

Spain's PSOE-Podemos government plans to deport almost 800 child migrants

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3 September 2021

Almost 800 child migrants are being expelled from Spain by the coalition government of the social-democratic Socialist Party (PSOE) and the “left populist” Podemos party. These mass deportations are the latest atrocity in the so-called “progressive” government’s crusade against migrants and refugees.

The children were among the thousands of migrants who arrived in Spain’s North African enclave of Ceuta, which borders Morocco, in May. Most swam around the six-metre fence that juts out into the sea, walked across at low tide, or used rubber dinghies to cross into Spain. Roughly 10,000 migrants are estimated to have crossed the border with Morocco in barely more than a day, of whom around 2,000 were minors.

In response, the PSOE-Podemos government sent in hundreds of soldiers in armoured vehicles, and mobilised over 200 riot police to reinforce the 1,000-strong police force stationed in Ceuta. Soldiers and police used batons to clear migrants from the beach and threw smoke bombs to stop others from crossing. At least one migrant drowned at sea.

The deportation of hundreds of children is a continuation of the violent assault on these migrants begun in May. Those who made it into the Spanish enclave, despite attacks by soldiers and militarised police, are now being summarily expelled without the chance to have their case heard, in flagrant violation of international law.

Podemos has half-heartedly postured as an opponent of the deportation order. The party’s Minister of Social Rights and Agenda 2030, Ione Belarra, pathetically declared, “any process of family regroupment must use a protocol that includes individualised interviews with the children as well as a detailed knowledge on the part of the Prosecutor’s Office.”

In reality, Podemos is complicit in the xenophobic, anti-migrant policies of the government of which it is a part. In

office it has implemented policies indistinguishable from those of the far-right, separating migrant children from their parents, building concentration camps on the Canary Islands and facilitating fascistic attacks on migrants stranded there. These policies led to the deaths of more than 2,000 migrants who attempted to cross to Spain in the first half of 2021, according to charity Caminando Fronteras.

Deportations of the minors began on August 13, with 15 children transported back to Morocco each day on buses. According to the Spanish Interior Ministry, the expulsions were being carried out in accordance with a 2007 agreement signed with Morocco to facilitate the rapid repatriation of unaccompanied children. Three days later, however, after 45 migrants had already been expelled, the government of Ceuta was forced to suspend the repatriations for 72 hours.

This was in response to numerous legal challenges, including by the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) Coordinadora de Barrios, Fundación Raíces and the Spanish Network for Immigration and Refugee Assistance. The children were being deported without having had access to a lawyer or the opportunity to have their cases heard individually, Patricia Fernandez Vicens, lawyer for Coordinadora de Barrios, stated.

Mass expulsions violate both domestic and international laws: children have the right to be heard during all legal and administrative processes that affect them, and the public prosecutor in Spain must issue an individual report before a minor can be deported.

Numerous NGOs denounced the PSOE-Podemos government’s decision as a breach of fundamental rights. UK-based charity Save the Children declared that “any collective repatriation of children and adolescents is illegal.” The Spanish government must carry out an “individual evaluation of every child,” the NGO said, “prepare a process of hearings and pleas for each young

person and collect information about the family of origin in Morocco.”

“Many of these children will be deported into a situation of risk to their safety,” declared Andrés Conde, managing director of Save the Children in Spain. The charity has interviewed around 350 of the child migrants who crossed into Ceuta in May, and many reported that they had suffered sexual violence, work exploitation, forced marriage and human trafficking in their country of origin.

Amnesty International, meanwhile, demanded that Spain’s Interior Ministry “halt these expulsions until every document has been inspected by the Juvenile Prosecution Office and guarantee that they have acted in the child’s best interest.”

It is the “obligation of the Autonomous City of Ceuta to protect the rights of minors that they find in their territory,” Amnesty International continued. “The Spanish authorities must in practice, and not just rhetorically, guarantee that the rights of the hundreds of unaccompanied minors in Ceuta are coming first. We have no evidence that this is the case.”

On 24 August, the judicial suspension of deportations was upheld as a “precautionary measure” by a further ruling. “Lifting this measure would be permitting repatriation,” the judge presiding over the case stated. “It would be absolutely ineffective to have delivered a verdict violating a fundamental right without having attained the intended protection for a minor in Morocco.”

A day later, PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez summoned Juan Jesús Vivas, president of the autonomous city of Ceuta, to Madrid to discuss plans to continue with expulsions despite these rulings.

Far from halting deportation orders, Sánchez and Vivas, a member of the right-wing Popular Party, doubled down on their plans. They reportedly agreed to prevent the transfer of any of the migrants currently held in Ceuta to mainland Spain and to continue processing deportations via the Aliens Law, rather than through the 2007 repatriation agreement with Morocco. The Aliens Law states that deportation cases must be individualised and carried out with the participation of the minor.

While the Aliens Law may slow the tempo of deportations, Sánchez has insisted that there will be no let-up in the government’s anti-migrant plans and that the children will be deported “in the shortest time possible.” In a government statement, Sánchez pledged to provide “triple support for a safe and ordered return of the minors ... with three axes: capacity, administration and

diplomacy.”

Sánchez “promised to activate all resources in the hands of the state to return the minors to Morocco,” Vivas stated in a press conference. “The only solution is the return to Morocco ...”

Falsely and cynically attempting to present the deportation orders as being for the well-being of the migrant children, the statement declared that Sánchez and Vivas “agreed on the necessity of prioritising a safe and orderly return of the minors to their country of origin, especially with the start of the school term, because their remaining in Ceuta could enormous harm their educational development and increase their uprooting from their families.”

The appalling and illegal treatment of the almost 800 migrant children in Ceuta reveals the deceitful nature of current attempts by the PSOE-Podemos government to posture as humanitarians in their response to the US debacle in Afghanistan.

At the end of August, Irene Montero, Podemos Minister for Equality and partner of former Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias, declared that the priority of the Spanish government “must be women and LGBTI people in Afghanistan now and in the next months.” The PSOE-Podemos government is “doing everything possible to assure that all those who need to can leave the country,” Montero added.

These nauseatingly false expressions of solidarity with Afghan refugees should be rejected with contempt. The PSOE-Podemos government’s mass deportation orders demonstrate that there is no constituency for a defence of democratic rights in the ruling class. The task of defending the rights of refugees and migrants to live and work wherever they want falls to the workers internationally, as an essential element of the defence of the social and democratic rights of the entire working class.



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