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Spanish children stranded in Mexico and the Soviet Union

Abstract

During the 20th century, the mass displacement of children was fairly common. One historical example can be found during The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). An unprecedented amount of evacuations abroad were organized with the aim of protecting children from the dangers of the war. For the first time in history, nations opened their doors to children. For many of these countries, it was a practical humanitarian act which also had considerable propaganda value in a tense international political scenario. Some examples of hosting countries are: France (20,000 children); England (4,000); Belgium (5000) and the former Soviet Union (3,000).

At the end of the war, the democratic government was defeated and the new leader, General Francisco Franco, wanted to get all the children back to Spain as soon as possible, as they were considered the future of the nation. However, family reunification at international level depended on diplomatic relationships and the new government was not recognized by Mexico and the Soviet Union. That meant that the children that found refuge inside their borders got trapped and their exile became permanent.

This research is about the efforts to get them home, it was an extremely complex affair due to the lack of liaison between Spain and Mexico and The Soviet Union as host countries. It is based on archival documents, bibliographies, and personal interviews with the refugee children, whom reflected on their own experiences at an older age. It will serve as case study for analyzing the selection process, the practical, legal, humanitarian, educational and political challenges which had to be assumed not only during the evacuation and settlement of the refugees but also in their return to Spain.

Keywords: unaccompanied minors, child migration, transnational migration. Refugees in the Spanish Civil War.