

The Ceuta Crossing, How One Missing Phrase Became a Snowball of Misinformation.

I made a video about this during my livestream. What follows is the complete timeline behind that video. It explains when the story began, how a narrow legal ruling was simplified, how success footage and private coordination changed how people saw the route, when Moroccan authorities stopped people, when they did not, and how enforcement resumed.

Three things to know

In short, Spain's Supreme Court did not open the border and did not rule that swimmers could stay in Spain. It said that a swimmer intercepted at sea could not be pushed back through one exceptional summary procedure. The authorities could still return that person, but only after identification, an individual decision, access to a lawyer and interpreter, and checks for asylum, age, trafficking and health risks.

There are three different starts to this story.

The migration market and the desire to reach Ceuta existed before the court ruling.

The recoverable legal-rumour chain began on 8 July.

The mass breach began around noon in Ceuta on 30 July, when low water exposed a walkable route.

Most of the view, like, comment and share numbers below were captured during the analysis from 1 to 3 August 2026. Many of the final refreshed figures were recorded on 2 August. They are cumulative snapshots, not measurements taken on the day each post appeared. Account handles and Facebook display names are platform labels, not verified civil names.

Before the ruling

Before 29 June, the market already existed. Public Facebook groups focused on irregular migration, including korob_haraga and Haraqa Spain, were already matching travel partners, advertising boat and jet-ski contacts, collecting phone numbers, discussing routes and equipment, and moving conversations into direct messages. The market included prices, “pay when you arrive” offers, alleged brokers, scam complaints and an informal reputation system. The court story entered a system that was already operating.

15 June, a popular video said the situation was getting worse. A TikTok by @yakuzaa533 reached 249,623 views before the judgment. It said “bye-bye asylum” and claimed that asylum was no longer being accepted as before and that some people had been rejected. This matters because the pre-event message was pessimistic. Viewers were being told that Ceuta was closing, not opening.

16 June, a pre-ruling Ceuta swim video went viral. @azhary_fishing's video, captioned “Ceuta is calling me”, reached 1,370,698 views when first collected and later showed roughly 1.44 million. Its comments show that viewers read it as a live crossing attempt, not only as sport. The original post is now unavailable. I preserved a copy of the video in the research archive and will repost it separately.

28 June, commercial facilitation was public. In the irregular-migration group korob_haraga, an anonymous Facebook post offered a jet-ski route and looked for people to join it. This was one of many boat and jet-ski offers found in these groups. Most of the proposed trips were commercial arrangements. Posters advertised transport, provided contact numbers, discussed prices or payment terms, and looked for clients or paying passengers. Some users were only searching for travel

partners or people to share costs, but the larger pattern was a market for paid crossings. The posts show how the service was advertised, although they do not prove that every advertised trip took place.

The ruling and the first distortion

29 June, the legal event. Spain's Supreme Court issued judgment 814/2026 in the case of an Algerian man who had been intercepted while swimming toward Ceuta and immediately returned to Morocco without a formal decision, lawyer or interpreter. The preserved judgment said the special *rechazo en frontera* procedure applies when someone is trying to overcome a physical border barrier. A maritime line, camera or sensor is not such a barrier.

What the ruling actually meant. At sea, authorities had to use the ordinary *devolución* procedure described in Article 23 of Spain's Foreigners Regulation. Return remained lawful after the required safeguards. The ruling granted no automatic entry, residence, work permit, asylum, transfer to mainland Spain or protection from later removal. It created no rule about reaching “international waters”.

29 June to 7 July, the market continued but the ruling did not spread. No recovered social-media post reacted to the judgment on the day it was issued. At 04.47 on 29 June, before any recovered legal reaction, the same anonymous video advertisement appeared in *korob_haraga* and *Haraqa* Spain. It offered a trip that day, cited a 600/900 horsepower motor and said payment was due only after arrival. In the comments, the poster provided a contact number with Algeria's +213 country code. On 5 July, a separate Facebook video showed a man beside someone he described as having helped people cross to Spain. It was a public endorsement inside the same informal market.

On 7 July, one user asked for the number of a provider known as *Younes*, who was described as charging two million centimes, about 20,000 dirhams or €1,850. Four more accounts asked for the same number within eleven hours. Together, these posts show that crossings were already being presented as paid services before the legal story spread.

El Supremo lo confirma: la ley no permite devoluciones en caliente de inmigrantes en el mar via [@elfarodeceuta](https://elfarodeceuta.es/supremo-confirma-ley-no-permite-devoluciones-caliente-inmigrantes-mar/)
<https://elfarodeceuta.es/supremo-confirma-ley-no-permite-devoluciones-caliente-inmigrantes-mar/>



From elfarodeceuta.es

8 July at 13.01.52 UTC, the most important publishing mistake began the recoverable legal chain. El Faro de Ceuta published an article with an accurate headline and an accurate body. They said the law did not allow devoluciones en caliente at sea, meaning immediate return without the required procedure. The subtitle dropped the two words en caliente and said that swimmers trying to reach Ceuta or Melilla “cannot be returned”. That broader sentence was copied into Google and into the Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram and X preview fields. In simple Arabic, the shared message looked like لا يمكن إعادتهم, meaning “they cannot be returned”. A person had to open the website and read the headline or article to see the correct legal framing. Sixty-four seconds later, El Faro's Facebook page repeated the broad sentence while the accurate headline remained visible in the link card. At 13.04.04, the Telegram post also placed the accurate headline and the broader subtitle together. The Facebook post later showed 149 reactions, 106 comments and 21 shares. This was a slow leak that made a procedural safeguard look like a guarantee.

8 July at 19.15, the story entered Arabic accurately. TelQuel Arabic correctly explained that return could not happen without legal procedure. Its Instagram post later recorded 11,297 likes. The report itself did not promise entry.

The change happened in the comments. At 20.35, the Instagram username @weld_tetouan_05



asked in Darija, “So now if the Guardia catches you, they let you in?” The question received 202 likes.

At 23.03, @zakii_nano wrote “Let's go to Spain”. At 01.40, @1_b_doo suggested using the distraction of the next football match because crossing would be easier. The first recovered change from legal procedure to perceived opportunity happened below an accurate Arabic report.

How the message became viral

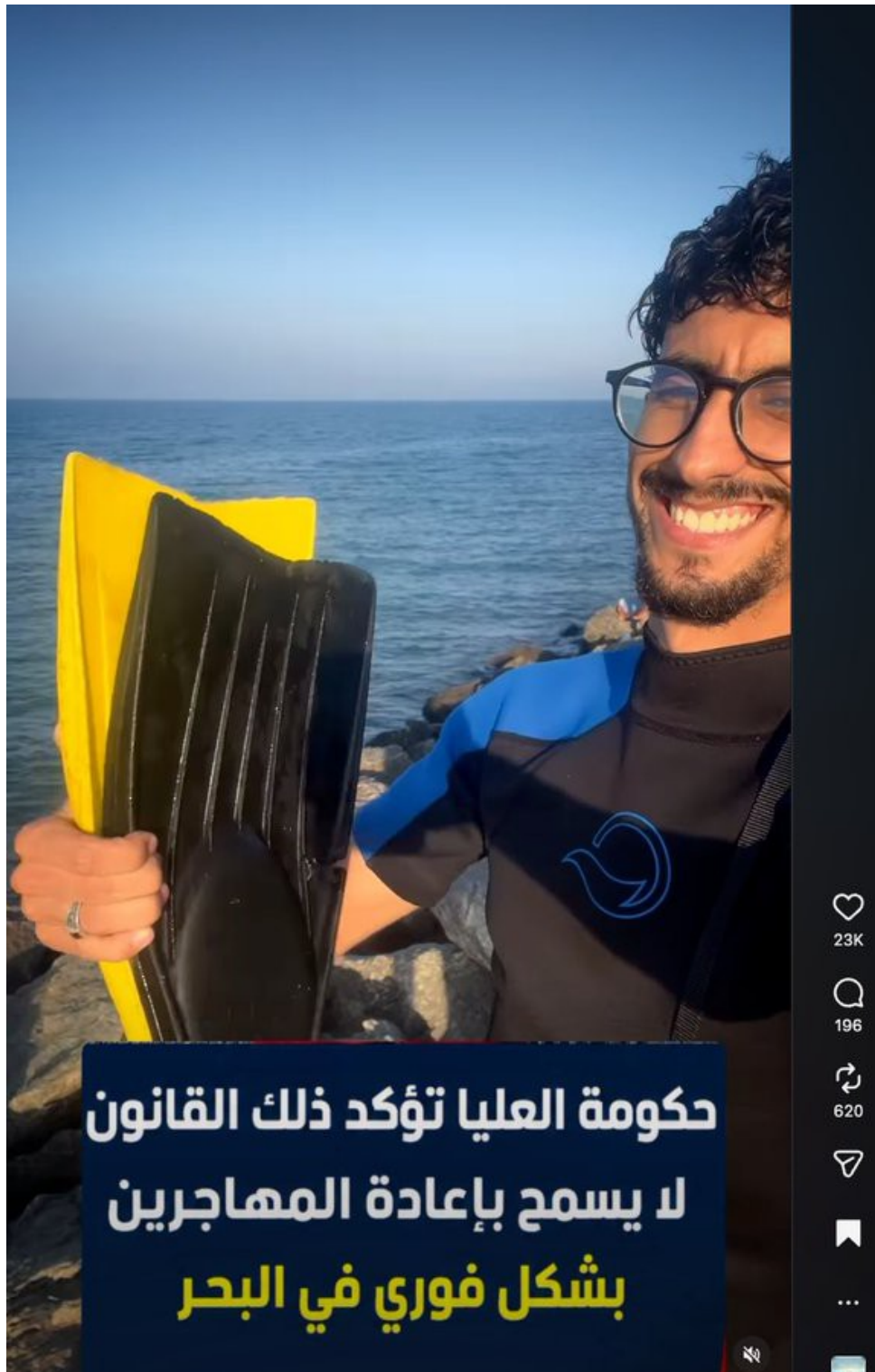
9 July at 00.42, the blue card became the first viral visual in the legal chain. The migration account @haragaa_ceuta1 posted a grammatically broken Arabic card about the ruling. It reached 33,051 likes and was reused across migration pages and later videos. The card still included the word “immediately”, so it was more accurate than the newspaper's exported subtitle.



9 July at 11.04, the claim acquired a body. Moroccan creator Moâtassim Mansouri, using @its.mansouriii, repeated the claim in a wetsuit while holding fins on the Martil coast near Tetouan. The reel reached 424,806 views. The legal story was now being shown with the clothing and equipment used for the crossing.

9 July in the evening, the physical cost appeared immediately. The Guardia Civil recovered the body of a young man at Desnarigado after two people reached Ceuta by swimming and one fell from the rocks. The timing does not prove that he acted because of a particular post, but it shows that the online story and the deadly route were developing together.

10 July at 13.57, the false “international waters” rule appeared. A video by @lhoussine.vloge displayed the TelQuel card and the blue card from the previous day. It then added a rule that exists nowhere in the judgment. It claimed that Moroccan authorities could return a swimmer in Moroccan waters, but not after the swimmer reached “international waters”. The video reached 150,039 views, 646 shares and 136 WhatsApp share actions. A commenter later said he had been returned from international waters, but the correction did not travel.



10 July, success imagery beat legal accuracy. A video claiming that arrivals had been transferred from Ceuta to Spain and then France reached 646,053 views

A more legally accurate post that explained the right to apply for asylum received only 1,259 views. Later reporting recorded more than 70 crossing attempts that night.

12 July, the first million-view legal explainer appeared. The Darija news account @inidnews used the broad headline “Spain bans the immediate deportation of migrants”, while its spoken explanation retained more of the procedure and safeguards. It reached 1,342,804 views, 5,429 shares and 1,269 WhatsApp share actions. People were also beginning to gather outside Ceuta's CETI reception centre.

Attempts grow while enforcement continues

13 July, Moroccan interdiction was active, but migrants still looked for traffickers. Moroccan reporting said the Royal Navy intercepted most of a group of roughly 50 swimmers, while at least six reportedly reached Ceuta. In korob_haraga, a route question was followed twenty-nine minutes later by an offer that said, “There is a walking route, DM me. You do not pay until you arrive”. Another post asked, “Is there a trustworthy smuggler?” The navy was stopping people at sea while the commercial contact market continued in public.

14 to 15 July, attempts grew, but Morocco continued stopping them. More than 100 people reportedly attempted the swim during Spain–France football celebrations, and Moroccan vessels intercepted most of them. Spain's Interior Ministry data imply only 244 classified land entries into Ceuta from 1 to 15 July. A police union warned of collapse while the government delegate said the border was secure.

16 to 21 July, urgency, brokers and missing-person appeals occupied the same spaces. Posts moved users from public comments into DMs and WhatsApp. One account wrote, “Whoever wants to cross to Ceuta, message me privately”. Women asked about travelling with children, avoiding payment until arrival and the risk of death. Missing-person appeals often received more engagement than broker offers.

17 to 21 July, the public-to-private system was stated openly. These are two examples from many similar posts. On 17 July, the Facebook display name El Salman wrote, “We do lives on TikTok and there is a group on WhatsApp”. Facebook was used to recruit, TikTok to broadcast, and WhatsApp for private communication. On 21 July, a family discussion asked what the smuggler who transported missing people had posted on his WhatsApp Status. Families were treating those temporary posts as a source for whether relatives had survived. WhatsApp Status disappears after 24 hours, so ordinary public archives cannot reconstruct it.

20 July, the wave predated the Algeria visit. About 200 people attempted the crossing during World Cup celebrations and Moroccan authorities intercepted most of them. Pedro Sánchez visited Algiers the same day. The legal rumour and physical escalation had already been developing for almost two weeks. The chronology does not support the later claim that the mobilisation began as retaliation for this visit.

Success footage and logistics converge

22 to 24 July, real success became more persuasive than the rumour. El Faro showed CETI residents leaving for reception resources on mainland Spain. That did not promise the same outcome to new swimmers, but it looked like proof that a journey could continue beyond Ceuta. On 23 July, El Faro arrival footage reached 1,201,826 views. Beneath it, a Spanish legal-rights comment and a Darija success comment appeared in the same thread. On 24 July, photos of people said to have arrived received 390 reactions. 50 minutes later, another post asked for phone numbers

and described a half-hour swim.

25 to 26 July, enforcement and visible success existed together. Morocco reportedly intercepted about 170 swimmers overnight on 25 July and 180 to 200 on 26 July. More than 50 still reached Ceuta, more than 150 slept outside the CETI, and three bodies were recovered within hours. A success video by @ghoufrane_s4 reached 1,520,350 views and 12,396 shares.

26 July at 19.14, a hidden countdown appeared in a comment. The Facebook display name Mohamad Ell Shr, who had posted an earlier travel offer, returned to that thread and wrote that six days remained, the meeting point was ready and anyone interested should leave a dot. The countdown pointed roughly to 30 July or 1 August, so it was close to the mass crossing but did not identify the date clearly.

This was the most specific pre-event Facebook countdown found in the archive. It also shows why reading posts without their comments can miss the transaction layer.

27 July, the first recovered public Thursday cue appeared. Beneath an older El Faro reel, the Instagram username @alhiuoi_do_42 wrote, “Brothers, who is going on Thursday? We will meet you there”. Thursday was 30 July. The account had 534 followers, but the comment had zero likes and zero replies. No second date-specific comment was found among the 278 comments in that thread. It may have repeated information circulating privately. It does not identify who selected the day or prove that this comment mobilised a crowd.

27 July, the scale had already changed. Officials said more than 1,000 people had entered during the preceding week. This was the clearest break from the 244 classified entries in the first half of July.

27 July, an unrelated referral-advertising campaign appeared at the peak. Between 27 and 31 July, the campaign circulated several versions claiming that migration had opened to Spain, Italy or France from specific dates. One version published on 28 July explicitly said that migration to Spain had opened from that date. The messages directed users to referral websites, including the Hijra Express page on Chadipress, which offered links for work in Spain, Italy, France and Canada. This was a commercial referral campaign using a repeated advertising template. No connection to Ceuta or the mass crossing was found. It is included because it appeared at the peak and used language that could add to the surrounding confusion.

28 July, Moroccan authorities were still intercepting people. Hundreds were in the water. Contemporary estimates said Morocco picked up roughly 300 people while the Guardia Civil picked up about 100. The CETI held around 800 people, with more than 400 outside. This directly contradicts any claim that Morocco had stopped enforcing throughout July.

The video that changed the online story

28 July at 08.48, the video of two young women changed the online story. El Faro's video arm posted footage of two young women celebrating after reaching Ceuta. Until this point, the story was mostly about legal wording, equipment, anonymous arrivals and dangerous attempts. This video showed two young women alive, smiling and celebrating. To a migration audience, it made the route look possible, immediate and human. It became one of the biggest turning points in the online chain. The Spanish caption was about Ceuta being overwhelmed and did not focus on the women. The TikTok reached 667,485 views. The Instagram version, posted sixty-four seconds later, reached 2,036,476 views, 99,310 likes and 2,004 comments.



ElFarodeCeuta · 7-28

► Ceuta no puede más, esta noche ha sido de locura ante la presión migratoria....

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[See translation](#)

28 July at 15.51, seven hours later, the same image became a different story. The footage was re-cut into an Arabic news template with the headline “Two young Moroccan women reach Ceuta by swimming in the dawn hours. What do you think?” That Instagram version reached 4,128,458 views. The Arabic edit shifted the subject from a city under strain to two women and invited the audience to judge them.

The repost chain was deliberate and fast. Twenty-four seconds later, the same brand posted the edit to TikTok, where it reached 504,675 views. Other same-day versions came from @jaouharlamguilimotard (20,253), @thekingdom174 (345,422), @marpresstv (144,604), and @tagrawla_international (32,384).

The footage of the two young women alone reached 32,198,740 displayed views across social media. It was reposted hundreds of times across different platforms and accounts.

The best correction that night received only 1,712 views. A French-language correction accurately explained that the court had neither opened the border nor guaranteed stay. Its audience was about 0.005% of the two-women edits.

The image ended in a harassment wave. A monitoring study covering 1,245 posts, videos and comments in five languages found racist and xenophobic content, including gendered attacks on women and girls visible in crossing footage. The two young women went from celebrating survival to becoming targets of public judgement.

28 July at 21.44, the WhatsApp layer became public. Akhbarona published six source panels from a WhatsApp group titled هجمة قرياح سبتة, which can be translated as “Ceuta fence rush”. The group showed 120 members. A leading participant displayed as ~ Taha, beside a number with Algeria's +213 country code, proposed secret groups, experienced managers, teams of ten going separately to “the forest”, a partly hidden line connecting 1,000 with “we start the plan”, and redistribution through Facebook groups. The number suggests an Algerian SIM.

I independently verified that this WhatsApp group was not unique. The Facebook archive contains tens of public posts and invitations that moved people from Facebook into private WhatsApp discussions about going to Ceuta. At least six direct WhatsApp invitation links were recovered. A separate Facebook group known as Hrig Sebta or Hraga Ceuta reportedly passed 20,000 members by 27 July and then closed.

The peak before the breach

29 July, Spanish national media made the story feel official and real. El Faro's video of the encampment outside the saturated CETI reached 2,577,044 views, 34,798 shares and 5,727 WhatsApp share actions. El Mundo reached 1,528,187 TikTok views, and its Instagram version reached 1,089,289. Antena 3 reached 4,655,743 TikTok views. RTVE connected the wave to the court ruling, and ABC said the ruling had “opened the door”. None supplied a complete date, hour, route and meeting point, but they supplied institutional legitimacy and visible proof of scale.

29 July, practical advice appeared beneath the success footage. One Darija comment advising swimmers to use fins received 411 likes. Other comments sought strong swimming partners, referred to a “second batch”, connected another attempt to the “new law”, and warned that publishing the route would cause it to be closed.

29 July, Morocco was tightening, not standing aside everywhere. A stretch of the Fnideq corniche

was reported closed, and users inside the groups discussed young men being taken away from the north on buses. The preceding day's estimates also showed active Moroccan interception.

30 July and the mass breach

30 July at about 04.00 UTC and 06.00 in Ceuta, the first phase began. Swimmers appeared and Spanish police initially collected people in groups for identification. It was a major wave, but it still resembled the escalating nights before it.

30 July around noon in Ceuta, the decisive break happened shortly after low tide. The official 2026 Ceuta tide table from Spain's Navy Hydrographic Institute gives a low tide of 0.21 metres at 08.12 UTC, which was 10.12 local time. The next high tide was not until 16.55 local time. Around noon, rocks beside the Tarajal breakwater were still exposed and people who could not swim could walk along the barrier. An Associated Press photographer observed Moroccan gendarmes standing with folded arms while people passed. The Moroccan side stopped functioning as a border at critical points, and counting became impossible.

The timing was a remarkable coincidence. The lowest water of the morning exposed the route at almost the same time that Moroccan personnel were observed not stopping people at decisive beach sectors. The tide alone did not create a mass breach, and the evidence does not show that officials planned their posture around it. The two conditions simply overlapped at the most consequential moment. A dangerous swimming route briefly became a route that many people could walk.

Everything online explains why so many people were ready and why the idea felt possible. The walkable route and temporary non-intervention explain why the number crossing suddenly became tens of thousands. Social media alone cannot explain the change from hundreds of attempts to a mass breach.

The non-intervention lasted for several decisive hours, not the whole day. The safest description from the available reporting is that open passage was observed from around noon and continued for several hours at specific beach sectors. By night, Moroccan enforcement was returning sector by sector. Thousands of personnel were deployed, roads and railways were restricted, vehicles were stopped and young men were detained at Tangier railway station. Riot-equipped lines sealed the land crossing while the nearby beach remained passable for additional hours. Officers reportedly said they were waiting for reinforcements and an H-hour, a military and police term for the exact time a planned operation begins. In this context, it suggests that they were waiting for a coordinated moment or order to intervene.

Visible success becomes coordination

30 July at 12.23, the successful breach became its own organising message. A Facebook user proposed a WhatsApp group to go to Fnideq and enter “like you saw today”. The post received 111 comments. People no longer needed to understand the court ruling. Visible success was enough.

30 July at 13.29, the walkable route was explained person to person. A user asked whether someone had to swim well or could simply follow the wall. The reply was “No, just go along the wall”. This is the clearest recovered person-to-person explanation that the route had become walkable.

30 July at 15.33, a post referred to “today's plan”. A now-unavailable Facebook post invited “girls from Casa” to travel together and enter “like today's plan”. Within six hours, the same group contained travel calls from Marrakech, Fez, Agadir, Casablanca, Rabat, Meknes and Beni Mellal. One Beni Mellal post said the authors had been prevented from boarding a coach. Transport

restrictions were already being applied.

30 July at 18.13, a WhatsApp invitation was posted publicly. Six WhatsApp invite links were recovered from the wider archive. Their presence shows how public posts moved people into private channels.

During the night of 30 to 31 July, Morocco reversed course sector by sector. Thousands of security personnel were deployed. Forces used tear gas and water cannon, controlled northern roads and railways, stopped vehicles and made detentions. The land crossing was sealed before the adjacent beach. This makes a simple story of continuous incapacity hard to sustain.

Enforcement returns

31 July, forceful enforcement resumed and the flow collapsed. Moroccan forces used gas, batons, water cannon and warning shots. Spain deployed army and police personnel. Public posts shifted from telling people when and how to go to asking whether the route was still open and whether they should turn back. That change in language marks the end of the cascade.

31 July at 22.30, direct testimony went viral after the event. A CBS interview reached 12,148,229 views. The witness confirmed that “Spain has opened the door” was circulating on Facebook and Instagram. The reporter, not the witness, supplied the fuller asylum-and-live-in-Spain wording. The video proves exposure to an open-door message.

1 August, physical control was restored. Spain began installing a 500-metre barrier and Moroccan forces prevented new groups from reaching the frontier. The reversal occurred within roughly a day of the decisive non-enforcement interval.

2 August, Morocco gave its first official explanation. The Interior Ministry said the events reflected misuse of digital space, misleading information, trafficking networks and incorrect readings of the Spanish legal decision. It also cited the short distance, less than 70 metres, and shallow water at some points as creating a false sense that the crossing was easy.

The human toll remains contested. Morocco's official account reported 11 deaths. Spanish authorities reported 72. The Moroccan Association for Human Rights reported close to 130, plus dozens missing. The only safe description is that the event killed dozens. The gap between 11 and roughly 130 remains unresolved.

The number who crossed is also disputed. Rabat reported roughly 40,000 toward Ceuta. Spanish and local estimates were 50,000 to 60,000. A figure of about 69,500 referred to recorded exit passages over 30 hours and may include people who had entered earlier. It is not proof that 69,500 distinct people crossed during the breach.

What the evidence supports

Established. The court ruling was narrow and procedural. El Faro's exported subtitle dropped the decisive qualifier. The broader sentence moved into Arabic discussion. Named public accounts packaged, embodied and expanded it. One account added a false international-waters rule. Successful crossings and mainstream coverage reached million-view audiences. Public and private users coordinated through small groups. Moroccan authorities repeatedly intercepted people before 30 July. Officers were observed not intervening at critical sectors around noon on 30 July. Enforcement resumed forcefully and the flow collapsed.

Strong inference. The legal-opportunity story helped prepare the audience. Success footage made it more persuasive. Existing contact and logistics networks made action easier. A temporary and geographically selective Moroccan non-enforcement interval was necessary for the mass scale.

Not established. The evidence does not show that Rabat, Algeria, Spain, a political party, a newsroom or one influencer designed or ordered the mobilisation. It does not show that Morocco transported people toward Ceuta, that the 20 July Spain–Algeria visit caused the breach.

The conclusion

The simplest accurate conclusion a narrow court ruling became a broad promise through a missing phrase. Social media placed that promise in front of an existing migration audience. Successful arrivals made it believable. Private and public groups supplied contacts and logistics. Then, for several decisive hours, a border stopped functioning as a barrier. The online chain explains why tens of thousands were ready. The enforcement gap explains why they crossed.