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EIGHT MONTHS OF MISINFORMATION IN THE CANARY ISLANDS: HOW HOAXES ON THE MIGRATION CRISIS HAVE AFFECTED COEXISTENCE

The streets are quiet around the twelve white tents and three yellow buildings that now make up the migrant reception centre in the neighbourhood of El Lasso in Gran Canaria. But not every afternoon in the last year has been like this. Since the decision in late 2020 to move newly arrived immigrants in Gran Canaria to this former school, demonstrations, hoaxes and conflicts have shaken the natural silence of this hillside on the island.

“Hello, does anyone know if it’s true that they’re going to place migrants at the León school?” reads one of the messages posted in August 2020 by a user of the Facebook group “You’re not from Lasso if you haven’t...” Two months later, in October 2020, another user in the same group shared the message: “Well, the León school building will soon be available to house migrants.” In December of that year, the doors of this former school, which was temporarily closed for classes in February 2018 for a reason unrelated to migration, were opened for the reception of migrants.

“The school has been stolen from us,” says Kelly García, spokesperson for the neighbourhood platform “El Lasso

se Mueve”, an association set up in December 2021. But she hastens to clarify: “The platform was not formed because of the immigration issue. We’re going to fight for the school to become a school again.” Kelly García, age 65, has lived in this neighbourhood full of endless stairs and steep streets since she was 19. She says that, with the opening of the facilities as a reception centre for migrants, the situation in the neighbourhood became very tense. “The uncertainty, the not knowing, the fear, we’re going to be invaded, lose the school. It was everything together: a Molotov cocktail.”



Migrant accommodation tents at the León school seen from a resident car park in El Lasso.

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The platform was not formed because of the immigration issue. We're going to fight for the school to become a school again

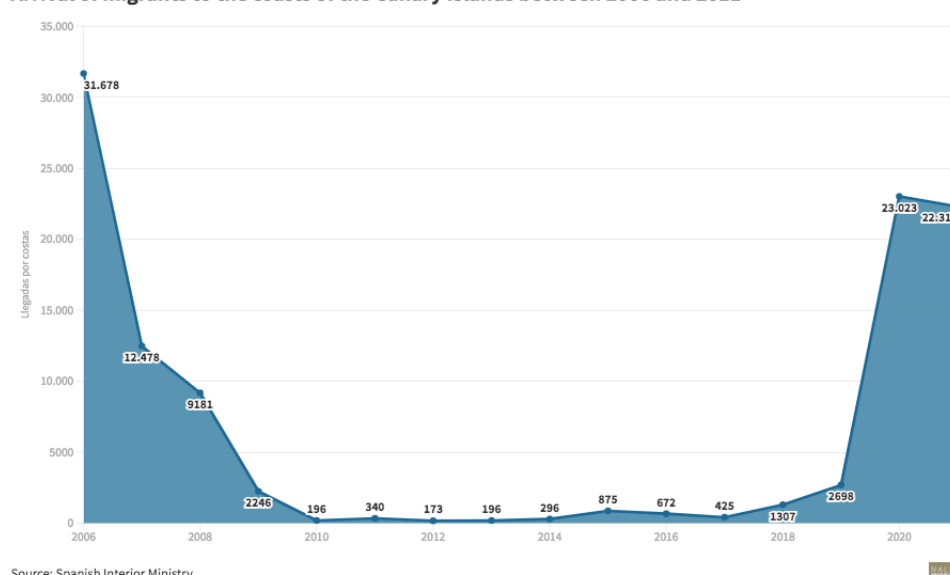
Kelly García, spokesperson for the neighbourhood platform

Classes were held at this former school until February 2018 when, according to [confirmed by the Regional Ministry of Education in a parliamentary reply to the Popular Group](#), the pupils were transferred to the Pintor Manolo Millares centre, just over two kilometres away, due to “a serious problem with its infrastructure.” According to the city council of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria [as confirmed to Maldita.es](#), the school was closed by the Educational Council at the time “due to the damage caused by rain to the roof of the building and the unsafe conditions from flooding that had affected the centre’s electrical

system.” They claim that it would repair and reopen the building for classes, but that in July 2019, “the Canary Islands government decided to close the centre.”

But in 2020 alone, when this building was repurposed to receive migrants, [23,271 people arrived](#) under irregular conditions in the Canary Islands by sea, a figure that had not been reached since 2006, when the island recorded [31,678 arrivals by this route](#), according to figures from the Ministry of the Interior. Faced with the increase in arrivals, the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration drew up the [Plan Canarias](#), which includes the use of this centre for the “emergency reception of immigrants” and as a “stable resource.”

Arrival of migrants to the coasts of the Canary Islands between 2006 and 2011



In January 2022, this centre was vacated and is “temporarily under construction” to “undertake structural works”, according to a statement by the Secretary of State for Migration to Maldita.es. Furthermore, the centre is intended to be used specifically for the reception of “vulnerable women, families and children.” The people who were housed there have been transferred to the Canarias 50 centre, located just over twelve km away in the neighbourhood of La Isleta.

some people were quite opposed to the centre being opened,” explains Ignacio Gutiérrez, coordinator of the humanitarian aid centres in Las Palmas for the organization Cruz Blanca, which manages the El Lasso reception centre. This neighbourhood is one of the poorest in the capital of Gran Canaria, with an average annual income per person of €7,199 in 2019, [according to the latest available data from the Spanish Statistical Office](#), which is just over half the average income of the Las Palmas de Gran Canaria municipality to which it belongs.



The León school seen from one of the high neighbourhood streets.

“When the resource was opened, being in a more marginal area of the island, not the whole population, but

“They have put them in the most vulnerable place,” complains Kelly García, who explains that the situation of many of the neighbours is very precarious, who often depend on food banks or help from other neighbours to make ends meet. According to a study carried out in 2013 by the department of psychology and sociology of the University of Las Palmas, a survey conducted in different neighbourhoods of Las Palmas indicated that district 1 of this city, in which El Lasso is located, had “a population located in the lower or lower-middle stratum with an education level that indicates no or only primary education.”



All kinds of hoaxes, quite different and rather far-fetched: from a rape committed by a migrant who was in the school, to robberies, thefts, threats, assaults

Ignacio Gutiérrez, from Cruz Blanca

The [Ombudsman] mentions the location of migrant centres in economically depressed areas in the study "[Migration to the Canary Islands](#)." This report notes that "the concentration of large centres of migrants in neighbourhoods [particularly hard hit by the severe economic crisis](#) caused by the pandemic the Canary Islands should be avoided."

Ignacio Gutiérrez, from Cruz Blanca, recalls that when the doors of this former school were opened to care for and house immigrants, altercations broke out. He says, "There were some demonstrations at the gates of the León school, there were some threats, some aggressive behaviours that were reported at the time." He explains that when the centre first opened, hoaxes started to spread across social media. "All kinds of hoaxes, quite different

and rather far-fetched: from a rape committed by a migrant who was in the school, to robberies, thefts, threats, assaults," says Gutiérrez, who says that such information was false that there was no sexual assault committed by a person staying at the centre.

Kelly García also reports that since the centre opened for migrants, they have been linked to sexual assaults. "It was like a war at the beginning. One mother said, 'I don't send my daughter outside because she will be raped.'" In the first quarter of 2021, when these messages were shared, crimes against personal freedom and sexual integrity in the province of Las Palmas [fell by 13.8% compared to the same period in 2020](#), according to data from the Ministry of the Interior.

In the first weeks after the centre opened to provide migrant housing,

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It was like a war at the beginning. One mother said, ‘I don’t send my daughter outside because she will be raped.’

*Kelly García, spokesperson
for the neighbourhood
platform*

the Cruz Blanca Foundation issued [a press release](#) stating that they had identified “an unstoppable stream of threats and misinformation through Facebook and WhatsApp groups” and an “increase in hate speech on the island of Gran Canaria against migrants, mainly of Moroccan origin.” [This press release](#), published on January 27, 2021, denounced the assault of seven of the centre’s residents within five days occurring near the centre. Three days later, on January 30, a demonstration was organized in front of the centre with slogans such as “This is a safe area, an area with dignity, and they are taking it away from us.” Less

than a week later, migrants housed in the centre announced a hunger strike to denounce the “harassment” and “racism” they were subjected to in the streets of the neighbourhood and to ask to be allowed to continue their migratory journey to Europe, according to media outlets such as [Agencia EFE](#).

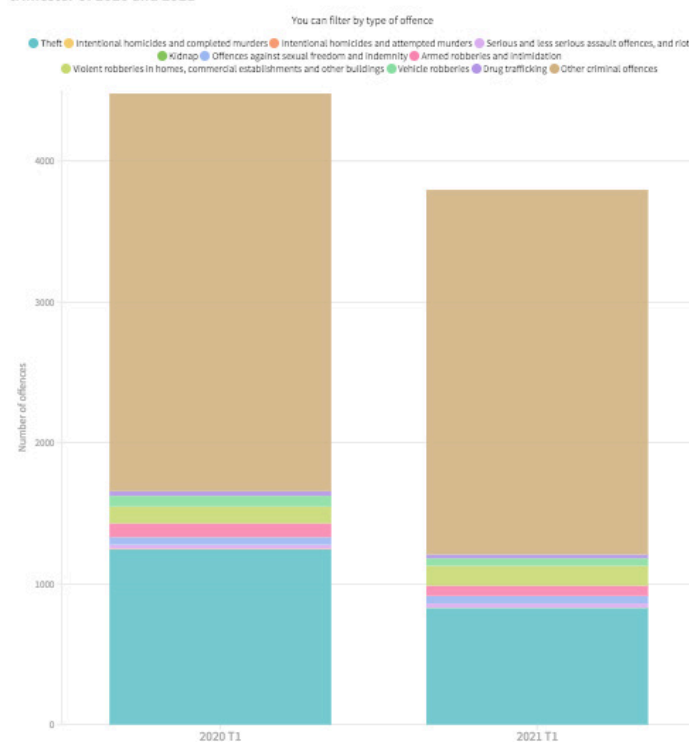
Around two months later, Vox MP [Javier Ortega Smith](#) shared a video of his visit to El Lasso claiming that this former school had been closed to fill it with “illegal immigration.” However, this was almost three years before its use as accommodation for migrants.

La Isleta: the neighbourhood that, despite the hoaxes, organized to fight xenophobia

On January 30, 2021, the same day as the demonstration in El Lasso, several groups of people gathered in the neighbourhood of La Isleta and in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. Videos of this demonstration spread across social media like Twitter [with messages such as](#) “citizens’ rally in Plaza de la Isleta, Las Palmas, Gran Canaria, Canarian residents shout ‘freedom’ in the streets after suffering aggressions, fights, assaults in their neighbourhood! #YoSoyCanarias’ [I am the Canary Islands].

“The neighbourhood of La Isleta has always been a neighbourhood of migrants,” says Felix Alonso, president of the Foro por La Isleta, a neighbourhood organization that works to solve local problems. He has also been a migrant, but within Spanish territory. He left Gran Canaria to work in Madrid as a paediatrician at La Paz Hospital. He says that this district of Las Palmas

Distribution of offences by type in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Gran Canaria island) in the first trimester of 2020 and 2021



Source: Spanish Interior Ministry - Trimestral criminality balance. Data from the first trimester of 2020 and 2021.

has had constant migration since the construction of the La Luz port at the end of the 19th century. The article [“A study of historical geography: the genesis of the neighbourhood of La Isleta”](#) also

tells how, at the end of the 19th century, the majority of the neighbourhood's population was migrants.

According to Alonso, although the increase in the arrival of immigrants in 2020 did not initially provoke rejection among the La Isleta residents, after the migrants were transferred to the reception centre set up in the former "Canarias No. 50" Infantry Regiment, now known as Canarias 50, and some of these migrants were left to live in the street, conflicts arose with part of the neighbourhood. "Xenophobic groups are starting to emerge." [This shift happened after the transfer](#) of the former Ministry of Defence regiment to the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration in mid-November 2020 for the use of the building as a reception centre for migrants, which since December 2020 has been managed by the Red Cross.

"We asked for this space," explains Alonso, who says that before this facility was transferred to the Ministry of Migration, they had initiated procedures to be able to use it for social purposes for the neighbourhood. According to the ministry's [Plan Canarias](#), this centre

will be transferred to Las Palmas City Council once the migrant emergency has passed. "With the Red Cross, whoever misbehaved was thrown out on the street. It created a situation where there were a lot of kids outside," says Alonso.

Mamadou Zhar, a 25-year-old Senegalese garment worker, is one of the migrants who lived on the city streets. After arriving on the shores of this island in 2020 and passing through one of the hotels set up for the temporary reception of migrants in the south, he spent four months sleeping rough. He got out of this situation thanks to a neighbour in La Isleta, who gave him shelter and support. He now lives with a friend.

However, although his life has improved in recent months, he has faced racist attacks. "One day I went took a bus and a man got on too. I sat in the back and he sat in front of me and started telling me you're a f***** n*****, what are you doing here," he says. He got up and sat next to the driver, but the man continued insulting him. "The driver told him that if he didn't shut up he was going to call the police." When

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One day I went took a bus and a man got on too. I sat in the back and he sat in front of me and started telling me you're a f*** n*****, what are you doing here**

Mamadou Zhar, a 25-year-old Senegalese garment worker

Zhar reached his stop he got off and his assailant followed him. “He wanted to hit me but I was doing this with my hands,” he says as he raised his palms in front of him. “It made me feel very bad. I don’t want problems, I want to work, to help my mother, to help my son.”

He is not the only one who has had such an experience. Ousmane Gning, Zhar’s childhood friend and his companion on the journey to the Canary Islands, also tells how he has been verbally abused in the last year in the Canary Islands. He boarded a boat because he had no work as a fisherman and reached the coast of Gran Canaria after 11 days. “Whenever three or four guys are together we can have problems,” he says and explains: “You can hear people saying something bad, like f***** n*****.” But he says he is not looking for trouble and does not respond to these insults, because he only wants to work to be

able to pay for medicine for his mother, who is in Senegal and who has malaria.

But Zhar and Gning have not only known this side of Gran Canarian society; both were helped by neighbours in the city of



Ousmane Gning on the rooftop of the building of the Atlas Association, which hosts migrants and carries out cultural activities to integrate the migrant population and locals in the neighbourhood.



There are times when they ask if they receive aid payments, it's a typical hoax

Miriam Suarez volunteer Somos Red

Las Palmas when they found themselves on the street. "There is a platform that has had quite an important impact here on the island, Somos Red, which since it was created has been quite an important pillar for the migrant population, especially for people who stayed and who were unable to receive assistance or left the centre voluntarily," says Ignacio Gutiérrez, from Cruz Blanca and manager of the reception of migrants at the León school, among others. "They helped them a lot in terms of food and accommodation. The network that has been created has been incredible."

Miriam Suarez is one of the volunteers who joined Somos Red in February 2021 to create this support network for migrants during the migration crisis that Gran Canaria has experienced over the last year. She explains that this platform was created to assist migrants because the decision was made to stop using hotels to house them and many of them would be left on the streets. It

was precisely those first months that she remembers as the hardest, from when the platform was created until April and May due to the decision not to allow migrants who were in the Canary Islands to travel to the mainland. "The Canary Islands became prison islands, they were blocked. Many had families on the mainland and were living here on the street."

As she recalls, while there were many people who were concerned about the situation of migrants during this time, there were also others who took a stand against migrants being on the beach or on the streets. "We think it's very important to explain to the other residents why these kids are coming," she says. This lack of prior knowledge is, according to Suárez, the reason why hoaxes are spread about migrants. "There are times when they ask if they receive aid payments, it's a typical hoax."

One image that spread on social media claimed that migrants arriving





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BULO

Ria
Ria Payment Institution, EP S.A.
Autorización Banco de España: N° 6842
Edificio Amara
Calle Cantabria 2, Planta 2 Puerta A-1
Alcobendas, Madrid 28108, España

COPIA DEL CLIENTE

Av Tomas I

INFORMACIÓN DEL BENEFICIARIO

NOMBRE	APELLIDO PATERNO		APELLIDO MATERNO	
DOMICILIO				
HOLIDAY CLUB				
CIUDAD	ESTADO	CÓDIGO POSTAL		PAÍS
PUERTO RICO	GC	35130		ES
NÚMERO DOCUMENTO	TIPO DOCUMENTO	RAZÓN DE TRANSFERENCIA		
02424621	PASAPORTE (NO VÁLIDO)	AYUDA FAMILIAR		

INFORMACIÓN DE PAGO

Método de pago	RECOPGAR
Total Pagado	EUR 1.105,00
Cargo	EUR 45,00
Tipo de Cambio	EUR / EUR 1.0000
Cantidad Recibida	EUR 1.105,00

RIA abonará el importe de la operación con fecha valor máxima del día hábil siguiente a aquí en que beneficiario de la orden de pago ordenada por el Cliente se efectuará en efectivo o abono en cuenta a carácter previo a la emisión de la orden de pago y se recogerá en el documento de liquidación. El Cliente, (entendiendo por este la persona que figure en el presente formulario), con la firma del presente formulario y durante la ejecución del servicio prestado por RIA, sean objeto de tratamiento por RIA; y tales empresas estar situadas dentro del Espacio Económico Europeo o en otros países que puedan no de envío de dinero y cumplir RIA con sus obligaciones legales, tal y como se detalla en la información en caso de no suministrarse el servicio no podrá prestarse. El Cliente podrá ejercitar en cualquier momento notificándolo a RIA PAYMENT INSTITUTION, E.P., S.A.U con domicilio en Calle Cantabria No. 2 - Piso 1 establecidos en la información adicional. Puede consultar la información adicional y detallada sobre PIA Pago por Cajero Automático (ATM). El cliente acepta que el medio de comunicación de las claves neces proporcionar un teléfono móvil con capacidad para recibir mensajes de texto (SMS). El envío del menú reclamación o consulta con respecto a la orden comunique inmediatamente con el Servicio de Atención al cliente que si la transacción tiene más de 30 días de antigüedad es posible que no podamos ayudarle. Número de ayuda de asistencia al beneficiario: en caso de la pérdida o robo del dinero, así como del de

irregularly in the Canary Islands were being paid was of an invoice from a company called Ria Money Transfer, showing a transfer for the amount of €1,105. This image circulated on social media claiming that it was a “family allowance” that “is given to Moroccans and Senegalese who illegally enter the Canary Islands” by the administrations. However, [it was a hoax](#).

Screenshot of the hoax claiming that migrants arriving in the Canary Islands receive a monthly allowance of €1,105.

Ria Money Transfer told Maldita.es that “This is misinformation,” noting that the company “has no agreement with the Spanish government, nor the Canary Islands, nor with the Spanish Red Cross to help illegal immigrants with these amounts shown, nor any other amount.”

Furthermore, both the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration and the Canary Islands Department of Social Rights assured Maldita.es that they do not give any kind of economic aid to irregular migrants, while the Holiday Club hotel, which appeared as the residence of the person who allegedly received the money on the invoice, stated that it is completely false that irregular migrants staying at the hotel receive any kind of money from institutions. Ousmane Gning, who was in the Canarias 50 centre run by the Red Cross, says he did not receive any money from the organization.

Arguineguín: the city council that provided buses to transfer migrants arriving irregularly out of the municipality

Gning and Zhar arrived in the Canary Islands while the camp was still active on the dock in the Arguineguín port. Like them, thousands of people passed through these white tents on this concrete dock in the municipality of Mogán, in the south of the Canary Island, between August and November 2020. During these months of the migration crisis, this was the first stop for people arriving on the Canary coasts – tents that “eventually housed thousands of people in precarious and overcrowded conditions”, in the words of the [Ombudsman](#).

The report also states that in this camp the people “were in a situation of total overcrowding, which prevented compliance with the minimum standards of social distancing required by the health crisis in which we find ourselves” and noted that “nor were the minimum conditions of hygiene met, in a place where some 2,000 people were



Arguineguín dock where the tents were located. The photo shows two sea rescue boats, with the Red Cross organization's stands in the background.

crowded on the day of the visit, with no possibility of physical access by the cleaning services.”

In November 2020, the Minister of the Interior, [Fernando Grande-Marlaska](#) [stated](#) that “at the Arguineguín dock [migrants] never stay for more than 72 hours because they are transferred into the reception system.” However, the [Ombudsman reported](#) that “the

period of 72 hours, which is the legal time limit for holding these persons in police custody, is again far exceeded.” Various stakeholders involved in helping migrants arriving at the Arguineguín port all agree that “there are people who spend more than 72 hours at the dock.”

Arguineguín is still the port of arrival for many migrants travelling to Europe, although there are now no more tents. At the docks are the sea rescue boats, along with the remains of an inflatable boat that still contains trainers and worn-out clothes. Also a half-submerged kayak is moored to a bollard on the dock, both boats from rescues in previous days. This centre was dismantled on November 29. A few days earlier, on November 17, some of the people in the tents began to leave directly to the streets, without being transferred to tourist accommodation, according to [a press release](#) from Mogán city hall.



A boat that arrived in late November with the remains of the migrants' belongings.



Abandoned belongings in an inflatable boat in the port of Arguineguín.



Half-submerged kayak moored to a bollard on the dock in the Arguineguín port.

At that time, the city hall had three buses that picked up some of these people and took them to the doors of the Government Delegation in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, as part of a political strategy of the mayor of the municipality of Mogán, Onalia Bueno. “The government delegation backed down and there were no more releases,” says Bueno. “They were relocated back to the hotels,” she says.

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Migrants have to leave the tourist area and go to other areas in a dignified manner

Onalia Bueno, Mayor of Mogán

Between September 2020 and March 2021, many of the migrants who arrived on the Canary Islands’ shores, after passing through Arguineguín, were referred to tourist accommodation. This measure, as indicated by the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration to Maldita.es, was of a “temporary and exceptional” nature. [The Mogán city hall](#) demanded that these accommodations cease to be used to receive migrants and announced that hotels and tourist flats that continued to receive migrants after December 31, 2020, would be fined. “We could not allow them to continue to be accommodated in hotels when the Spanish government had not done its logistical work with the camps,” says Bueno. “Migrants have to leave the tourist area and go to other areas in a dignified manner.”

With regard to the situation in Mogán with the arrival of thousands of immigrants and their temporary accommodation in hotels in the city, Onalia Bueno stated on December 16,

2020, in an interview on [Cadena Ser](#) that “we have had many incidents and many complaints in the municipality of Mogán since November until now” and that “incidents such as petty theft or minor assaults in the municipality of



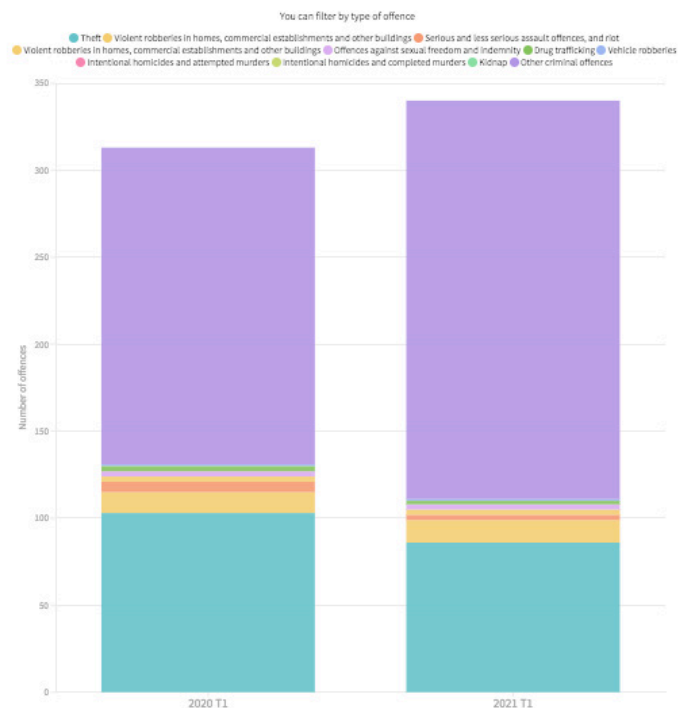
Onalia Bueno, Mayor of Mogán.

Mogán have increased by more than 60%.” In a reply to Agencia EFE on December 17, 2020, the government delegate, Anselmo Pestana, stated that crime in Mogán had fallen by 30% so far this year.

“He twisted those words,” Bueno told Maldita.es in relation to the government delegate’s statements, pointing out that “what had increased was the level of serious incidents in the municipality.” “In January and February there was an increase in crime and serious incidents,”

she says. However, according to [Ministry of Interior data](#) in the first quarter of 2021 there was a 50% reduction in serious and less serious offences of assault and battery compared to the same period in 2020. In that time, there was an increase in total crime in the municipality of 8.6%, an increase that was linked to an 8.3% increase in burglaries in homes, establishments and other premises and a 25% increase in other criminal offences, which do not include crimes against sexual identity or crimes of assault and battery, robbery or theft.

Distribution of offences by type in Mogán (Gran Canaria island) in the first trimester of 2020 and 2021



Source: Spanish Interior Ministry - Trimestral criminality balance. Data from the first trimester of 2020 and 2021.

During the time that the Arguineguín camp was active, Jessica Caricce remembers crying several times out of helplessness at the tense situation in the municipality. She and her then-partner run a vegan cafeteria that they set up for migrants arriving at the dock. She remembers Yassin, a young Moroccan who was helped to return to his country, with particular emotion. “He realized that this was not the way it was portrayed. She says that this young man, with whom she is still in contact through video calls, was sleeping on the beach and they managed to find him a foster home.

In those months when Mogán became a key point in the migration crisis, one of the worst moments that Caricce remembers is an anti-immigration

demonstration in December 2020. “They carried machetes,” she says. She says that several videos shared on social media called on the inhabitants of the Canary Island to protest with weapons against migrants in Arguineguín. “Not to my knowledge, no,” says Onalia Bueno, mayor of Mogán, on the call for this demonstration, adding, “I didn’t see it, it never happened, not with sticks or boards or anything else.” Caricce claims that on that day the protesters arrived and businesses had to close.

“There was one incident with a Maghreb social worker,” Bueno points out. The incident referred to is [a video posted in December 2020](#) of an alleged “beating” by a “group of minors” of a young man in Mogán. In it, a woman claimed that her brother had been attacked by some 20 people, “a group of Moroccans,



Jessica Caricce behind the counter of her café Anam, located near the Arguineguín port.



There are no problems of coexistence here

Onalia Bueno, Mayor of Mogán

Arabs, those people who come in the boats.” As a result of this incident, on December 14, two people testified in court regarding these events, both of whom were Spanish nationals. One of those involved, arrested by the Guardia Civil, is the social educator who accompanied the young people, and they say that he is a Spanish national of Maghreb origin. Additionally, versions of the attack also differed as to how the events began. One witness said that the argument started because the minors were bothering some girls and the victim tried to stop the situation, while the other said that it was the victim who started to scold the young migrants.

These are not the only videos that have been shared on social media linking migrants to violence. Caricce recalls that people she knows received videos of people encouraging locals to protect the island from soldier migrants and content claiming that the people

arriving in the Canary Islands were soldiers, “that they had a tattoo that marked their number, that they were armed. They knew how to fight, they knew how to shoot.” One of these videos is the one that circulated in November and December 2020 with the messages “Impressive training of the new arrivals in the Canary Islands” or “Morocco’s fifth column, they don’t look like skeletons, but like mercenaries.” The images showed black men training on a seaside promenade and claimed to be Moroccan military personnel who had arrived in the Canary Islands, [but it was a hoax](#): it was a training session for Senegalese MMA fighter Pape Mbaye who was in Spain training to compete in his discipline.

“There are no problems of coexistence here,” says Onalia Bueno, who explains that “today the boat arrives, a bus comes and takes them to the camps.” According to Miriam Suárez of Somos Red, since February 2021, many of the migrants who arrived on the coasts and those who were evicted from hotels have been relocated to the Las Raíces reception centre in Tenerife. “I don’t want to go to Las Raíces,” says Mamadou Zhar.

Las Raíces: the macro-housing centre for migrants and a change in municipal strategy

This Accem-managed centre is located on the outskirts of the Tenerife municipality of San Cristóbal de La Laguna, just behind the airport. As in the case of the León school and Arguineguín previously, its facilities are rows of white tents.

The migrants in Las Raíces are far from the urban centre, surrounded by dirt roads and living in these tents where the minimum temperatures can be as low as 8°C, with the humidity of the nearby forest. Adilt Ouarad lived in one of these tents. He is Moroccan and travelled to the Canary Islands by boat in search of a better life. "In Morocco there was no work, it's poor and that's why we came to Spain," he explains with the help of a simultaneous translation app. There he was a blacksmith, although when work was not available he went to the countryside to earn money. But when

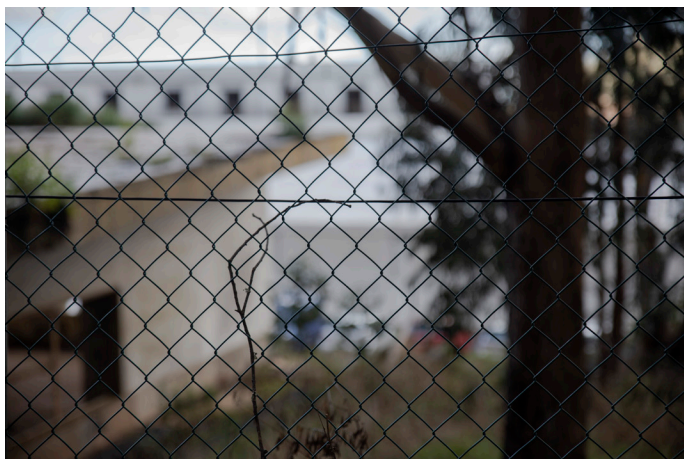
he arrived in the Canary Islands, hoping to find a better work situation, he found that he was not allowed to work. Since December 13, Ouarad has been in Madrid, where he has relatives.

This reception centre was formerly [a Ministry of Defence barracks](#) which, as in the case of Canarias50, was transferred to the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration in November 2020 for the reception of migrants who had recently arrived on the islands. "We were the last administration to find out, the decisions had already been taken," says Luis Yeraí Gutiérrez, mayor of San Cristóbal de La Laguna, on the refurbishment of state-run migrant reception centres in the municipality. According to him, the City Council sought "legal channels" to first look for an alternative to the model that the central government was trying to implement. "The model of macro-

centres that they wanted to implement was contrary to the political stance that the City Council wanted.” That model, he says, was accommodation in smaller centres with better housing conditions.

Maldita.es contacted Accem to find out its position on the conditions of the people housed in this centre, its possible closure and its relationship with the city hall and the residents of the municipality, but at the time of writing, there has been no response.

One of the legal channels used by the City Council of San Cristóbal de La Laguna is the use of the Urban Planning Department to try to stop the works in the centres of Las Canteras and Las Raíces, the two macro reception centres for migrants in the Tenerife municipality. [The Regional Council Management](#) claimed that the relevant municipal licence had not been obtained and pointed out that the mayor of La Laguna had offered the Ministry of Defence several alternative locations.



Fence separating the Las Raíces camp, where hundreds of migrants stay, from the street.



Tents where migrants sleep in the Las Raíces macro-camp on the outskirts of the Tenerife municipality of San Cristóbal de La Laguna.

Gutiérrez explains that the council's approach to this situation was to "consider the newly arrived immigrants in the municipality as just another neighbour." In early February 2021, the [City Council sent](#) a letter to the residents of the former Las Raíces barracks announcing that it would be opened as a reception centre for immigrants and encouraging residents to consult the job profiles of the people housed in order to offer them work.

"La Laguna has always been a welcoming municipality, which has shown its solidarity and commitment in difficult situations and now it will be no less. We Canarian men and women know very well what it means to emigrate: our history is full of episodes of emigration to America, and rare is the family that does not include among its members someone who has emigrated. It is now our turn to be recipients of people seeking a better future who have risked their lives to come to our country. We have set ourselves this challenge and would welcome your involvement," the mayor said in the letter.

However, the presence of migrants in the municipality also led to the spread of hoaxes. Shortly after the opening of

the Las Raíces centre, [on March 3, 2021](#) the local police identified an individual who had spread a hoax about a group of migrants allegedly attacking his mother. "He admitted it was all a hoax," says Gutiérrez. The municipality decided to file charges against the individual and the case is currently in court.

But this was not the only hoax. As in other Canarian municipalities, in San Cristóbal de La Laguna, according to Gutiérrez, the city council also identified some that claimed that immigrants were being paid. "They go around with bags full of clothes and food, these people are being paid a salary." Ouarad, who was one of the migrants who walked back to the camp with bags full of water and food, denies that they were given money by Accem, which manages the Las Raíces camp where he was stayed, and affirms that the organization gave them "only food." The contents of these bags, he explains, were bought with money sent to him by his family.



Adilt (right) and Hassan (left), migrants who have been staying in the Las Raíces camp, on an esplanade outside the camp.

[Four months after the opening of this macro-centre](#), the City Council, together with the General Foundation of the University of La Laguna, created a municipal anti-rumour network “to prevent racism, xenophobia and discrimination.”

“Things are different in Gran Canaria than in La Laguna because of the political situation,” says David Meliá, a lawyer specializing in migration issues. “In Mogán there is direct opposition to migration.” However, according to Meliá, beyond the migration approach of both municipalities, “the systems in place (macro-centres) leave much to



The solution is to support integration, which lowers tension levels

David Meliá, a lawyer specializing in migration issues

be desired.” “The solution is to support integration, which lowers tension levels,” he says.

On November 15, 2021, the mayor of San Cristóbal de La Laguna said [in an interview on COPE](#) that the Secretary of State had confirmed to him that “Las Raíces will be closed” and that “in March [the centre] will no longer be available for this purpose.” However, the same had been stated on previous occasions. Regarding the closure of this centre, the Secretary of State for Migration told Maldita.es that at the end of January they were “studying all the possibilities” and that “no decision has been taken regarding the future of these reception centres.”

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