TO THE PRESS AND THE PUBLIC **19.08.2026**

IN CEUTA, MIGRANTS ARE PAYING THE PRICE FOR BORDER POLICIES!

At the end of July, a large migration movement occurred in Ceuta, a city on Spain's North African coast. In just 24 hours, approximately 72,000 people attempted to cross the border by swimming. During this time, many people lost their lives, were injured, and went missing. What happened in Ceuta once again revealed the serious consequences of border policies that disregard the right to life of migrants.

Following the Spanish Supreme Court's decision banning the swift return of those who crossed the border by swimming, misinformation spreading on social media fueled the increase in migration. However, the reasons for the migration movement are not limited to this. Poverty, youth unemployment, social insecurity, and the search for a better life in the region, combined with the lack of safe and legal migration routes, are pushing people towards dangerous paths.

The true number of dead and missing in Ceuta remains unclear. Spanish forensic authorities announced that as of August 7th, they had received 80 bodies, of which only four had been identified. However, the Human Rights Association reported that 141 people had lost their lives. **This situation highlights the urgent need for complete and accurate documentation of information regarding the dead, injured, missing, and those returned.**

Unaccompanied children are among those most severely affected by the events in Ceuta. A temporary reception center with a capacity of 90 children is currently housing approximately 1,100. Due to insufficient capacity, more than a thousand children are forced to live on the streets and in unsafe conditions. Cases of sexual assault reported to hospitals further highlight the vulnerability of these children. **Meeting the housing, healthcare, and protection needs of unaccompanied children is a requirement of both human and child rights.**

Ceuta should not be used as a tool for anti-immigrant politics.

The events in Ceuta quickly became a subject of anti-immigrant politics in Europe. US President Donald Trump described the events as an "invasion" and criticized the Spanish government for its border policies. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, on the other hand, defended the implementation of temporary border controls under the Schengen agreement with Spain.

Following the crisis, the Spanish government strengthened border controls and erected barricades stretching for kilometers into the sea. Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez stated that they expected more solidarity from European countries and that immigration must be stopped. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen considered the events a demonstration of the need to protect European borders.

To consider Ceuta solely from the perspective of border control means ignoring the conditions that drive people to risk their lives to reach Europe. The real issue is the consequences of policies that, instead of changing these conditions, further strengthen borders.

As borders are strengthened, safe routes are narrowing.

The events in Ceuta once again reveal the consequences of the European Union's migration and border policies. In Europe, where capital and goods circulate largely freely, the movement of African migrants is restricted by visa and border barriers.

The EU's increasing delegation of migration control to third countries is pushing people towards more dangerous routes instead of stopping migration. The Migration and Asylum Pact, which entered into force on June 12, 2026, foresees the acceleration of screening and registration processes at external borders, the assessment of some asylum applications at the border, and the faster return

of those whose applications are rejected. The pact also introduces responsibility-sharing and solidarity mechanisms among member states.
The EU defends these regulations with the aim of creating a more common and orderly asylum system. However, UN agencies and human rights organizations are drawing attention to the potential consequences of stricter border and return policies on people's right to life and asylum. The fact that many people had lost their lives in the Mediterranean in the first months of 2026 also increases these concerns.
Strengthening border controls and return processes does not eliminate the need for people to reach Europe. Unless safe and legal routes are expanded, these policies will continue to push people towards more dangerous routes instead of stopping migration.

The migration conditions in Europe
It is impossible to separate what happened in Ceuta from the broader migration conditions in Europe. By the end of 2025, the total refugee and asylum seeker population in the European Union and the United Kingdom is estimated at 9.59 million. In the same year, 770,000 asylum applications were made in Europe.
According to Frontex data released in July 2026, more than 49,000 irregular border crossings were detected at the European Union's external borders in the first six months of 2026. This number is 37 percent lower than in the same period of 2025. However, irregular crossings increased by 17 percent on the Western Mediterranean route.
The decrease in border crossings does not mean that the routes have become safer. On the contrary, it shows that people are forced to take dangerous routes. According to information provided by Frontex based on IOM data, more than 1,200 people lost their lives in the Mediterranean in the first four months of 2026.

Push backs and human rights violations must be investigated, and those responsible must be held accountable.
The deaths and deportations in Ceuta must be independently investigated in all aspects. The conditions under which people who crossed or attempted to cross the border were deported, how rescue operations were conducted, and the consequences of security forces' interventions on the right to life must be revealed.
Spanish authorities must share all information regarding deaths and disappearances with the public, and carry out the necessary work to identify the deceased and return them to their families. The cases of those returned must be documented, and their access to international protection and asylum must be guaranteed.
Justice must be served for those who died and disappeared in Ceuta, and those responsible for human rights violations must be held accountable.

Migrants are not alone.
As the Migrants and Refugees Solidarity Network, we will continue to defend the right to life of migrants and fight against the deaths caused by border policies. We will not allow the normalization of racism and xenophobia.
We will not forget those who lost their lives in Ceuta. We will continue our solidarity with migrants.
Migrants are not alone. Open the borders, protect the right to life.

MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES SOLIDARITY NETWORK