

A photograph of a dilapidated room, likely a shelter or a place of residence for migrants. The room has a concrete floor and walls. A long window runs across the back wall, with laundry hanging from the sill. The wall below the window has graffiti that reads "UNTIL DEATH" with "UGBos" written above it. To the right, there is more graffiti, including a drawing of a person's face and the year "1949". The room is cluttered with various items, including a striped mattress on the floor, cardboard boxes, and other personal belongings. The lighting is bright, coming from the window.

# MONITORING THE RIGHT TO LIFE

JANUARY-JUNE 2022

CA MINANDO  
FRONTERAS

## Monitoring the Right to Life: January-June 2022

Loss of life on migration routes has become normalised in the discourse of migration control, resulting in a rise in the number of victims and the use of increasingly deadly repression against migrant communities.

During the first half of 2022 covered in this report, there has been an escalation in the militarisation of migration control, with measures that represent a systematic attack on migrants' human rights.

This situation has been exacerbated by the belligerent discourse surrounding the war in Ukraine and the rearmament envisaged by Europe and NATO is also likely to affect border control management. In the Spanish State's political narrative, people on the move have been positioned as one of various threats from the Global South and subjected to a de facto military response.

This report presents data on the victims of the necropolitics applied to border control at the western Euro-African border during the first six months of 2022. These data have been confirmed by the Human Rights Observatory run by the Ca-minando Fronteras collective.

In the report, we also considered it important to analyse the tools used to exert systematic violence against migrant communities. We have attempted to lay the foundations for an analysis of the situation at the border over the last six months that will focus on human rights and counter belligerent narratives and warmongering fervour. It is crucial that we analyse the violence suffered by migrant communities on a daily basis, the sources of this violence and its impact on migrants' lives, many of which are cut short after sustained rights violations.

This report was drawn up using data from the Observatory of the Western Euro-African Border founded by the Ca-minando Fronteras collective in 2015, which records victims migrating on Mediterranean (Strait of Gibraltar, Alborán Sea, Algeria) and Atlantic (Canary Islands) sea routes, as well as on overland routes via the border fences in Ceuta and Melilla.

The numbers and stories presented in this report play an essential role as we strive for greater respect for the rights of victims and their families. Their memory must remain with us, lighting the way to truth, justice and reparation and ensuring that these deaths cease once and for all.



## TOTAL NUMBER OF VICTIMS



Every one of the victims represented in this infographic has a story, a family and a community. Their hopes, dreams, desires and enthusiasm for life have all been cut tragically short.

Each individual leaves a void behind them in their communities and family networks, but collectively, this loss of life also has a major impact on their places of origin and on the countries where they died. These are no isolated cases; this is a series of deaths all caused by the policies applied to certain groups of migrants.

***“She was coming for treatment. Poor her, she left to get away from that man but she was already sick. She said that if she was cured, she’d help us a lot. She was heading for France. Where did you say the accident was? In the ocean off Abidjan? It’s very dangerous there. I’ll call you to see if there’s any news. Now I’ll have to tell mum.”,***  
sister of a woman from Ivory Coast.

*"He set off with some other young people from the village. They all left, they couldn't make a living here anymore. I didn't know he'd leave. This is a very small village. They all set off on the same boat. We searched for them, but they didn't show up. Our young people are gone. Some parents have held ceremonies and started mourning. I can't bring myself to do that yet, I want to wait."*, father of a young Malian man.

### WOMEN AND CHILD VICTIMS



Women's bodies are at particular risk because sexual violence is a common phenomenon on migration routes. Women may suffer this form of violence at the hands of fellow migrants or of members of the societies they move through en route. However, the most important development in recent years is the use of sexual violence in migration control, where it has become a tool used by the institutions to inflict pain and punishment on women who migrate.



***“She’s dead. She had HIV but she didn’t start treatment until very late on. She’d been through a lot of violence, like other women, like me and I’m a community worker. None of us can escape from it. She tried to cross twice and she saw two sisters die on one attempt. But when they arrest you after you’ve tried to cross the sea and dump you in the desert or in the south and they rape you over and over... Although we do a lot to raise awareness, women are unable to protect themselves in these conditions. Many women are dying like this. They survive the ocean, but they die later from all the pain they’ve been accumulating for years. May she rest in peace.”***, friend of one of the victims.

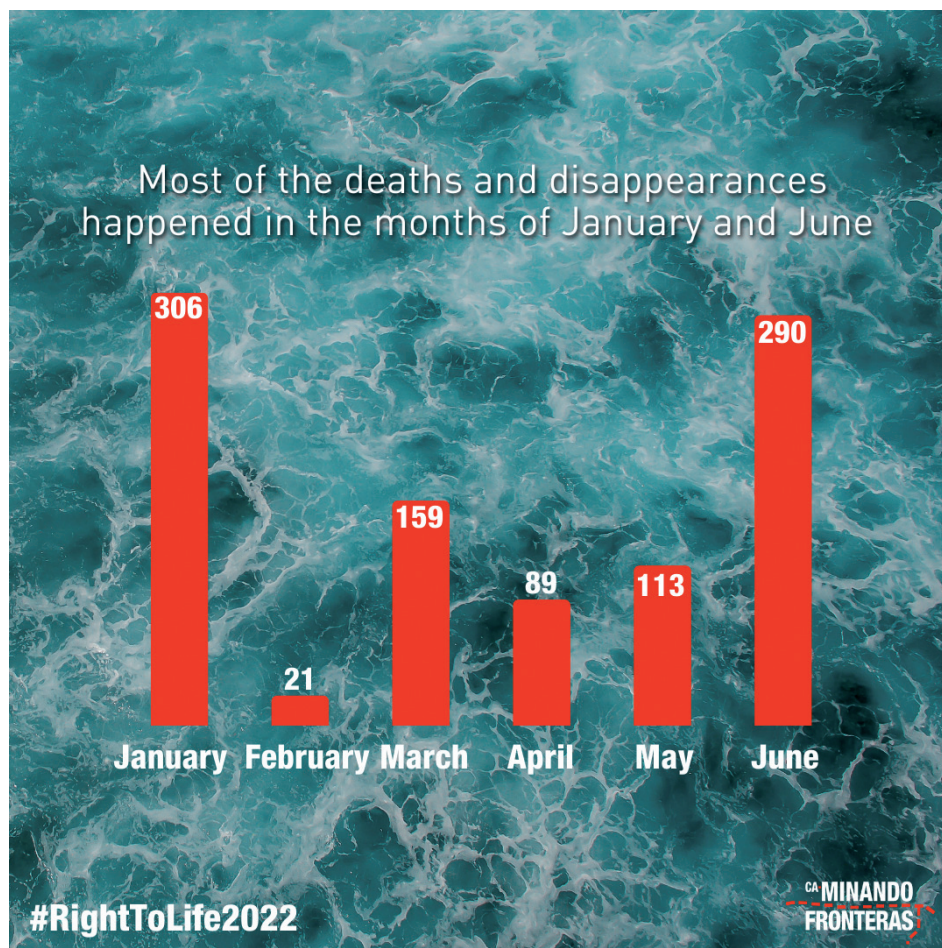
Women and child migrants experience different forms of violence, which intersect in family units. For most mothers, losing their children along the way is one of their greatest fears when it comes to migration.

Hundreds of children are already familiar with the pain and repression inflicted by migration control measures. Adolescents are stigmatised, criminalised, singled out and violated. Children are subjected to repression and violence under necropolitical policies. They are stigmatised by being labelled as migrants, negating their rights as children and adolescents. Many are referred to as ‘MENA’ (unaccompanied foreign minors in Spanish) in public discourse, distancing them still further from their status as children. Meanwhile, younger children run the risk of becoming separated from their families due to the institutional racism present in border control.

***“I couldn’t make the crossing with her, they separated us right there on the beach at night. It was like they’d torn part of me away. She reached the Canary Islands in one piece. I did everything I could to make the crossing, no matter what it took. I risked my life because without her I’m nothing. Six months later, I arrived at the same place. I thought it would be easy to hold her in my arms, but it wasn’t. She’s my daughter, my daughter. I did everything they told me to, everything, papers, DNA. Sometimes I didn’t understand them but I did it anyway. I had to ask an organisation for help because they didn’t listen to me. Someone to defend my rights and listen to me. I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t eat. I called the organisation every day. Months later, I was able to hug her again. It was terrible. I’m sure they wouldn’t have given her back to me without that support. I’m certain it’s because of all the racism that they look at us with suspicion, they punish us, they think we’re bad mothers. But that’s a lie – how many mothers would make the sacrifices I’ve made for my daughter? Those women at the centres for minors aren’t better mothers than I am, but they’re definitely more racist than me.”***

*"We set off from Douala together. We did everything together, like a family. Our mothers are very poor and since we were little, we sold products in the streets to get a bit of money to survive on. One day, we left for the sake of our families. Our aim was to work wherever we could and to beg when we couldn't find work. There's a lot of work in the fish factories and we worked there day and night. We sent some of the money to our families and saved the rest for the crossing. The day arrived and we set off. The dinghy stopped and we called for help for hours. It was sinking. I lost her in the middle of the night, she sank to the bottom and I couldn't do anything to help. I still haven't told her family. I can't bring myself to do it. How old am I? We're both 15. We were born a month apart."*

#### NUMBER OF VICTIMS BY MONTH

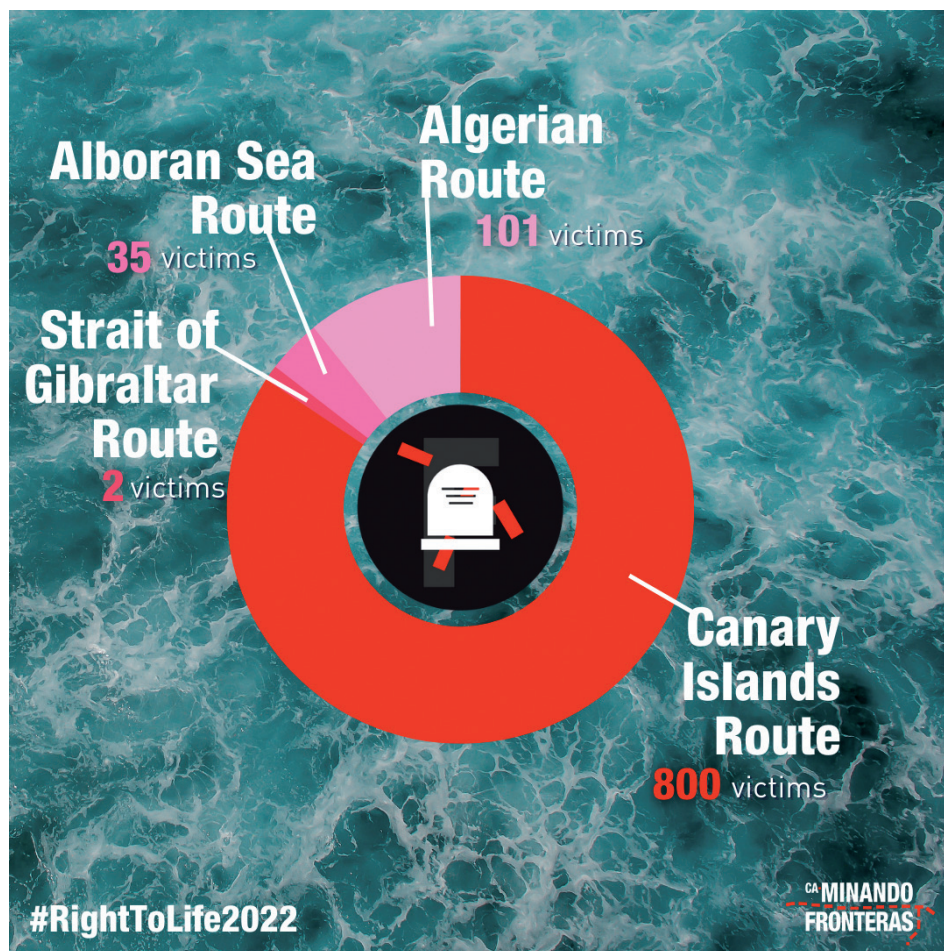


Horrifically, not a month goes by without a death. The border is merciless and danger is always present. When people move, their right to life is placed in jeopardy.



*"In the first few days of January, more than 300 people went missing. You can look on Facebook at the Algerian family groups. We don't know where lots of the people are, but they set off from the Oran region and their families are looking for them. A lot of boats arrived around that time but others still haven't appeared. We don't know if they're dead or alive, or if they've been locked up. We don't know how many people there are, it's hard to know. It's important that we have all the information we need to look for them."*

### VICTIMS BY SEA ROUTE



The Atlantic route continues to be the most deadly. The physical characteristics of the route, the use of boats that are too flimsy for the ocean, the long distances and the political relations between countries in the region that are driven by territorial interests on land and at sea hinder international collaboration to defend the right to life and lead to delays in mobilising rescue services.

***“At 4:00 am, some relatives alerted us to a rubber dinghy carrying 53 people, which had left Tarfaya around four hours earlier. When we managed to make contact with the boat, there were already people in the water. We conveyed the information to the rescue services, which already had a position as they had been alerted hours earlier. The relatives called us because the rescue services hadn’t taken action and the people were still in danger. That’s when we found out that Rabat was responsible for coordinating the rescue. Hours went by without a response until the Moroccan authorities told us at 15:00 that the dinghy had been located but that they had only found 10 people alive, including six women, and that two corpses had been retrieved from the sea. The others had fallen victim to a tragedy that could have been avoided if the rescue services had mobilised more quickly and if they had been coordinated both on land and by air. This was an avoidable tragedy because they had the boat’s position and information on the danger it was in.”***, account from the Ca-minando Fronteras helpline.

The Alborán Sea and the Strait of Gibraltar are less commonly used routes but migrants travelling on them are at constant risk due to failure to render assistance at sea. Rescue services are not mobilised or are mobilised too late after being alerted to vessels in distress.

***“In the early hours of 8 January, 28 people set off on a rubber dinghy from Dar El Kebdani. They lost contact with their families at 8:00 UTC. It wasn’t until midday that our organisation received the warning and we immediately conveyed it to MRCC and Salvamento Marítimo. During successive calls to Salvamento Marítimo, we were repeatedly asked to provide the details of the boat that we had already reported in previous calls. It is unclear what search measures were taken that evening, but we know for a fact that no specific action was taken to search for those people throughout the whole of that day. During the night, the boat called 112 for help and resources were mobilised in the early hours. At that time, Salvamento Marítimo called our organisation again to ask for the details of the boat, which we had given them the previous morning in every call we made to them. A lifeboat and an air resource were then mobilised, but it was too late.***

***Several days later, five bodies washed up: four women and a man. Our pre-identification suggested that they had been travelling on the boat that the authorities had been alerted about on the 8th. At that point, the families were informed and the Spanish authorities were contacted to ensure that the people would be buried in accordance with their Islamic religion.”***, account from the Ca-minando Fronteras helpline.



The Algerian route is completely invisible and failure to render assistance at sea is exacerbated by the lack of alerts from people and their families, who make contact too late. As a result, although we know that hundreds of families are looking for victims who were travelling on this route, it is impossible to provide accurate figures.

***“On 11 May, the families of the people travelling on a boat that left Mers el Hadjadj in Oran alerted our organisation. There were nine men and two women on board, one of whom was pregnant. They hadn’t been able to contact their families since they left on 7 May. We conveyed the information to the Rescue Coordination Centres in Cartagena and Almería. They asked us for the most recent information and we sent them the telephone numbers of those on board. When we contacted them on subsequent days, they told us that they had no record of an arrival of that description and we do not know if they mobilised specific search and rescue resources.*”**

***On 14 May, a navy boat rescued several people but it was unclear how many or whether any further information was available. They advised us to call the main phone number for the Guardia Civil or Cruz Roja Almería. With help from Cruz Roja Almería, we were able to confirm that only three men had been found from the boat that had set off on 7 May. The bodies of the two women and the other six men remain missing to this day.”***, account from the Ca-minando Fronteras helpline.

## PERCENTAGE OF MISSING PEOPLE



Most of the migrants who fall victim to the sea routes disappear without a trace and their families never receive a body to allow them to confirm the death.

*“On 11 May, 14 women, six children and 39 men set off from Guelmin at 2:00 on board a rubber dinghy. For three days, we maintained contact with the rescue services to provide them with the telephone numbers of those on board. We do not know whether specific search and rescue resources were mobilised for this vessel. On 15 May, the people on the boat made contact with us, explaining that they were off Tarfaya and that several people had already died. They confirmed that MRCC was coordinating the search and rescue operation. Communication with the boat was smooth as it was in an area with good signal, although they were unable to send their position. They told us that people were dying of thirst because they had been adrift for several days. The night before, the boat had overturned and several people had died. At 18:30 UTC, the rescue of 46 people,*



*including 10 women and two children, was confirmed. Two corpses were also retrieved. The bodies of 11 people remained at sea. In subsequent calls from distressed relatives, one said desperately that if they at least had a body, they could confirm the death and begin mourning.”*, account from the Ca-minando Fronteras helpline.

### MISSING BOATS



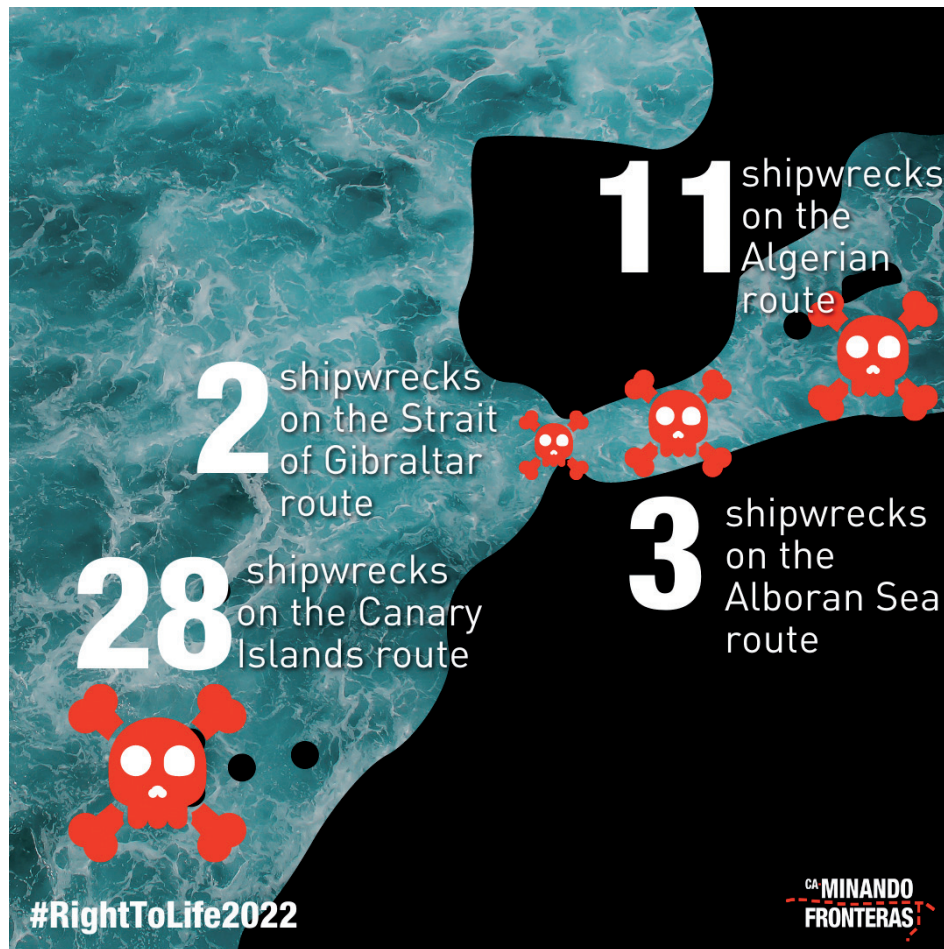
When a boat disappears along with everyone on board, it is much more difficult to obtain an account of what happened and the situation is still more distressing for the families of those travelling on the vessel. There are no survivors to provide the information that is often key in allowing families to mourn even when they do not have their loved one's body.

***“Seventy-eight people, including 30 women – two of whom were pregnant – and nine children, sent their position from their wooden boat on the morning of 10 January, calling for assistance. This***

*information was conveyed to the rescue services and the MRCC took charge of coordinating the operation. Twenty-four hours after calling for help, Rabat informed us that they had received a new position for the vessel; we did not manage to make contact with the boat. The next day, Rabat claimed to have sent a patrol to the area from which the positions had been sent but they had found nothing. At that point, the search for the boat ceased. The 78 people on board are still missing.”*, account from the Ca-minando Fronteras helpline.



### TOTAL NUMBER OF SHIPWRECKS



This is the total number of shipwrecks documented by our collective for the period in question. Each of them has been reconstructed to produce an account explaining the causes of the shipwreck to the victims' families and to cast light on the stories of both victims and survivors. Here is a list of the multiple causes of these tragedies:

- Search and rescue operations were not mobilised. This occurs in the Alborán Sea, in the Balearic Island area and in the rescues in the Atlantic region coordinated by the MRCC in Rabat.
- Search and rescue operations were not launched quickly enough despite the location of the unfolding tragedy being known.
- Inadequate search and rescue resources were mobilised: insufficient sea resources and lack of air resources, which play an important role in searching for vessels.
- Negligence from the Spanish rescue services.

- No air resources were mobilised despite there being people in the water.
- Lack of information and transparency due to military operations by US and Moroccan military forces taking place in the region.
- Delays in exchanging information between Salvamento Marítimo and MRCC Rabat.
- Lack of effective coordination between the two countries' rescue services.
- Incorrect information provided to the rescue services, which hindered the search operation.
- Our organisation struggled to communicate with the rescue services; they did not respond to our alerts and ignored our warnings that the vessel was in danger. This occurred primarily with Salvamento Marítimo workers; the relationship with the control towers in Almería and the Balearic Islands proved especially difficult.
- Lack of coordination between Morocco and the Spanish rescue services to save lives. Spain does not mobilise rescue services, despite being aware that Morocco is effectively failing to render assistance at sea. This also happens in waters where the Spanish State is responsible for search and rescue operations, especially the area between Laayoune and Dakhla.
- Large distances with insufficient resources available to cover them.
- Off-course vessels.
- Overloaded vessels.
- Vessels that set off amid difficult terrain and were shipwrecked upon departure.
- Panic and distress among people travelling on the boats, causing them to capsize; crew members desperately jumping into the sea in fear and losing their lives.
- Hastiness on the part of a freighter that carried out a rescue without fulfilling the necessary conditions. It is unclear why the freighter embarked on this rescue.
- Failure to render assistance at sea by fishing boats due to fear of criminalisation.
- No active searches for corpses were carried out after the tragedy.
- Survivors of tragedies suffered torture and inhuman or degrading treatment after reaching land.



## NATIONALITIES



The victims' countries of origin cast light on their migration history and the reasons prompting them to leave. They also allow us to analyse migration routes and the impact of the violence suffered by migrants. The contexts and communities where migrants originate enable us to develop a narrative centring on their status as individuals.

The reasons prompting migrants to leave were:

- Armed conflict.
- Neocolonial extractivist policies.
- Poverty exacerbated by climate change.
- Poverty exacerbated by rising prices and shortages of basic foodstuffs such as cereals.
- Poverty exacerbated by lack of work and absence of material conditions for making a living; lack of appealing or desirable future prospects.

- Gender-based violence.
- Violence against LGBTBI+ groups.
- Human rights activists fleeing after fighting for access to social rights and greater democracy and/or against corruption.



## VICTIMS OF THE BORDER FENCES



On 24 June, 39 people lost their lives at the border fence in Melilla. This fateful date brings to mind the victims who died at the fences in 2005, who were targeted using terrible deterrents, including firearms. The images also evoke the victims of Tarajal in 2014.

These tragic events are the product of the implementation of the renewed security cooperation agreement between Spain and Morocco.

***“That’s when we began to fall. Everyone began to fall, one after another. The police climbed up to the top and made us come down, then they caught us. They shot at some of us. Lots of people died. They threw us to the ground, hit us, sprayed tear gas in our faces. They did all that until... If you cried, they carried on beating you. But if you played dead, they left you alone. But if you cried, they kept going.”***

## **Systematic Human Rights violations: legitimising the hunt for people on the move using a warmongering discourse**

Throughout the last six months, we have supported people in transit in countries along the EU border and documented the repeated violence that they have suffered, which has increased since the new cooperation agreement between Morocco and Spain was signed.

We monitored the violence and waves of repression targeting migrants throughout this period in the following cities: Nador, Tangier, Tétouan, Agadir, Rabat, Laayoune, Dakhla, Oujda, Beni Mellal and Taza.

The massacre on the border at Nador-Melilla will be the focus of a separate section of this report. To document these practices, the Ca-minando Fronteras team worked with human rights activists with extensive experience in social emergency situations. As well as gathering information, we also offered humanitarian support to the people suffering violence during the attempt to cross the border fence on 24 June and on subsequent days.

Additionally, we provided assistance to wounded people in need of healthcare to address their physical needs or their shock at the violence to which they had been subjected.

This was no easy task and the violence continued away from the border fence. The difficulties experienced by survivors in accessing basic rights and support from organisations and communities heightened the pain felt by victims of the massacre in Melilla.

## **Externalisation / Militarisation**

Relations between countries are shaped by processes of border externalisation linked to migration control. During these first six months of the year, militarisation has been driven by the new agreement between the Spanish State and Morocco, which is based on exchanging recognition of territorial interests and funds for measures to block and repress people on the move.

The following tools are used to exert violence at externalised borders:



## 1. Systematic illegal and/or arbitrary detentions:

- Use of premises belonging to public institutions that are not linked to the Ministry of Interior for forced detentions. These centres are not subject to judicial scrutiny and detainees find themselves in a state of administrative vulnerability. They have no legal representation and social organisations have limited access to them to provide humanitarian support.
- Detentions without administrative procedures or safeguards. In recent months, mass arrests overseen by the Moroccan authorities at the Ministry of Interior have proliferated across the country. The concept of the 'border city' has expanded and migrants are being persecuted in inland areas.
- Involvement of institutions not related to immigration in detentions and migration control. Over the course of this six-month period, we have detected a rise in social centres and schools being used as spaces for detaining migrants. Meanwhile, public employees in settings such as hospitals, schools and family courts help identify migrants and play a role in repressive migration control measures.

## 2. Systematic use of force:

- During detentions, controls and operations on beaches and at border fences, the use of force by state security forces has risen exponentially and migrants are viewed as a threat rather than as individuals with rights. Anti-riot equipment and even firearms have been used.
- Violability of the home. Migrants have been detained by force in their own homes by security forces that have broken down doors in order to enter. These detentions sometimes take place at night. Not only are people attacked, but their belongings are often stolen.
- Injuries caused by police raids. During detentions, people may be injured even when they do not resist. Most harm is caused by fractures, as beating migrants until their bones break and they are unable to flee is a systematic practice.
- Raids on informal settlements. Raids of this kind are particularly violent, with military forces blocking access to food and water as a form of torture. The security forces are accompanied by local criminal groups, which steal the rest of the migrants' belongings and raze the camps to the ground once the soldiers have left with the detained migrants.

### 3. Racial discrimination:

Black people are stopped even if they have documents accrediting their residency in the country. In recent months, asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers have suffered detentions due to their skin colour and/or place of origin. Their rights have been violated and Morocco has breached the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families under the migration control agreement signed with the Spanish State. On 13 February, we were saddened to hear of the death of J. B. from Cameroon, who lost his life during a forced relocation to the south of the country after one of these racial detentions.

### 4. Forced relocations and collective expulsions:

- Once they have been detained, migrants are often relocated to cities such as Beni Mellal, Taza, Agadir and Casablanca, which act as a stopper preventing people from leaving again. Many people arrive in these cities with injuries and healthcare organisations and services are unable to provide an adequate response to this appalling humanitarian situation.
- Collective expulsions to the Algerian border. In these collective expulsions, detained migrants (including men, women and adolescents) are sent to the city of Oujda. This is particularly dangerous as the conflict between Morocco and Algeria is becoming increasingly violent and migrants find themselves stuck and their rights violated by both countries. Migration has also become a tool for negotiating and exerting pressure in the territorial conflict between the two countries. During the last six months, at least four people, including a teenager, have disappeared following a collective expulsion to the eastern border.

### 5. Specific violence against migrant women and children:

- Sexual violence. This form of violence is used by the security forces during raids, especially those targeting camps. Another way of punishing women that has been documented this year is to expose their naked bodies to everyone present during raids.
- Separation from children. During detentions, raids, forced relocations and collective expulsions, separations have been documented as repression is used to target family units.
- Child and adolescent migrants experience the same violence, violating their best interests. Meanwhile, adolescents are subjected to the same controls, repressive measures and violence as adults.



Children aged under 11 years old can fall victim to direct violence or witness the repression waged against their mothers and other members of the migrant community.

- Sexual and reproductive health. Systematic sexual violence affects women's health, exposing them to sexually transmitted diseases. Continuous violence forces them to move constantly, which prevents them from taking the treatment they need when they contract diseases as a consequence of this form of repression targeting migrants.

#### **6. Legal defencelessness:**

- There are no legal procedures to safeguard migrants or instruments to protect victims of violence. With no legal defence, not even the international conventions signed by Morocco apply to migrants. In addition, migrants have been unable to report the abuse they have suffered as they risk being subjected to further repression. The right to legal certainty is de facto violated.
- There is no reparation of damages. The impact of these different layers of violence affects migrants' physical and mental integrity but there are no safe spaces for migrants in Morocco. Some associations provide support to alleviate the effects of the repression, but this is entirely inadequate compared to the scale of the harm suffered.

#### **7. Persecution of individuals defending migrant rights:**

Recounting violence and calling for truth, justice, reparation and a commitment to ending these practices carry significant costs for migrant communities. Community leaders are subjected to surveillance, challenged for defending migrants' rights and repressed to prevent them from continuing with this work. The militarisation that has occurred this year with the implementation of the agreement between Spain and Morocco has also led to a resurgence in the criminalisation of individuals who condemn violations of migrants' rights.

## **Ceuta and Melilla border fences: transnational Human Rights violations**

During attempts to enter Ceuta and Melilla in collective efforts by large groups or by smaller groups of one or two people, the following practices were observed:

- Systematic use of force. Migration control at the border fences in Ceuta and Melilla is based on military practices. The use of tear gas, rubber bullets and real bullets was confirmed.
- Violations of the principle of non-refoulement. Pushbacks were documented in images during attempts to cross the border fences on 2 and 8 March and on 24 June. On the first two occasions, the pushbacks were carried out by Spanish security forces. In the case of the slaughter in Melilla, the pushbacks were conducted in collaboration with the Moroccan security forces, which entered Spanish territory to violently remove the migrants.
- Returns to countries where people are subjected to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The people pushed back from Spanish territory at the border fences in Ceuta and Melilla were subjected to violence.
- Violations of the right to asylum. Among the people returned to Morocco were migrants from Sudan, South Sudan, Chad and Mali, who may be refugees. Cases of individuals fleeing persecution, such as LGBTQI+ communities, were also confirmed.
- Returns of highly vulnerable people. These included injured people, child migrants and trafficking victims.
- Collective expulsions and forced relocations awaited people who had fallen victim to the violent migration control measures implemented at the border fences in Ceuta and Melilla.



## **Slaughter at the Nador-Melilla border 24 June 2022**

### **A death trap: two months of ongoing repression**

Since May this year, the camps in the woods around Melilla have become a war zone. Military incursions using increasingly aggressive strategies and military equipment have taken place two or three times a week, resulting in significant harm to people and property.

The security forces attack migrants' camps in the early hours of the morning. First, groups of soldiers surround the ghettos<sup>1</sup> as the migrants sleep, taking them by surprise. Then helicopters arrive and begin to spray gas, which, according to statements from migrants, is intended to choke them as they flee from the auxiliary forces.

These operations last for hours and end with the camps being razed to the ground. In each raid, the refugees lose the few material belongings that they still possess. They also report a deterioration in their physical and mental health as a result of these practices.

The victims/survivors interviewed by our organisation described the impact of the raids on their lives:

***We lost everything, including our clothes and shoes, and it happened over and over again. After two months of that, we had nothing left to lose because they'd robbed us of our health too. But we never lost hope that we'd escape the situation because going back isn't an option for us.***

***We were beaten again and again; we had wounds that we couldn't heal. It was very difficult to find medical care. The most serious thing are the fractures because they beat you so that you can't walk or run away. If you can't move, you're good for nothing because often our only way to defend ourselves is to run away.***

***They stole everything they didn't burn: our phones so that we couldn't call for help, the few dirhams we had in our pockets. The soldiers took everything, and if there was anything left, the thugs accompanying them during the raids took it instead.***

***It can drive you mad not sleeping, always being on the alert, waiting for them to attack you, being ready to run for your life all the time. Many of us have experienced war and we know what these military incursions mean, how they work and how they destroy you little by little.***

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<sup>1</sup>This term is used to refer to informal camps with flimsy shelters made from wood and plastic

The raids prompted the migrants to move their camps towards Melilla into more impenetrable parts of the mountain. Drones played an important role in locating people who were hiding or retreating in search of safer locations. These unmanned robots are increasingly common in migration control, where they are employed to identify targets and provide images used to plan military incursions.

According to the migrants, the situation became increasingly unbearable from late May to early June.

On 7 June, there was a major raid with more helicopters and gas than usual. During the raid, four Sudanese refugees were badly injured: in the words of fellow migrants, **“they broke their bodies”**.

The fact that the migrants outnumber the soldiers is their only form of defence, ensuring that they are not all injured and/or detained at once.

On the Monday of the week when the slaughter at the Nador-Melilla border occurred, around 500 soldiers surrounded the refugees' camp. Once again, they were attacked with gas and dozens of migrants were wounded.

On Tuesday, the attacks let up but they intensified again on Wednesday and Thursday. From the early hours of the morning to the evening, the soldiers chased the refugees from the camp. During the raid on 23 June, fire broke out in the woods, endangering people and the environment.

That day, a clear message was sent: the migrants had 24 hours to vacate the area or the next raid would be even more violent.

On Friday 24 June, with the prospect of another attack looming, individual strengths waning and hopes of escaping the violence, the migrants in the camp decided to flee forward towards the border fence. The raid had begun early in the morning.

This time, the migrants had neither hooks nor ladders to climb the fence; it was every man for himself. They managed to get hold of a power saw and shears for cutting metal and decided to break through one of the gates in the fence, making sure nobody would be left behind at risk of further attack by the soldiers. The migrants were aware that many were reaching the limit of their physical strength and would not be able to climb the six-metre fence.



## Pain, blood and death

A group of around 1,800 people walked to the border fence in the Beni Enzar area bordering Melilla. Some were carrying items that they had found to defend themselves from the attacks they had suffered in the camps on previous days.

The soldiers charged again and were pursuing them.

***“Not everyone was carrying sticks. Some, like me, had only our legs to run on. But I can understand how after this time they felt like a stick might save their lives. I think we were conscious of the fact that they would kill us. Throughout that week, we felt that they would cross that line and that we were no longer safe anywhere. It was do or die, there was no other way out”.***

The migrants in the group came from Sudan, South Sudan, Chad, Mali, Yemen, Cameroon, Nigeria, Senegal, Niger, Guinea Conakry, Burkina Faso and Liberia. More than 80% of the people trying to reach the Nador-Melilla border fence were from Sudan and South Sudan.

From 08:00 to 14:00 on 24 June, there were clashes between migrants and soldiers. In the first few hours, these clashes were limited to hand-to-hand combat. Later, the migrants' sticks, stones, desperation and fear were countered by the soldiers' drones, surveillance cameras, anti-riot gear, tear gas and firearms.

The first group to reach the border fence used the power saw to try and cut the wires, but witnesses explained that they quickly ran out of battery and were unable to do much more with the shears. Some people were able to reach the other side of the fence.

By that point, the soldiers had circled the migrants from behind and those who had not succeeded in reaching the other side were surrounded. They were trapped; people fell to the ground one after another but received no assistance.

No coordinated support from Spain or Morocco was provided for the people at the fence who were suffering the impact of the crush caused by the soldiers' manoeuvres.

On the contrary, witnesses report that the Moroccan forces trampled the bodies of those who had fallen to the ground.

Those who were no longer able to move were dragged away and dumped in the sun, with no attempt made to evaluate the extent of their wounds. If they moved, they were beaten until they stayed still.

***“I’ve been to the border several times but they’d never been so violent before. The more recent times were very difficult. It was a disaster. It was as if they had everything prepared beforehand. They forced us to move forward and when we did, they came in from behind. We were surrounded”.***

***“If you cried, they beat you again until they broke your legs or you passed out”.***

The coordinated violence employed that day led to deaths and hundreds of injuries. Based on witness statements, a series of different causes of death and injury were identified. In some cases, several of these causes came together at once.

- Suffocated by gas.
- Crushed after falling to the ground.
- Crushed by the soldiers’ boots.
- Beaten with traditional and electric batons.
- Struck by bullets.
- Refused medical care and assistance.
- Forced displacement of wounded people.
- Removals of wounded people from Melilla without receiving medical treatment.

The circle surrounding the refugees was made deadlier still by the entry of Moroccan soldiers into Melillan territory. Working alongside the Spanish security forces, they were able to continue attacking the migrants and push them back to Morocco. These practices were used by both the Spanish and Moroccan security forces, which coordinated with one another.

According to oral and visual evidence provided by the victims/survivors, the Spanish State drove back dozens of potential refugees and unaccompanied minors to Morocco on 24 June. These removals took place despite the scenes witnessed by the Spanish authorities, which revealed the torture and inhuman and degrading treatment suffered by the refugees first-hand.

The Spanish authorities saw what was happening and used the information to support the repressive military strategies used by Morocco. However, neither of the two countries initiated a collaborative effort to help the victims and mitigate the terrible impact of the tragedy.

Monitoring instruments such as drones and cameras were used solely for military manoeuvres and not to obtain information to assess the scale of the emergency and mobilise coordinated assistance.

As a result, dead, wounded and exhausted people stricken with pain and fear laid on the ground for up to eight hours under the blazing sun, with soldiers arbitrarily beating them from time to time.

The area around the border was packed with suffering, inert bodies until buses and a few ambulances began to arrive.

The luckier migrants received medical treatment for their wounds, although what went on inside the hospitals remains a mystery as the Moroccan police prevented social organisations and victims' family members from entering. The Ministry of Interior tightened security at the hospitals in the cities of Nador and Oujda.

Many questions remain unanswered. What medical criteria were used to decide to move some wounded people and not others? What assistance did they receive and when? Have they received support for operations and medical treatment? Were they able to contact their loved ones? Why and how did some migrants die in hospital? Did they speak to their families before they died?

Meanwhile, 65 people have been charged with offences relating to the events of 23 and 24 June.

The accused have been divided into two groups. One group has been charged with serious crimes by the Court of Appeal in Nador and is facing sentences of up to 20 years in prison. The other group is charged with facilitating clandestine entry and exit of people to Morocco, among other accusations. All the refugees are in custody and are being assisted by lawyers from social organisations.

The remaining migrants have been subjected to forced relocations within the country, stripped of all their belongings and abandoned to their fate. Our organisation also documented the deportation of 132 people to an area known as no-man's land on the border with Algeria.

The number of casualties remains unknown. Witness statements collected by our organisation place the number of dead at 62. We have been able to confirm the deaths of 37 people on the day of the slaughter itself and an additional three deaths that occurred at a later date due to injuries inflicted on 24 June. This brings the number of casualties confirmed by our organisation to 40. May they rest in peace.



Once again, a lack of transparency prevented organisations and families from visiting the dead in order to identify them. It is unclear whether autopsies have been conducted to clarify the cause of death. Therefore, as well as the right to life, the rights of deceased people and their families have also been violated: the right to be identified, to be informed of the true causes of death and to have a dignified burial.

The rights of the victims/survivors of the slaughter and their family members were not only violated on 24 June; they have been constantly revictimised since then.

## **The humanitarian crisis following the slaughter**

Our collective organised a team of human rights activists to provide assistance to the wounded and to those subjected to forced relocation following the slaughter on 24 June.

In four humanitarian missions that have supported 862 people in different cities at the time of writing, the following tasks were carried out:

- Providing medical care to wounded people.
- Issuing kits containing food, hygiene products, clothing and shoes.
- Drawing up a list of missing people who are being looked for by relatives and friends from their communities with help from victims/survivors.
- Obtaining witness statements to produce an account focusing on the rights of the victims/survivors.

During these last few weeks of work on the ground, we have witnessed a genuine humanitarian crisis, which the Moroccan authorities have sought to conceal with political support from the Spanish government. We have attempted to alleviate the terrible pain caused by the slaughter by working with community leaders. We have also been able to work towards a collective evaluation of the impact of the policy of border militarisation on refugees.

## Key characteristics of the humanitarian crisis:

- **80% of the people assisted suffered injuries of varying sizes and severities on 24 June.** Most of the injuries were caused by violence and beatings: fractured legs, arms and skulls were observed among the migrants.

***“They beat us even when we were lying on the ground. We had no strength, we were completely exhausted.”***

We assisted people who were waiting for operations at hospitals in the places to which they had been forced to relocate despite the severity of their condition.

We witnessed a bullet wound that had to be operated on to remove the projectile.

Another young man, after being forcefully relocated by bus, had to be admitted to hospital because he had fallen into a coma while being detained. He remained in a coma for three days and had difficulties moving and speaking when he awoke due to the blows he had received to his head.

The wounded needed operations and some of these operations required materials that are not provided for free by the health authorities. The fact that the police did not allow social organisations or family members to enter the hospitals in the days following the tragedy exacerbated the humanitarian emergency. For example, an operation that was delayed due to a lack of materials caused a person who had suffered fractures at the hands of the soldiers to have one of their feet amputated.

- **Physical and mental conditions associated with post-traumatic stress.** Panic attacks, nightmares, pain all over the body and fear were reported by most of the individuals assisted during the humanitarian missions.
- **Left with nothing.** After the violence, the refugees we met had lost everything. According to their witness statements, the soldiers had stolen the little that they had left: mobile phones, small amounts of money and even shoes to prevent them from walking. The terrible situation in which the migrants found themselves in the days following the slaughter was exacerbated by the difficulties experienced by social organisations and community leaders in providing humanitarian assistance.

- **Persecution of the Sudanese refugee community.** According to the statements gathered and observations on the ground, police controls in the days following 24 June were specifically aimed at identifying people of Sudanese origin. In subsequent weeks, the Sudanese refugee community was subjected to particular harsh repression. This stigmatisation has filtered into society more broadly and we were able to confirm the death of a Sudanese man during a fight with a Moroccan citizen.
- **Child migrants.** 30% of the victims/survivors of the slaughter were young people aged between 15 and 17 years old. 5% were children aged between 11 and 14.

## The narrative

### Constructing a legitimising narrative: a pornography of violence.

The authorities' discourse in relation to the slaughter emphasised externalisation and Morocco's role as the European Union's gendarme. The stances taken by the Spanish State and its Moroccan neighbour have been based on the same three discursive pillars: the fight against people smugglers, Algeria's responsibility for organising the attempted fence crossing, and Spanish and EU support for the military equipment used during the slaughter.

The scenario created by the two countries, including images showing the violence used, seeks to confirm the need for these types of interventions against migrants.

There has been a shift from a pornography of pain to a pornography of violence, with violence presented as collateral damage caused by necessary border control measures.

In this scenario, civilian victims of the border war are shown.

It is paradoxical that journalists from EU countries have been able to carry out their work relatively 'freely' in Morocco, even without official permission from the Moroccan authorities, while social organisations with licensed projects authorised to support migrants have faced serious difficulties in assisting the victims/survivors of the tragedy.

In the official narrative, the refugees caught up in the slaughter are nothing more than an anonymous mass of people. This represents an increasingly violent strategy of exposing migrants' 'otherness' and positioning them as deserving of violence and death.



We are left wondering whether the slaughter at the Nador-Melilla border will be a major step forward in normalising the violent military strategies implemented jointly by Moroccan and Spanish forces.

## **Accounts from victims/survivors**

For years, migrant communities have been telling their stories of the border in a narrative that prioritises human rights and acknowledges the humanity of people on the move. Community leaders and relatives of people who have died or gone missing at the border have created mutual support networks and developed strategies to resist the appalling violence meted out as part of a necropolitics.

In this case, members of the Sudanese community, who have fled from years of terrible, protracted conflict, are well aware of their rights as refugees. They have a strong collective awareness and organise alongside victims/survivors of other nationalities to bravely share the truth of the events that took place.

***“The auxiliary forces beat me with a truncheon and called me a dirty nigger. They trampled me with their boots and I felt my bones break. I saw the bodies of the people who died. There were about 30 of them. They called an ambulance to take us away and the bodies were put in the same ambulance. We arrived at the hospital and they left us all on the floor, both the dead and the injured. My friend spent four days in a coma before waking up. He was hit in the head with a bullet. The soldiers killed us, I saw it with my own eyes. I’m alive. God kept me alive, but I’ve lost five friends. I saw them die with my own eyes.”***

***“Hatred has been stirred up among the general population. People who were living in houses are being kicked out. At the border with Algeria, there’s a constant flow of deported people. They all have injuries on their bodies, backs and heads. It’s hard to bear the pain when you see them. It’s enough to make you cry seeing human beings treated like this. I tell them: “Be strong, my brother. You have to be strong.” But it’s difficult when you see the situation they’re in. Even drinking water brings the risk of disease. They want to hide the truth of how migrants are living, how their rights are destroyed, how they trample on asylum seekers and burn their passports and any other documents they have.”***

***“We experienced hell itself. Our hands are swollen because the auxiliary forces beat us with iron bars on our ankles so that we couldn’t walk. If they find out you’re from Sudan or Chad, they torture you when they detain you. In our group, there are 13-year-***

*old children. They came on foot at night, fleeing from the soldiers and the people. Because they've told the population not to let us take transport. There are soldiers and police officers in plain clothes and when they see you in the city they come straight over to ask for your papers. If you're from Sudan or Chad, even if you have papers they call the van and take you to the holding cell or deport you to the border."*

*"We received so many insults during our journey to Nador, when we went to the hospital or approached people. They [plain clothes police officers] asked what we were doing there and I told them that I'd come to look for my missing brother. Then they said that they had already been to the embassies and that they hadn't found anyone because nobody was missing. I showed them my papers and they told me to go back to my city because I'd have problems in Nador if they saw me here again."*

*"Inside, my friends had fallen to the ground. You can't see with the gas. You have to close your eyes because it blinds you, it's better that way, so you can't see. Then when you fall over, they search you from head to toe. They take everything you have, your money, your phone, and they keep it for themselves. One comes and steals from you, then another, and that's what they do while we're injured. I had 24 dirhams, one of them had already taken my phone. Another took the 20 dirham note but he left me the 4 dirham coins. But another one came and he took those from me too. Every one of them hurts you in one way or another, they have no mercy."*

*"They came two days in a row. They were beating people; they don't want people in the wood. They came on Wednesday and attacked us. Then again on Thursday, they beat us up. So on Friday, we decided to flee to the border. When we were there, they beat us badly. Many Sudanese people died, many Sudanese people were injured. They were beating people with truncheons and spraying gas. From 08:00 to 14:00, they were beating people. Lots of people died but we can't do anything, we're just travellers. Now we don't even know what we're going to eat or what we're going to do. They beat us even after we were sent for deportation. The Moroccans treat us really badly. I want everyone to know that a lot of people are dead and that we need help."*

*"I was in shock, they beat me badly. I can't remember much right now. They hit my brother on the head, they hit me on the head and on the abdomen. They were wearing very, very big shoes to hit me, to hit us. Many, many people were on the ground. It was really tough. Many, many people died. Many, many people. Even my brother who*

*saved me. I haven't seen him since. They gave me this really big [wound] before taking me to be transported to Oujda. The police beat us and told us we were dogs and we were stupid."*

*"Hello, how are you? I hope you're well. I'm sending you this message because of the situation, to tell you how we're coping. Here, refugees are facing many problems. They face many problems when they cross the border with Morocco. Some were injured when they entered the hole in the hill. Others were injured when they tried to cross the border fence. They were injured there and they're in a very bad state now... Nobody can understand what's happening. They're trying to hold on but they can't. We're very grateful for the help we've received and for what has been done for us. We'd be very grateful if you could help us a bit. I'm trying to help these people, who are my people. I represent them, I'm one of the leaders of their clan. They asked me to send you this message. We wish you all the best. May God be with you."*



**EVERYONE FOR  
THEMSELVES**

**LEAVE NO ONE  
UNBEHIND**

**DEFEND  
YOURSELF NOT  
TO DIE**

A REPORT BY:

**CA-MINANDO  
FRONTERAS**

WITH THE SUPPORT OF:



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