nature of pushbacks), but these examples give an insight into how these illegal returns are carried out indiscriminately against minors, asylum-seekers, ex-protected minors and others from the transit community.

- A. is a 16 year-old who had been living in Ceuta for the past three years. He had lived in the minor shelter and was hence protected by the Spanish city. He was pushed-back to Morocco by Spanish police against his will.
- X. is a moroccan who had arrived in Ceuta on the 18th of May and wanted to claim asylum given that he belongs to the LGBTQI+ community, meaning he possesses a rightful claim under Spanish law. He was pushed-back into Morocco on the 20th of May.
- N. is a 17 year-old who had arrived in Ceuta on the 18th of May and was taken to the border during a police raid on the 24th May. Guardia Civil denied the presence of minors at the border and the existence of push-backs of minors. However, the N. was already in Morocco when NNK members went to the border to prevent the push-back.
- K. is an ex-protected young adult by the city of Ceuta, who was living in the CETI. Also he was pushed-back to Morocco regardless of his already begun process to seek asylum.
- M. is a young adult from Morocco who entered during the week of May. He was taken on a police raid on the 31st of May and was forced back into the country, along with six other people, two of whom claimed to be minors. There was no presence of a lawyer or translator during the procedure.

In the raid described above from 24th of June, A. was hit with a baton by the officers in the face and other body parts. The officer also broke his mobile phone. He presents a bruise near his pubis. (Source: No Name Kitchen)



Raids began to intensify towards the end of June: taking place daily and at arbitrary times (with a special focus on early mornings). As well as targeting informal accommodation, Spanish security bodies have been known to apprehend people in the street and return them to Morocco. While neither Spain nor Morocco have been forthcoming on information regarding the execution of these returns, it transpires that Morocco has been accepting a number of 20-30 people back into the country on a daily basis. But it was only on the 14th of July, after No Name Kitchen and Maakum had repeatedly been denouncing this malpractice, that the Delegate of the Government in Ceuta [officially announced](#) this practice to be true.

"We were near the gas station next to the parking lot of the port when a police car approached and four Policía Nacional agents showed up. They beat people up and forced a group of approximately 30 people onto buses. We fear they took them to the border."

- A. 28 from Morocco

These raids are performed arbitrarily and have primarily focused in the areas surrounding the port of Ceuta. Generally, groups of people or individuals are approached by Guardia Civil or National Police vehicles. They are told to identify themselves and forced inside the vehicles. The use of force through batons and other physical means is applied if someone contests the arrest or tries to escape. The ensuing procedure seems to lack a linear adherence to legal or administrative norms, with testimonies describing how people are brought to the Commissary where they are handcuffed with either regular handcuffs or improvised rope cuffs. This dehumanising tactic has since May, with Guardia Civil agents observed carrying multiple lengths of rope slung from their belts.

Their fingerprints are sometimes taken before they are brought to the border. Once there, they are forced out of the vehicle still with their handcuffs

on, and forced to enter the border crossing and exit where Moroccan police are awaiting them.

A boy who had just turned 18 and is an ex-protected minor by the city of Ceuta was taken on one of those raids to the border, even though his documents are in order. We found out through a call from his friend and went to the border to ensure he would not be forced to Morocco. He arrived in a Guardia Civil vehicle where a group of eight were kept, all handcuffed. Some of them saw us through a small window and began to hit the walls from inside the vehicle to ask for help. The police only let out of the van the boy whose name we knew. While we were waiting for the police to check that his documentation was, in fact, in order, we witnessed how people were let out of the vehicle to cross the border into Morocco, one by one. One of them resisted to move. The scene turned violent very quickly and soon he was lying on the floor, handcuffed, while approximately seven National Police officers were minimizing him: some using their batons and others kicking his body with their feet. He was dragged into Morocco.

- Testimony by a No Name Kitchen volunteer in the field from the 30th of June



Improvised rope handcuffs used by Guardia Civil in Ceuta (Source: No Name Kitchen)

THE ENCLAVES IN A WIDER VIEW

Violence in Port of Ceuta and FRONTEX presence

As described within the context of Melilla, port violence against people trying to cross to the peninsula is also a pressing risk for people in the harbour in Ceuta. Those attempting “risky” on board ferries face similar challenges in terms of surveillance and violent assault from a host of security forces deployed in the port, as one incident documented by No Name Kitchen illustrates. N., a 19 year-old who was found inside the Port of Ceuta by Policia Nacional and Guardia Civil agents in the early morning of the 15th of May was beaten heavily with batons, including on the side of his head. He went to the hospital on his own the next day, where he was treated and prescribed medicine for the severe swelling and bruising to his temple.

While this experience matches the evidence from the Port of Melilla. Deterrence at attempts against “risky” from Ceuta have taken on an additional dimension in recent months, with the national authorities being bolstered by a new FRONTEX. Pressed by the EU, it was made official by the [Spanish Government](#) that on the 18th of June 2021 Policia Nacional would begin a joint operation with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in the Port of Ceuta. Under operation “JO MINERVA 2021”, the new external deployment of member state officers is set to “face the challenges of migration and police management at the borders of the ports of Algeciras, Ceuta and Tarifa”.

The participating countries have brought up to 112 experts with different profiles such as “*false document experts, interviewers, canine guides, border crossing front line experts, two FRONTEX support officers and stolen vehicle detection experts*”. In spite of the past [reluctance of the Spanish Government](#)

to pass its border control onto FRONTEX, there is an ongoing conversation on whether to commission the control of Ceuta and Melilla land borders to the European agency as well.

According to [V́ctor Suárez, Chief Inspector of the National Police](#) in charge of the Minerva operation in Ceuta, there are currently 26 agents from 9 different nationalities in the Port of Ceuta, including: 8 canine guides from the Portuguese CNR, 7 Policia Nacional officers, and various agents from nationalities such as Lithuania, France, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Holland.

Additionally, activists on the field have received reports that FRONTEX officers have accessed the CETI in Ceuta dressed in civil clothing. Inside, officers talked to residents, most of whom are asylum-seekers, and inquired about their migration history and plans. Notably these discussions were reportedly carried out without personnel unveiling their identities or true intentions.

The new joint operation has shades of the [Rapid Border Intervention](#) installed in Greece’s Evros region in March 2020, which also saw the EU upping its presence at the external border at a moment of systematic repression against transit communities entering via Turkey. The parallels to today’s manoeuvre are notable, and match the Agency’s wider intent to increase its presence at strategic entry points to Europe. However, as opposed to Evros, the installment of FRONTEX officers in Ceuta has been subjected to more protracted resistance from the Madrid government and it remains to be seen how this relationship will develop, with Operation Minerva planned to run until the 8th of September 2021.

N.’s wounds and swollen head from the beating
(Source: No Name Kitchen)



CONCLUSION



As explored in this report, the borders of Ceuta and Melilla represent an embedded violence against people-on-the-move, both demonstrated by the events of May 2021 onwards, but also their history as transit points to continental Europe, and strategic importance as colonial ports on the Mediterranean and Atlantic. The invisibilisation of border struggles in Ceuta and Melilla must be called into question, not only because of the systemic human rights violations occurring there, but the regional importance of these transit spaces, particularly in light of wide scale EU funding for border protection and the new FRONTEX deployment. Further attention to these locations and the lived experience of people contained and abused by these borders is needed, as well as connected approaches which link up struggles against parallel border violence across wider Europe and beyond.

The shameful events of May have brought to the table the violent nature of Ceuta and Melilla. Yet, those living and documenting these borders for a long time often remind us that this is not a novelty: the current situation in Ceuta and Melilla is merely a magnified image of the policial state that reigns in these fragments of European territory that many long to reach. As can be understood by the bureaucratic malaise and poor unestablished procedures that prevail, the ultimate goals of the Spanish government in Ceuta are (1) to “clean” the streets through pushbacks and forced returns, pretending that almost 12,000 people never entered the enclave, and (2) to exhaust people in Ceuta through strategies such as never ending bureaucratic cycles, gatekeeping of asylum access, regular abuse of force, and pressure to accept voluntarily return to Morocco. Likewise in Melilla, the containment and administration of arrivals, as well as the application of violent urban policing, raids on documented and undocumented persons, and pushbacks, has normalised a similarly violent limbo for people-on-the-move.

The events of May have only made the systematic use of physical and institutional violence which controls and inhibits people-on-the-move, and consequently Europe, more visible within Spanish territory. This is a violence which is also often hidden in border zones and conducted by Moroccan police and military forces on behalf of and funded by the European Union. Additionally the situation in Ceuta and Melilla uncovers the dramatic shift that has occurred in this region following the closure of the border under the premise of COVID-19, regarding the mobility of people entering from Morocco, and the use of racialised violence to control and inhibit this; presenting an escalation and expansion of systemic violence conducted using racial profiling.

The joint impacts of the pandemic and recent border security trends have redrawn access to the enclaves via land, calling into question whether the relationship with neighbouring Moroccans will ever return to pre-May conditions. This local reconfiguration of the border also overlaps with the situation for sub-Saharan Africans and how changes to border control will impact wider migratory routes into the enclaves. Questions also remain over the issue of externalisation in Ceuta and Melilla, and whether FRONTEX will also be installed at the land borders and Port of Melilla. The need for human rights violations in Ceuta and Melilla to be put under the spotlight is more pressing than ever, and challenging these continuities in violence against people-on-the-move is a question for both local and European struggles against the border.

***Note:** The testimonies cited in this report can be found in this [annex document](#). If you have any questions about this report or its contents, please don't hesitate to contact us via email at mail@borderviolence.eu.