

MIGRATION TRENDS ACROSS THE WESTERN ROUTE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

THE MOROCCAN BORDER WITH THE SPANISH CITIES OF CEUTA AND MELILLA

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SYRIAN MIGRANTS

Syrian people fleeing from the conflict usually arrive to Morocco from Algeria, where they did not need a visa until beginning of 2015 (Palestine Syrians need a visa since 2014). They are mostly families with children. Now that Algeria asks them for a visa, maybe their route will change and they will start arriving from Mauritania. The Moroccan border with Algeria is a very conflictive and corrupt point of their transit to Europe. Syrians need to pay smugglers in order to cross -around 400€ per person-. Once they arrive to Morocco, they usually stay one or two days in Uxda and arrive thereafter to Nador. In Nador they wait until they get a chance to exit Nador and walk to the Spanish border post of Melilla, Spain. They usually stay in hotels.

Between 700 and 1500 Syrians are waiting in Nador for an opportunity to cross to Melilla. It is very difficult to cross the Moroccan border post without paying smugglers. The Moroccan border police do not allow Syrian people to exit Nador, they reject them when they approach the border post. The only way to cross is paying smugglers around €1000 and €400 per child. The ways used by the smugglers vary widely, families are usually separated and many children are crossing alone the frontier while one of their parents is waiting in Melilla and the other one is still in Nador. Children are at a high risk. Also, this practice creates numerous problems for families to prove their family ties once the whole family is in Melilla (ADN proofs, lost passports, etc).

UNHCR Morocco has recently decided to monitor the situation in Nador and Uxda. To this end, they have reached an agreement with OMDH to finance a person in each of these cities.

Once the syrian refugees arrive to Melilla border post -Beni Enzar-, they ask for asylum and they are transferred to the CETI (“Centro de Estancia Temporal de Inmigrantes”) where they have to wait until they are transferred to the Peninsula. Some Syrians do not ask for asylum believing that this will protect them against an eventual return to Spain under Dublin Regulation. This belief is not completely true, however.

The CETI is a public centre under the responsibility of the Government -Ministry of Employment and Social Security-. It was created to host irregular African migrants and it is by no means a reception centre for asylum seekers. In fact, SJM believes that the CETI is completely unacceptable to host asylum seekers. The CETI has an official capacity of 480 people, but it is hosting around 1600 persons. A third of them are children. Many large tents have been put in place to increase the sleeping space. People there live in cramped conditions: overcrowding, queues for food, for restrooms, lack of information, lack of legal aid and legal orientation –except to apply for asylum-, very limited medical attention, no school for kids. People are divided between men and women and their children. Some activities are offered inside the CETI -some classes or courses related to different topics- but overcrowded. The majority of residents complain heavily about the conditions and the fact that it is overcrowded affects them. There are also many conflicts between the residents due to the poor living conditions.

They all want to exit Melilla and be transferred to the peninsula but cannot move until the authorities so decide, even though they are asylum seekers and should be allowed to move freely within Spain. Asylum seekers are stuck in Melilla for an average of 2 months, those who do not ask for asylum stay there much longer. The transfer procedure and its requirements are not public so residents have no idea of when and according to which criteria they will be transferred to the Peninsula. Not even before being transferred to the Peninsula are they informed in advance where they will go and which help/reception conditions will Spain offer them as asylum seekers.

200 hundred Syrians arrive to the Peninsula (Malaga) every week -300 some weeks- and are received by the 3 NGO that manage the asylum reception system in Spain: Red Cross, ACCEM and CEAR (“Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado”). People are not informed in Melilla where they are going to be transferred. The NGO receive them in Malaga and take them to different centers in Andalucía, most of them for migrants, not for asylum seekers, depending on the availability of the different shelters. Migrants shelters only offer accommodation for three months. Upon arrival, most of them leave the centers and take a bus to Madrid, in the hope of continuing their journey to other countries of Europe. They are very poorly informed of the protection offered by Spain and the consequences under Dublin Regulation of leaving Spain. They feel Spain is a bad place for refugees.

The majority of Syrians want to go to Germany, Belgium or Sweden as they say that reception conditions are better in these countries and also that there are more job opportunities. In some cases, some members of their families have already arrived to those countries and they seek family reunification.

SUB-SAHARAN MIGRANTS

Sub-Saharan migrants come mainly from West Africa and neighbour countries: Cameroon, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea-Conakry, Congo... Border externalization agreements signed by Spain in the past years with West African countries have closed the route through Senegal and Mauritania. Today the routes cross the Sahel and are longer and more dangerous. They usually arrive from Algeria where they refer they are subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment. In Morocco they use to cross through Uxda until they arrive to the outskirts of Nador and Selouan mountains.

Sub-Saharan migrants are subjected to ill treatments by the Moroccan authorities. They cannot live in Nador, they are harassed by the police. They do not approach the city centre as they are afraid of the Police.

They hide and live in settlements in the forest in miserable conditions. The Police make from time to time some raids in their settlements in order to burn the few things they have to live.

We can count between 1500 and 2000 Sub-Saharan migrants in the forests. Around 70 of them are children. They usually group themselves depending on their nationalities. They used to be camped in the Gourugu Mountain (very close to Melilla) but due to police raids, now they are more spread. They are not able to cover any basic need in those settlements as they do not have anything, just some plastics and blankets to sleep. They do not have access to water or food, so they have to beg for some provisions. These terrible living conditions make them more vulnerable to any kind of disease, affecting specially women and children.

They used to stay in these settlements around seven months, but we can now find people that have been living there for more than a year.

It is common to find in the forests settlements of young women victims of human trafficking but it is really difficult to identify those persons and protect them, they are heavily warded by traffickers. Most of them are Nigerian. Traffickers menace victims and terrify them. The majority of the women get pregnant during the transit, most of them due to rapes from migrants or even from the Moroccan authorities. Many pregnancies result in induced abortion by the traffickers in miserable conditions.

It is impossible to cross the land border in a legal and safe way for Sub-Saharan people because they do not have any documentation and because before arriving to the border post, the Moroccan Police stops them and rejects them. Sub-Saharan migrants have traditionally crossed the border jumping the multi-wire fence barrier built by Spain along the entire border separating Morocco from Ceuta and Melilla. Most of the fences are equipped with anti-climbing grids. However, since April 2015 no attempts to jump the fence have been recorded officially. The reason is that Morocco has built a barbed fire fence in its side of the border and rejects violently any attempt to jump the fence. Now they have to access Melilla by sea or hidden in vehicles. Sub-Saharan migrants do not apply for asylum. They are sanctioned with a return procedure.

Spanish Government has been “pushing back” Africans at the border fence without any procedure whatsoever, the so called “hot returns”. The Guardia Civil is responsible of patrolling the coast and the land border in order to prevent irregular entries of migrants. Push backs in Ceuta and Melilla have been heavily criticized by national and international organizations. SJM has asked the EU Commission to open an infringement procedure against Spain for this practice. The Spanish Government modified the Law in April 2015 in an attempt to legalize those practices. The amendment is very ambiguous and requires a procedure to be defined, which still has not taken place after 6 months. This ambiguity is very unsatisfactory.

*The **Jesuit Migrant Service** –Spain (SJM-España) (www.sjme.org) is part of the Jesuit Social Apostolate. It is dedicated to the study of migrations, the reception and accompaniment of migrants and to promoting an inclusive, integrated and intercultural society. The SJM works primarily in Madrid (Pueblos Unidos), Barcelona (Migra Studium), Valencia (Ceimigra), Sevilla (Volunteer Claver) and Bilbao (Centro Ellacuría); and also in Burgos, Tudela and Valladolid.*

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