

Deadly migration crisis in the Canary Islands

written by Struggle - La Lucha
November 25, 2020



According to official records, more than 1,200 refugees have lost their lives trying to reach Europe in 2020. Many more deaths at sea are not reported. All of these deaths are a direct consequence of the criminal exclusion policy of the European Union, which rejects refugees at the continent's external borders.

The sealing off of the EU from refugees begins in Africa. The EU is exerting massive pressure on North African states, such as Mali, Niger and Algeria, to take action against refugees and migrant workers.

Because of this, migration has been redirected to increasingly more dangerous routes. One of these routes is along the West African coast toward the Canary Islands, which belong to Spain. On Oct. 23, one boat broke apart on this route after its engine exploded, and 140 refugees drowned.

The route to the Canary Islands is the most deadly in the world. According to IOM (International Organization for Migration) estimates, one in 16 refugees does not survive the crossing. The number of unreported cases is extremely high, since boats repeatedly miss the islands and drift out into the Atlantic Ocean.

Statement on migration crisis in Canary Islands

The World Federation of Trade Unions issued the following statement on the migration crisis in the Canary Islands:

“In recent weeks we have seen a steady increase in the arrival of cayucos to the Canary Islands with migrant workers and youth from the African continent. So far this year, 18,300 people have arrived, and in just a few months, 530 people have certainly died.

“The Canary Islands are a small country of barely 7,500 km² [2,900 square miles], situated 1,000 km [620 miles] from the European coast and 98 km [60 miles] from the African coast. The territory of the archipelago has a population density of 330

h/km [855 people per square mile], which is doubled if we take into account that 42 percent of the island territory is not viable for human settlement due to its natural conditions or being protected land. [Editor: Jacksonville, Florida, for example, has a population density of about 1,100 people per square mile] With a structural unemployment of 20 percent, today, with the pandemic crisis, we can say that 50 percent of its active population is unemployed, or in a situation of temporary unemployment. A country that is becoming a prison for thousands of people fleeing from hunger, misery, political or gender persecution, all of which are products of the plundering of its resources carried out thanks to the colonial past and the neocolonial present of the African continent.

“European immigration laws, the externalization of borders, FRONTEX [European Border and Coast Guard Agency], have moved safer migratory routes and territories with more possibilities of mobility, towards the Canary Islands, which is, as is being demonstrated, a high risk for the lives of migrants, and a permanent source of social conflict in the Canary Islands, fed by the deficient and repressive migration policies, which aim to place migrants coming from their continent as enemies of the Canary Islands people, in order to make the colonial policies, which are also exercised against this Spanish colony on the African coast, invisible to the real enemy.

“The reception conditions for migrants are not only inadequate, they are subhuman, in battered tents, forming camps on the quayside on asphalt or on land, or they are left to their fate in cities like Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, without resources or contacts. We cannot fail to mention the treatment of the so-called MENAS, unaccompanied minors, who are the responsibility of the host community. The Canary Islands are currently home to more than 2,000 minors and, despite the offer of other communities, Extremadura, Castilla and Leon and the Basque Country, to care for some of these young people, the Madrid government has not taken the necessary steps to make this possible. The 20 centers opened in a hurry by the Cabildos and the Autonomous Government are insufficient, poorly equipped, and

with no help from European or state funds, which makes it impossible for the supreme good of the guardianship and adequate care of the minor to remain.

“We point out that this new migratory crisis is taking place in two scenarios that are well defined by Moroccan policies: the unilateral extension of Morocco’s territorial waters, thereby stealing what must be the sovereign waters of the Canary Islands, behind which hides the immense business that the tellurium mountains found there can suppose, and the reactivation of the armed conflict between the Polisario Front and the kingdom of Morocco.

“Faced with such a humanitarian and social catastrophe, the People’s Coordination of the World Federation of Trade Unions express, first of all, our solidarity with the people of the Canary Islands and with the migrants who arrive at the risk of their lives on the coasts of the Archipelago. We are aware that the migration projects of these people do not have the Canary Islands as their final destination, but that it is seen as a bridge to reach the European continent. We therefore demand that they will be allowed and facilitated to move there, in compliance with Article 14 of the Charter of Human Rights, by providing a welcome that respects and dignifies their lives, and we also demand that the necessary mechanisms be activated for the solidarity-based transfer of unaccompanied minors, giving priority, in their final destination, to places where family members or people from their own communities live.

“We denounce Morocco’s continuous maneuvers to impose its expansionist will in the area without the government of the kingdom of Spain or the European Union taking any action to put a stop to them. We demand that both the lives of migrants and the Canary Islands cease to be the currency of any kind of policy between them.

“We support the freedom of movement of all people, as well as the right to live in their own land, so that both are possible. In Europe and the USA, the big multinationals have to take their bloody hands off the African continent. In this

respect we demand respect for the right to free self-determination of peoples, and in this case especially of the last two Spanish colonies on that continent, the Canary Islands and Western Sahara.

“Finally, as class oriented trade unions of stateless nations, we express our firm will to protect the lives of migrant workers, risking such a dangerous journey. Therefore we demand the repeal of the law on foreigners and the end of the repressive migration policies of the European Union, while announcing that we will give all the support that is in our hands to those who are transferred to our territories.”

