

Tourism and irregular migrations in Northwest Africa: an interlinked mobility in COVID-19 pandemic times



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The interlinked mobility of tourism and irregular migrations during the pandemic in the Canary Islands

Hypothesis:

- The right to assisted immobility of the general people leads to the forced mobility of those who cannot afford to be immobile
- Migration and tourism are intertwined and interact each other as demonstrated by the business strategies lodging irregular immigrants in tourist establishments in the Canary Islands as a resilient response of tourism entrepreneurs to immobility

Objectives:

- Characterizing the irregular migration by sea during the pandemic
- Analysing the reception strategies implemented

Sources and methodology:

- Systematically collection and classification of news

Area	Media consulted (01-07-2020 / 31-03-2021)	Total days with news on irregular migration	Amount of news on	
			Accommodation	Social response
Local	La Provincia	397	66	118
	Canarias 7	325	54	104
	Canarias Ahora	196	38	54
National	El País	83	14	32
	El Confidencial	27	6	14



Human mobility and the pandemic



- Mobility is a constitutive element of the social and economic transformations of the current world, since it includes not only conventional migration processes, but also those that derive from the internationalization of consumption and new patterns of leisure and tourism.
- During the pandemic all kinds of mobility diminished and, especially, those linked to international.
- The reaction of the states to the spread of the epidemic included in almost all countries, until the last months of 2021, a closure of their external borders, which made international migration very difficult.
- At the same time, the economic crisis caused by the confinement has left tens of thousands of migrants around the world unemployed and in precarious situations.
- The effects of the COVID-19 have led to a revision of the mobility paradigm in light of the immobility.
- Besides, there has been an increase in the smuggling of migrants across the borders of America and Europe. Despite the blockade and the strict restrictions on mobility, the smuggling of migrants continues, as can be confirmed in the case of the Canary Islands.

Tourism and the pandemic. An overview

During the pandemic there was a big drop in tourism flows.

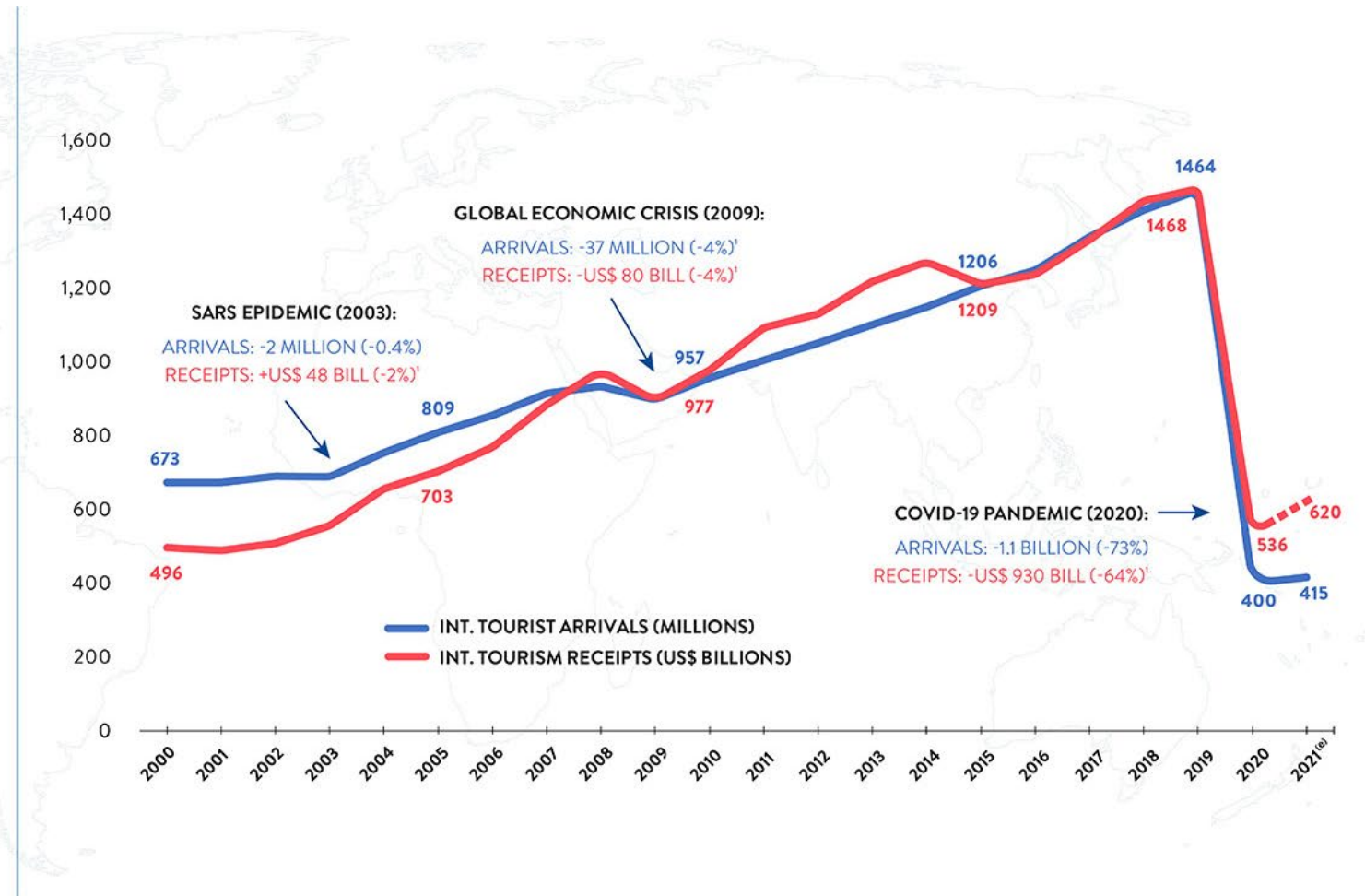
INTERNATIONAL TOURIST ARRIVALS AND TOURISM RECEIPTS 2000-2021

(e) Figures for 2021 are preliminary estimates

¹ Real percentage change (local currencies, constant prices)



SOURCE: UNWTO
(DATA AS OF JANUARY 2022)



Tourism and the pandemic. An overview

The fall in the number of tourists because of the border closure hit production hard in many countries whose economies depended on tourism, having a high impact in some regions in developing countries.



Africa (tourism arrivals 2020)

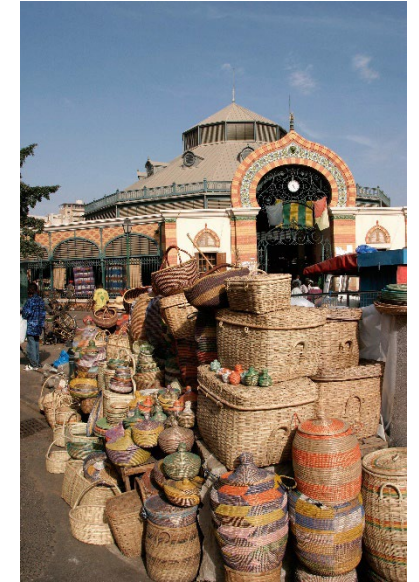
MonthName	Arrivals Monthly YoY
January	1,3 %
February	1,2 %
March	-39,8 %
April	-91,2 %
May	-89,7 %
June	-90,6 %
July	-87,5 %
August	-86,4 %
September	-84,9 %
October	-80,0 %
November	-78,6 %
December	-73,3 %

According to National Accounts: in Morocco, in 2019, the tourism direct GDP represented 7.1% of the total GDP
In Mozambique, in 2019, 4.7% and 2.4% in 2020. In Rwanda, in 2019, 3.2% and 0.9% in 2020 (NWTO)

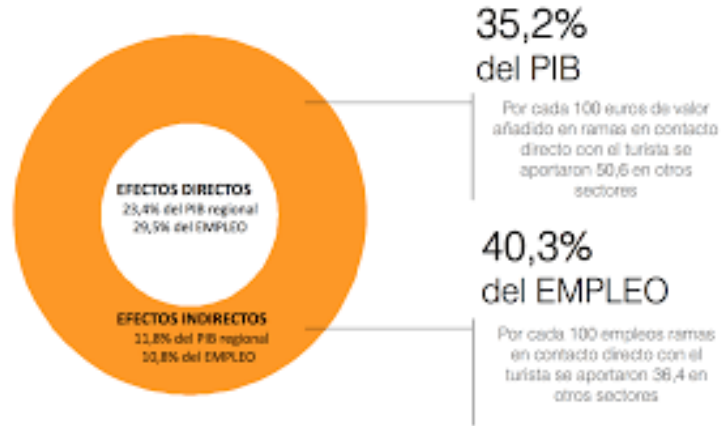
Tourism and the pandemic. The cases of Senegal and Morocco

Two case studies:

- In Senegal, “surrounding the building of the Kermel market, located in one of the hearts of Dakar, is a maze of empty shops selling souvenirs and waiting for international visitors for a long time. Inside the market, with fish, meat, fruit and vegetable stalls, the climate of frustration is similar. ‘Many shops have closed’, says a young man as he offers us prawns, or sardines, or squid. ‘Many of our clients were restaurants and hotels that with the coronavirus had to close because there is no tourism,’ he laments. The young man points to two stalls beyond. ‘A few weeks ago, 14 people who used to work here left for Europe. They sent us a WhatsApp telling us that they had arrived, but four of them died on the way’”(Ara, International, 15/04/2021).
- In Morocco, the tourism sector has been the most affected by the COVID pandemic due to the closure of borders with the rest of the countries, the cancellation of the Operation Crossing the Strait in June-2020, the restrictions on passenger traffic and the temporary closure of international air connections. “Hossan, the owner of a small Riad in Chefchaouen describes the worst months of the pandemic as a huge void in his life and in his profession. He shut down for a year and a half, spent all his savings and had to lay off 90% of the staff. ‘It's a ruin, let's hope God helps us’” (Atalayar, 3/12/2021).



Tourism and the pandemic. The case of the Canary Islands



35,2%
del PIB

Por cada 100 euros de valor añadido en ramas en contacto directo con el turista se aportaron 50,6 en otros sectores

40,3%
del EMPLEO

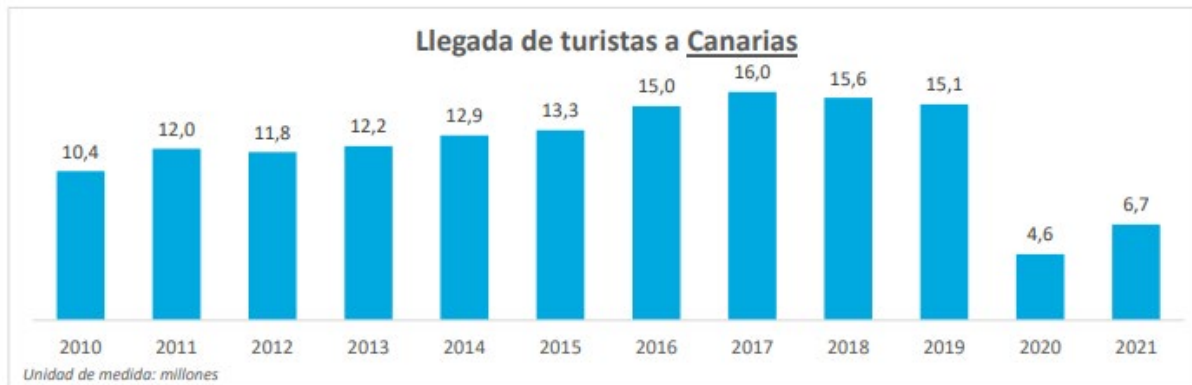
Por cada 100 empleos ramas en contacto directo con el turista se aportaron 36,4 en otros sectores

The tourism activity in the economy of the Canary Islands



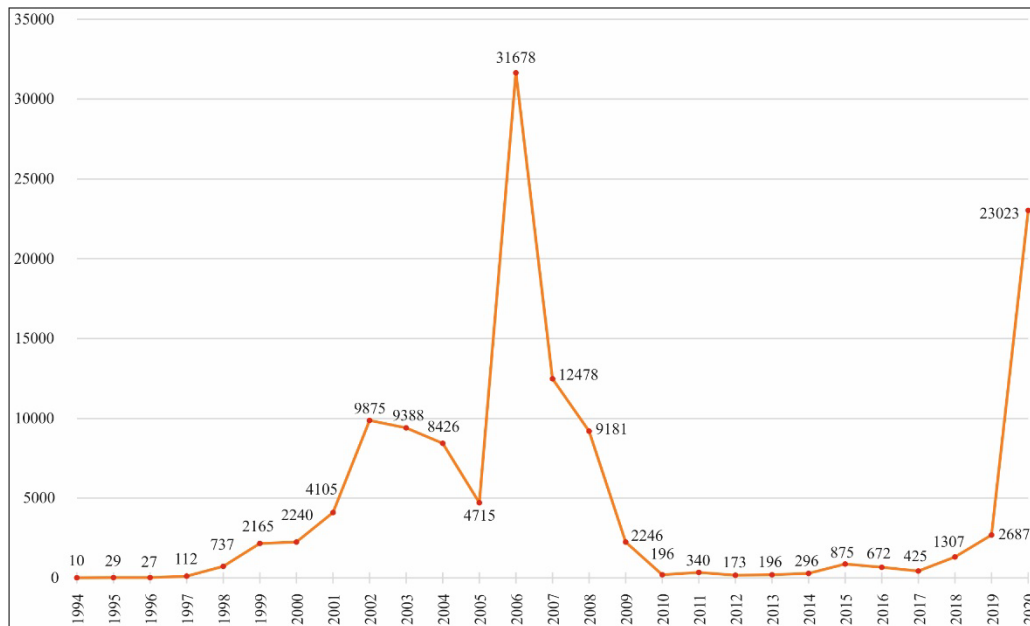
Empty hotels, hotels for sale

Drop in the tourist arrivals due to the Coronavirus



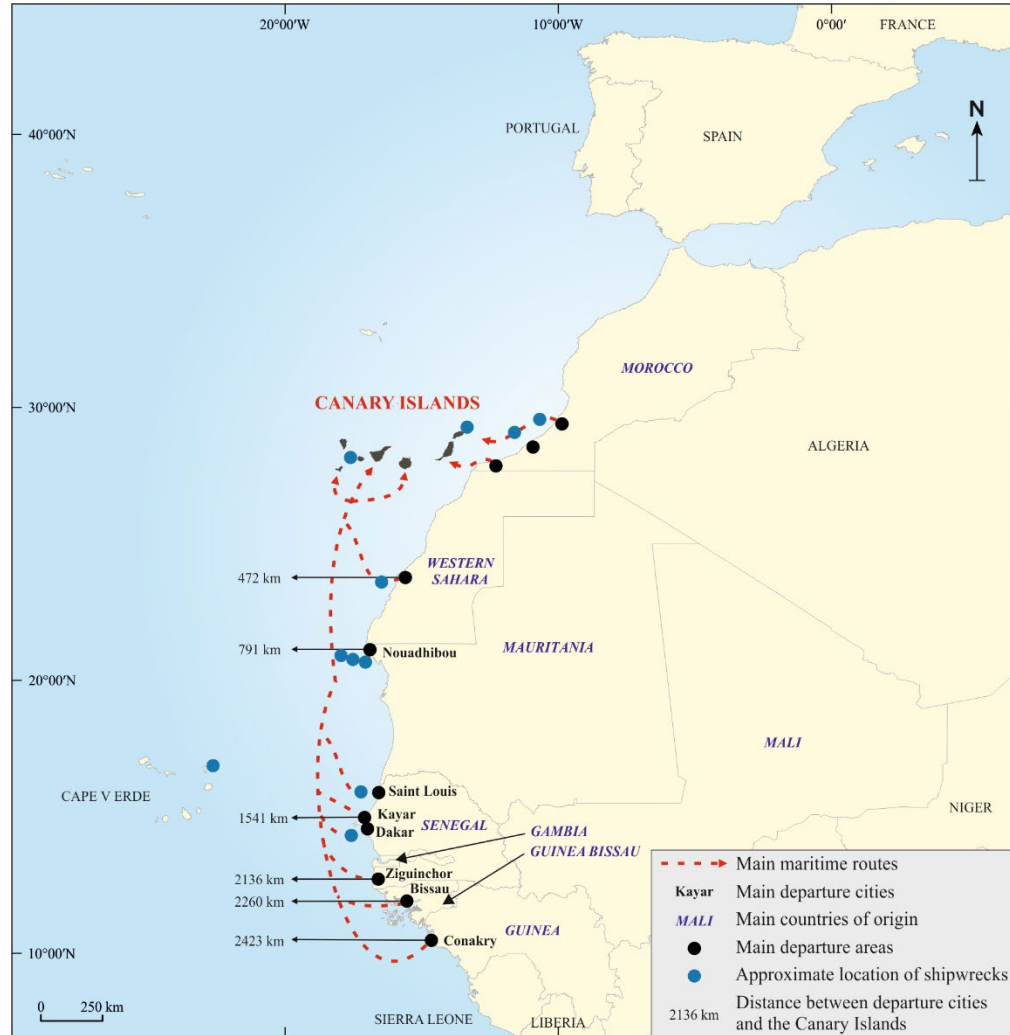
Irregular migrations and the pandemic. The case of the Canary Islands

- Irregular immigration flows acquired an unusual intensity due to the pandemic since the mid of 2020, as the drop in tourism in Africa, the unemployment, and the flee from war conflicts have been exploited by gangs trafficking with human beings, moving by sea men and women, young people and children from the African coast to this outermost region of the European Union.
- Irregular immigration to the Canary Islands in precarious vessels began in 1994 and the maximum intensity was reached in 2006.
- A secondary peak corresponds to 2020-2021



Irregular migrations and the pandemic. The case of the Canary Islands

- 745 vessels
- >23.000 immigrants
- Senegal, Mauritania, Western Sahara and Morocco



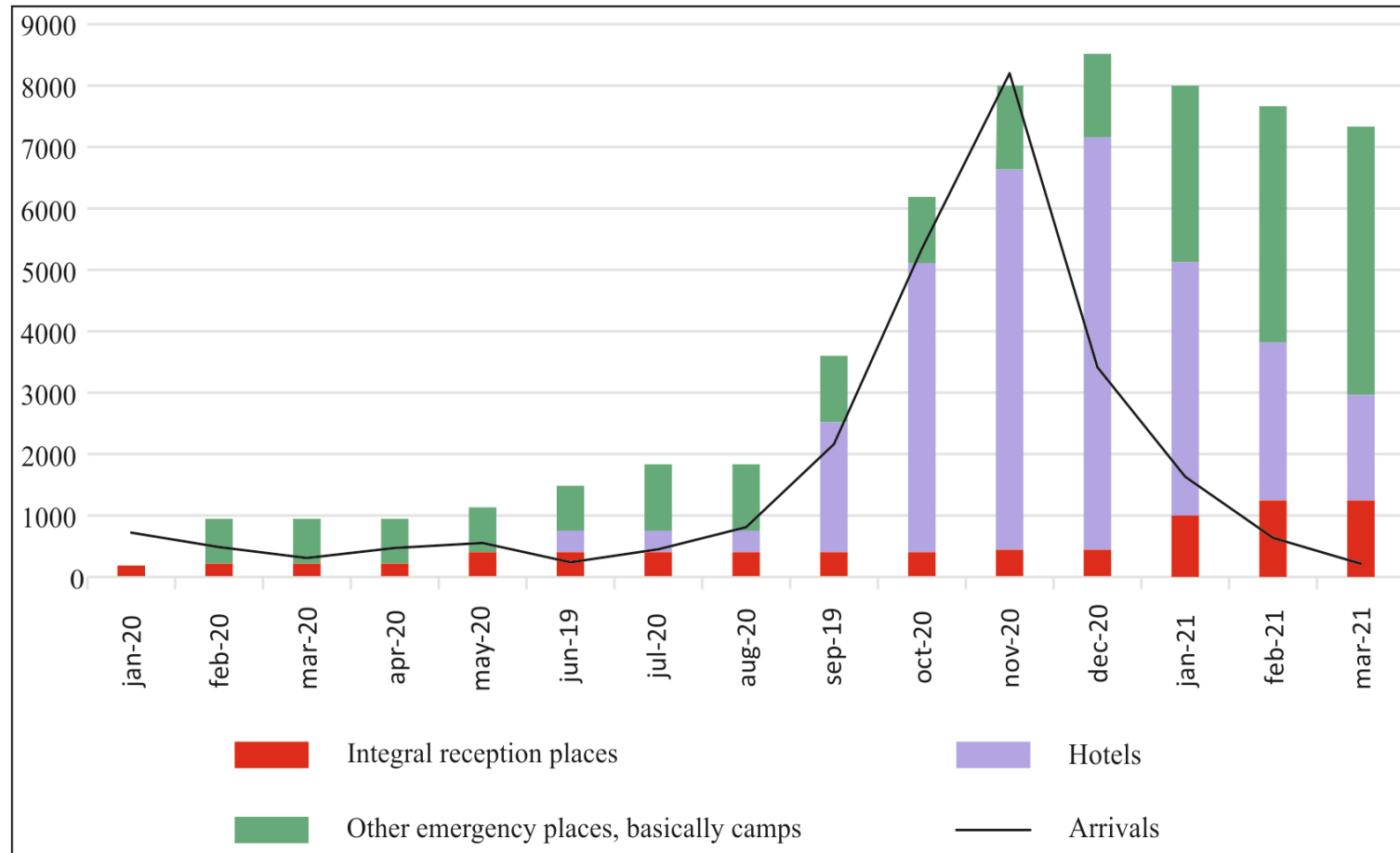
Irregular migrations and the pandemic. The case of the Canary Islands

- Multiplication of maritime rescue actions to assist the vessels detected
- Deployment of additional health control resources
- Proliferation of “managers” (consolidated NGOs as Spanish Red Cross, Spanish Commission for Refugee Aid and the White Cross; and new NGOs as Spanish Catholic Migration Commission Association, Women, Solidarity and Cooperation, Federation of African Associations in the Canary Islands and Patio of Cultures)
- Difficulties in providing these migrants with the necessary legal services
- Limited referrals to mainland Spain and even fewer repatriations
- Insufficient accommodations (overcrowding of immigrants in open areas as the arrival docks)



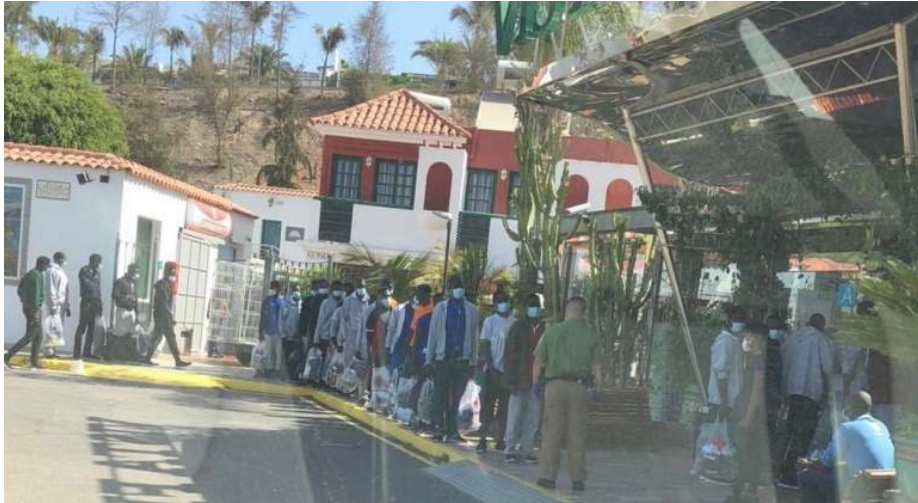
Irregular migrations and the pandemic. The case of the Canary Islands

Places available to cover accommodation requirements



Irregular migrations and the pandemic. The case of the Canary Islands

- The accommodation in hotels and tourist apartments

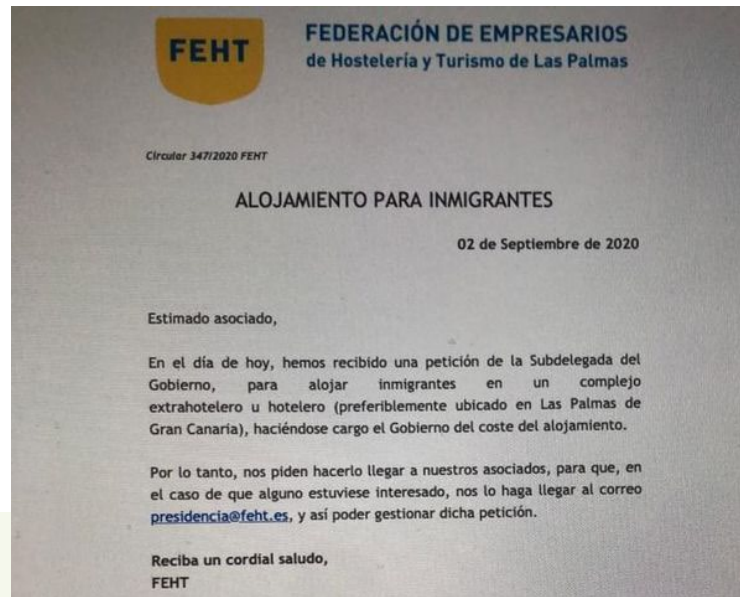


- The building of camps



Human mobility in an EU outermost region: the Canary Islands

- In July 2020 began the leasing of the tourist establishments by the Spanish Government, although contracts increased significantly in October, November and December
- A total of 17 tourism establishments were leased in Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Fuerteventura and Lanzarote and allocated about 7,000 migrants
- Association of Hotel and Catering Businessmen, NGOs and most of the citizens defended this measure, but as time went by, attitudes changed. In one of the tourist municipalities where these migrants were staying (Mogán), the Mayor and a group of neighbours promoted demonstrations claiming to put an end to this practice with the slogan “Let’s save tourism in Mogán”, demanding the original tourist use for these establishments.



Conclusions

- The upsurge and management of irregular migration in the Canary Islands has revealed the complex relationship between mobility and the border location in developed countries, between mobility and tourist specialization, and between mobility and immobility in times of pandemic.
- Since immobility of tourists who cannot visit African countries has caused an important economic bankruptcy in Morocco and Senegal, inter alia, the mobility of those unemployed or with no income from informal work, has shot up.
- At the same time, hotel entrepreneurs in the Canary Islands, whose economic activity is based on the mobility of tourists, try to find in other mobile subjects (irregular migrants) the rent that will guarantee the survival of their businesses.
- The analysis of these events related to irregular migration in the Canary Islands in 2020-2021 demonstrates some of the transformations introduced by the pandemic in the mobility paradigm.