

Spain returns 1,500 migrants to Morocco after thousands stage massive invasion of its enclave in Africa



Migrants walk into shallow waters as they attempt to cross the border from Morocco to Spain's North African enclave of Ceuta on May 18, 2021. © AFP / Fadel Senna

Madrid, May 18 (RHC)-- Spain has returned some 1,500 migrants to Morocco a day after “around 6,000 people” got into its North-African enclave of Ceuta by sea, either swimming or with inflatables, all in a bid to eventually get to mainland Europe.

The en-masse expulsion of the new arrivals was confirmed by Spanish Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska on Tuesday, on broadcaster TVE. The official said that “around 6,000” people had entered Ceuta on Monday, and that some 1,500 “of these” had already been returned to Morocco.

The mass border breach appeared to be a coordinated attempt by the migrants to get into the EU, with the ‘invaders’ taking a sea route into Ceuta, a fortified city bordering Morocco. The breaches of the border began early on Monday at both the north and south of the enclave, and continued throughout the day.

The migrants used various inflatables to navigate through breakwaters marking the border, walked in on the low tide, with some even daring to swim from Morocco into Spain. At least one person died during the attempt, according to Spanish authorities.

Around 1,500 of the migrants who crossed the border are minors, according to Grande-Marlaska. The adult migrants are currently being kept at a local football stadium, while the minors have been housed at an industrial building.

Spain is now hastily reinforcing its border, with an additional 150 national police and 50 border-guard agents deployed to the enclave, Grande-Marlaska has said. The additional troops will back up the force of 1,100 agents already guarding the enclave’s border.

The Spanish North-African enclave of Ceuta, home to some 80,000 people, has been a hotspot for migrants seeking to reach Europe for years already. Alongside another enclave, Melilla, located some 300 kilometers east of Ceuta on the Moroccan shore, it has been subjected to mass breaches of its border on multiple occasions.

The migrants, seeking to get from Africa into Europe, have repeatedly undertaken coordinated attempts to break through, either scaling border fences en-masse or taking the sea route to get past border guards. A minor border breach was reported by Spanish media in Melilla on Tuesday, with at least 85 migrants getting in after they climbed over border fences.

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