

World Refugee Day

20.06.2022

Today, June 20th, is World Refugee Day, a date that the United Nations designates to honour refugees and displaced persons. It is sad that we have to select one day a year to empathize with the millions of people who are forced to abandon everything in the face of conflict, misery and persecution. Even so, from Solidary Wheels we take this day to reflect, once again, on a reality that we see in Melilla, in Europe and practically in the entire world.

The war in Ukraine and the displacement of millions of its citizens have highlighted Europe's capacity, when it chooses to, to respond and welcome those who flee. This is a solidarity that we applaud, but at the same time, we question why it is not extended to people who come from other regions. They told us that there were no resources, that we had no space. It is clear that the only thing missing was political will.

[Frontex](#), the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, is the agency with the largest budget in the EU, more than the [European Medicines Agency](#), even after two years of pandemic. More than the [Fundamental Rights Agency](#), despite the multitude of European countries with legal deficiencies. The Agency's funding and mandate have been steadily increasing since its founding. The fact that it was involved in extremely worrying cases of abuse was not enough to encourage the Union to rethink its system of border management. On the contrary, we have reinforced this cruel, racist and dehumanizing system.

It is important to look at things in perspective. We are used to talking about the "migration crisis" in Europe, but this is an inaccurate and deeply misleading term that legitimizes and justifies insufficient responses by European governments. In 2019, 120.000 people arrived in the EU through "irregular" routes. In the same year, an average of 90.137 passengers travelled daily through Dublin Airport. Yes, we are dealing with a refugee crisis, but the crisis is about the blatant abandonment of human life. It is about the intensification of border control and the securitisation of EU borders. It is not a crisis of numbers, lack of space or lack of financial resources. If Pakistan can host 1.5 million refugees with a GDP vastly inferior to that of the EU, we can do more. Perhaps the EU should take from the nearly €200 billion spent on defence and put it towards promoting the protection of human rights, fulfilling its obligations and preserving human life.

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Real measures are urgently needed to ensure that refugees not only survive but can have a dignified life and access to opportunities. We must reject the constant dehumanisation of those who are displaced, ensure that their lives are not reduced to numbers or to leverage for political negotiations. On World Refugee Day, like any other day, we would like to emphasise that the welcoming of those who seek refuge cannot depend on geopolitical interests or the colour of their skin.

World Day Against Child Labor

14.06.2022

Yesterday, June 12th, was the World Day Against Child Labor, an unfortunate reality in the city of Melilla. Below we analyze publications, news and daily events in the city that generate situations of child labor and exploitation.

In January of this year, CIDOB (Center for International Relations of Barcelona) published an analysis comparing the management of migration in different Spanish regions, including the Autonomous City of Melilla. It confirms something already felt by our volunteers on the ground, which is that the city does not have an integration model, does not have clear objectives or a coordinating structure and that no specific actions are being taken to reduce the inequality between migrants and nationals.

In addition, the regulatory framework hinders access to the most basic rights of children, such as administrative barriers blocking access to the census or long waits to access social services. This means that minors in transit and minors who were born in Melilla but whose situation has not been regularized find themselves in an administrative limbo. Without access to basic rights such as education, they often have no option but to work from a young age.

Many of the unschooled minors are under the care of the Autonomous City of Melilla in various reception centers in the city, including La Purísima.

This is a center for minors located on the outskirts of Melilla, 200 meters off the border fence. The building was a military fort until 2001, when it became a facility for minors.

The lack of decent conditions, of schooling and of integration efforts, as well as the treatment received, results in minors under guardianship deciding to go off to the streets to "make a living", even before reaching the legal age to be able to work (according to article 6 of the workers' statutes, in which "The admission to work of minors under sixteen years of age is prohibited."). Thus, they have no other path other than unregulated and precarious work, where neither the conditions nor the salary are decent. Many opt to leave the shelter for good and live on the street, where they remain invisible in the eyes of government administrations and associations.

"The center is no good. I make my own living, the street"

Testimony of a minor in "street situation", June 2nd, 2022, Melilla.

There are children who get relatively constant jobs, such as accompanying a merchant, selling their products or preparing and collecting stalls in the city's markets. Others must resign themselves to cleaning or parking cars, delivering groceries, etc. in exchange for a few euros, which they sometimes never receive.

Last week, different media outlets published a news article titled "[The Civil Guard dismantles in Melilla an organization that used minors under guardianship in the center of La Purisima for drug trafficking](#)".

This is yet another example of the deficiencies in the Spanish system for receiving unaccompanied minors.

From Solidary Wheels we demand the protection and integration of minors, the need to guarantee their rights and to offer support in their transition into adulthood. Policies and actions that promote the criminalization of these children must be eliminated through concrete norms that take into account that being a minor takes precedence over being an irregular migrant.

We denounce the institutional abandonment and the inability of the current social policies to respond to the needs of children. These practices endanger the physical and moral integrity of the minors subjected to this type of work. Mostly through coercion and manipulation (taking advantage of their misinformation or naivety), minors are made to participate in illegal and unsafe work. It is a clear example of how the capitalist system capitalizes on human poverty and exploits those in vulnerable situations.

Once again, we demand the right to be a child, for all of them, anywhere in the world!