



SUPPRESSION OF MOVEMENT

**Migration Control, Manufactured Precarity and
Racialised Border Regimes in Post-Hirak Algeria**

In the Name of Sovereignty,
at the Service of Rent Accumulation

**Forum Tunisien Pour Les Droits
Economiques Et Sociaux**



Forum Tunisien
Pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux

SUPPRESSION OF MOVEMENT

**Migration Control, Manufactured Precarity and
Racialised Border Regimes in Post-Hirak Algeria**
In the Name of Sovereignty, at the Service of
Rent Accumulation

Sofian Philip
NACEUR

June 2025

CONTENT

| | |
|---|------------|
| I. Executive Summary | 8 |
| II. Methodology | 12 |
| III Abbreviations | 13 |
| 1.0 MIGRATION CONTROL | 15 |
| 1.1 Resetting the Refugee Regime | 18 |
| 1.2 The Harga and Algeria's Authoritarian Rollback | 26 |
| 1.3 Regional Alliances against People on the Move | 31 |
| 1.4 Obstruction of Movement | 36 |
| 1.5 Rentier Capitalism and Manufactured Precarity | 44 |
| 2.0 BORDERING ALGERIA | 52 |
| 2.1 The Mediterranean: "A Merciless Indicator of Failure" | 55 |
| 2.2 Morocco: Post-Colonial Legacy, Neo-Colonial Stalemate | 61 |
| 2.3 Mali: From Informal Integration to Militarisation | 65 |
| 2.4 Niger: The Deportation Routine | 70 |
| 2.5 Tunisia: Algeria's Semi-Permeable Frontier | 75 |
| 2.6 Libya: The Silent Border | 79 |
| 3.0 STATE COOPERATION | 82 |
| 3.1 A Cautious Integration into Europe's Border Regime | 85 |
| 3.2 Algeria's (Non-) Collaboration on Returns | 92 |
| 3.3 Equipping the Police: The Mirage of Technology Transfer | 96 |
| 3.4 Training the Police: The Berlin-Rome Axis in Full Swing | 100 |
| 3.5 The UN's Migration Control Service Providers | 105 |
| 4.0 REDEFINING SOVEREIGNTY | 109 |

ABOUT FTDES

The Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights (Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux, FTDES) is a Tunisian civil society organisation, recognised by the state in 2011. FTDES is non-governmental, neutral, and independent from any political party or religion. It was established in 2011 in order to fight and advocate for people's economic and social rights at the national, regional and international level. FTDES is working on labour rights, women rights, environmental justice and migrant rights. The organisation is a member of several international networks, including FIDH, Migreurop or Loujna Tounkaranké. It has its head office in Tunis and local branches in the governorates of Kairouan, Monastir and Gafsa.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sofian Philip Naceur is a Tunis-based freelance journalist, working with the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation's northern Africa office, and various media outlets and NGOs. After reporting from Cairo as a correspondent from 2012 to 2019, he mostly works today on Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and border regimes across northern Africa.

Translation to Arabic: **Maher DHABI**

With the indispensable support of **ASGI, Statewatch, Lorenz Naegeli (WAV Recherchekollektiv)**

I. Executive Summary

In recent decades, the Algerian state has established a multitude of border control regimes at Algeria's land and sea borders, modernised and securitised ports and airports, and built up surveillance and policing capacities across large parts of the country, which are now placed at the state's disposal to crack down at will against Algerian citizens and people on the move alike. Algerian authorities have either used these capabilities to restrict and suppress the movement of Algerian and non-Algerian 'harraga' (the Maghrebi Arabic term for those who do not obey borders but 'burn' them), or they have acted passively, tolerating or permitting human movements.

In 2023, the Tunisian state—in the midst of an authoritarian rollback since 2021—substantially intensified migration controls amid strong pressure from Italy and the EU, and started to regularly deport people to the borders with Algeria and Libya. Algeria responded to this new reality on its northeastern border and the shift in regional migration dynamics by also tightening (anti-)migration policies. Non-Algerian harraga have increasingly been setting sail from the country's shores since 2023, while mass expulsions of people by Algerian authorities to Niger continue unabated. The state is also deporting more and more people to Libya and, once again, to Morocco.

Since 2024, Algerian, Tunisian and Libyan authorities have been coordinating their reprisals against irregular movements, while increasingly aligning their policies with the EU border regime architecture in Africa. In the past, however, Algeria, unlike neighboring countries, was considered extremely reluctant to formally integrate into the European border regime, near-

consistently refusing to take part in Europe-funded 'border management' projects. Under President Abdelmajid Tebboune and army chief Saïd Chengriha, however, the state initiated a cautious turnaround and expanded its bilateral (anti-migration) cooperation with Italy, Germany and UN agencies. The government has also started drafting an asylum law, which aims at regulating the UN refugee agency UNHCR more closely, and at gradually transforming the organisation's Algiers branch into a mere service provider. The bill may also further consolidate Algeria's selective enforcement of international refugee law and pave the way for the government to obscure rights violations against people on the move more effectively.

Meanwhile, European and African governments, the EU, and agencies under the umbrella of or affiliated to the United Nations continue to promote the securitisation of migration, persistently suggesting that irregular human movements can be effectively contained by imposing means of control, surveillance or deterrence. Above all, however, this securitisation maintains and accelerates the substantial precarisation and deprivation of rights of people on the move, and is thus water on the mills of the advancing corrosion of the international legal architecture regarding refugees and migrants, undermining in particular the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol as well as the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

While Algeria is often referred to as a so-called 'transit state', the vast majority of people entering the country irregularly are not bound for an onward journey but in search of work in Algeria. Facilitated by the rise of oil and gas revenues between the early 2000s and 2014, the government launched extensive infrastructure projects to modernise transportation, secondary industries, housing and the agricultural sector, fueling a countrywide demand for cheap labour. A range of sectors have since become major employers of migrant

workers such as construction, real estate and affiliated industries, as well as craft, retail and food and household services.

Whereas seasonal labour migration from Niger and Mali has been an integral part of the southern Algerian economy since the 1970s, the construction boom since the early 2000s has rendered people on the move indispensable for the country's modernisation of housing and infrastructure. Due to their exclusion from social protection, wage security and labour standards, however, state-owned, private, small and medium-sized companies continue to profit from this manufactured precarity. This over- and super-exploitation of migrant labour is equally fueled by the ever-returning crises of Algeria's rentier economy, which uses this workforce as a reserve in times of fluctuating rent formation (in particular the oil and gas rent, but also revenues stemming from the exploitation of other raw materials).

The state's reprisals against people on the move, their precarisation and the widespread racism (re-)produced by the state and large parts of society are, meanwhile, in stark contrast to Algeria's anti-imperialist past. The country's capital Algiers was once known for its hospitality and solidarity with 'the wretched of the earth', as Frantz Fanon once called the colonised and dispossessed. Today, however, only traces of this once staunch alignment with the Global South remain. The state maintains a political imagery and foreign policy nurtured by the spirit of the post-colonial Algeria of the 1960s and 70s. However, unable and unwilling to confront the distortions of the rentier economy or to effectively counter the corrosive effects of EU border externalisation, Algeria's regime continues to feed on a migration control dogma it rhetorically opposes when it is deployed by European politicians and governments.

Instead of reinforcing the commodification of human movements and the (anti-)migration cooperation with Europe—and despite being confronted with powerful trafficking networks and significant security concerns at some of its borders—, the state should:

- **Cease its arbitrary crackdowns on undocumented people;**
- **Reform its labour and residency regime;**
- **Sign the AU's Freedom of Movement Protocol; and**
- **Consistently turn towards the Global South—politically, economically and with regards to human movements.**

A regional integration that is increasingly prioritising the coordination of reprisals against undocumented people and the fortification of borders will neither help to cope with Algeria's alienation with its southern neighborhood, nor its dependencies vis-à-vis the Global North. On the contrary, it will further reproduce and reinforce them.



II. Methodology

Migration control has turned into an ever-present subject of public discourses and government interventions across northern Africa. Respective developments in Tunisia, Libya, Morocco and, more recently, in Egypt have been largely researched and publicised by human rights groups, NGOs, academics, activists and journalists. Corresponding matters in Algeria, however, remain strongly unreported. Accordingly, this report aims at providing a mapping of migration control, human rights violations against people on the move and the state cooperation on the suppression of movement in Algeria, and thereby contribute to bridge the research gap. This report is based on extensive desk research and literature review, but relies, first and foremost, on more than 80 interviews predominantly carried out in 2024 and 2025. The vast majority of these are, due to the wishes of interviewees, only referenced anonymously.

Among those interviewed are dozens of people who are or were directly affected by border and migration control policies in Algeria, and who either live in Algeria or had transited through the country in the past years. Also consulted for this report were academics, journalists and representatives of NGOs, associations or activist networks in Algeria, Morocco, Mali, Niger, Tunisia, Mauritania, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, France, Spain, Portugal, Egypt, Palestine and the United Kingdom. 13 former or current staff members of northern Africa branches of UN agencies and diplomats shared valuable insight. Additionally, parliamentary inquiries, press requests and freedom of information requests have been filed with governments, state agencies and companies in various countries and with the EU Commission.

III. Abbreviations

| | |
|----------|--|
| ACTC-MBM | Arab Centre for Technical Cooperation on Migration and Border Management |
| AIMC | Arab Interior Ministers' Council |
| AME | Association Malienne des expulsés |
| AMSV | Association d'aide aux migrants en situation vulnérable |
| APS | Alarme Phone Sahara |
| AU | African Union |
| AVRR | Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration |
| BAPRA | Bureau Algérien pour les Réfugiés et les Apatrides |
| BJA | Bundeskriminalamt (Federal Criminal Police Office, Germany) |
| CEMOC | Centre d'état-major commun opérationnel conjoint |
| CEPOL | European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training |
| CGATA | Confédération générale autonome des travailleurs en Algérie |
| CIPIMD | Centro internacional para la identificación de migrantes desaparecidos |
| CREAD | Centre de recherche en économie appliquée pour le développement |
| DGSN | Direction générale de la sûreté nationale |
| CMA | Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad |
| DRC | Democratic Republic of Congo |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of West African States |
| EU | European Union |
| EUTF | European Union Trust Fund for Africa |
| ICMPD | International Centre for Migration Policy Development |
| IOM | International Organisation for Migration |

| | |
|----------|--|
| LADDH | Ligue Algérienne pour la défense des droits de l'homme |
| LAS | League of Arab States |
| MDM | Médecins du monde |
| MEP | Member of European Parliament |
| MPRR | Migrant Protection, Return and Reintegration Programme |
| MSF | Médecins sans frontières |
| NAUSS | Naif Arab University for Security Sciences |
| NDICI | Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument |
| OHCHR | Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights |
| OMCT | Organisation mondiale contre la torture |
| PAF | Direction de la police des frontières et de l'immigration |
| PMA | Plateforme migration Algérie |
| RAJ | Rassemblement actions jeunesse |
| RCD | Rassemblement pour la culture et la démocratie |
| RMSM | Réseau Maghreb-Sahel Migration |
| RSD | Refugee Status Determination |
| SADR | Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic |
| SAMIN | Southern Africa Migration Network |
| SAPPL-MB | Société algérienne pour la production de poids lourds de marque Mercedes Benz |
| SEM | Staatssekretariat für Migration (State Secretariat for Migration, Switzerland) |
| SNAPAP | Syndicat national autonome des personnels de l'administration publique |
| TSGP | Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |



Western imperialism and Third World nationalism feed off each other, but at their worst they are neither monolithic nor deterministic.¹

Edward W. Said, 1978



“Departures of Algerian migrants to Spain soar”², “Harraga smuggling network dismantled”³ or “Clandestine emigration: Dead, injured and missing in Annaba”⁴: Since 2023, headlines like these are once again routine in Algerian media. Irregular migration from the Algerian coast to Italy and Spain has noticeably intensified since the end of the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2021 and the ultimate failure of the protest movement ‘Hirak’ (Arabic for ‘movement’) the same year. The government reacted to this rise by successively stepping up reprisals against irregular migration (usually referred to in Algeria as the ‘harga’⁵), targeting Algerian and non-Algerian people on the move alike.

¹ Edward W. Said, *Culture and imperialism*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1993, p.XXVII.

² Radio M, *Harga: Les départs de migrants algériens vers l’Espagne explosent*, 8 January 2024. Accessed 9 October 2024, <https://algeria-watch.org/?p=90561>

³ El Watan, *Démantèlement d’un réseau de passeurs de harraga*, 27 November 2024. Accessed 2 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/yfhdnv9c>

⁴ M.F. Gaïdi, *Émigration clandestine: Des morts, des blessés et des disparus à Annaba*, El Watan, 9 July 2024. Accessed 15 November 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/svpwcpry>

⁵ ‘Harga’ and ‘harraga’ are Arabic terms used in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, referring to the activity of irregularly crossing borders, or referring to the people doing so. It could be translated as ‘burning’ borders or ‘those who burn’. Amade M’Charek, *Harraga: Burning borders, navigating colonialism*, In: *The Sociological Review* Volume 68, Issue 2, 6 April 2020. Accessed 20 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/2dzdp59z>

During the 20-year term of former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika between 1999 and 2019, the harga of predominantly young Algerians had been repeatedly amplified due to the lack of socioeconomic prospects and the absence of political and societal freedoms. (Anti-) migration policies and polarising rhetoric on migration were accelerated or scaled back by officials for reasons linked to the regime's internal power struggles, or exploited for political ends abroad. But the semi-authoritarian state tolerated the harga and only made timid attempts to prevent it.

The realigned regime, however, now applies much stricter migration controls, aiming at reestablishing the authority and control of the state in society. This conceals discontent about socioeconomic mismanagement and a dysfunctional economy, and compensates for the regime's lack of political legitimacy. The image of a prosperous 'New Algeria', propagated by President Abdelmajid Tebboune and his allies within the elite since 2021, is strongly contradicted by media coverage about the increasing number of those people once again leaving Algeria, favoring the risks of clandestine migration over remaining in the country.

Meanwhile, the state's crackdown against non-Algerian harraga continues unabated and has intensified even more since 2023. "The repression of African migrants is as old as their presence in Algeria", as Ali Bensaâd, professor at the University of Paris 8, wrote as far back as 2009.⁶ The arrest campaigns and mass expulsions of people on the move to Niger are nothing new, but are now coordinated with neighboring Tunisia and authorities in western Libya. The crackdown on the maritime migration route between Tunisia and Italy, and the new deportation practices of Tunisia's National Guard (under which arrested people are expelled to Algeria and Libya) have led to a shift in regional migration movements since 2023. Non-Algerians are now also increasingly setting sail from the Algerian coast.

⁶ Ali Bensaâd, *L'immigration en Algérie: Une réalité prégnante et son occultation officielle*, In: *Ali Bensaâd, Le Maghreb à l'épreuve des migrations subsahariennes*, Éditions Karthala, Paris 2009, p. 37..

The state's sovereignty and 'management' discourse regarding migration, and the racist rhetoric against Black people, are continuously (re-)produced by authorities and large parts of society. They also feed off each other, and serve as a means for diverting the public's attention away from the socioeconomic impacts of Algeria's failing rentier model. Unable and unwilling to confront the distortions of this rentier economy or to counter the corrosive effects of European border externalisation on African soil, Algeria's regime increasingly feeds on a migration control dogma it rhetorically opposes for its own citizens in Europe. This current state of affairs, however, stands "in stark contrast with the image of hospitality and solidarity once associated with revolutionary Algeria", as Thomas Serres put it. He has described the "rise of a racist and negrophobic discourse" in Algeria signalling once more "the gradual collapse of third-world solidarity."⁷

Yet, the expansion of migration controls at Algeria's frontiers does not solely materialise in the context of the European Union's (EU) (anti-) migration policies in northern Africa or recent migration-related developments in the region. Primary drivers of this trend include both economic and political factors in Algeria, but also the state's significant security concerns in its neighborhood. Before providing a mapping of Algeria's various border regimes (Chapter 2.0) and the international cooperation on the suppression of movement (Chapter 3.0), this report will first outline the latest migration-related developments in Algeria and discuss the new asylum law (Chapter 1.1), the expansion of migration controls after the Hirak (Chapter 1.2), the regional coordination of reprisals against migration (Chapter 1.3), the state's accelerated deportation practices (Chapter 1.4), and the interplay between manufactured precarity and Algeria's rentier economy (Chapter 1.5).

⁷ Thomas Serres, *Algeria, where is your African revolution?* Jadaliyya, 14 March 2019. Accessed 2 March 2025, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/38467>



The right of ‘derogatory asylum’ has supplanted the ‘right of axiological asylum’ in Algeria, insofar as the choice of refugees received is part of the anti-imperialist strategies of Algerian foreign policy.”⁸

Salim Chena, 2011



The legal architecture of the refugee regime currently in place in Algeria is about to be partially transformed. After years of unsuccessful attempts by the EU to persuade northern African countries to adopt asylum laws, Egypt passed such legislation in 2024. In December, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi ratified the vaguely worded bill that is to transfer Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and asylum recognition procedures from the UN refugee agency UNHCR to the Egyptian state.⁹ The UNHCR office in Algiers has confirmed that the Algerian government is also working on such a law. In an email, UNHCR’s Algeria office elaborates:

"While UNHCR is not directly involved in the drafting process, we continue to offer technical support and expertise to the Algerian authorities to align the legislation

⁸ Salim Chena, L’asile au Maghreb: Quelle reconnaissance pour les exilés subsahariens, In: *Les Cahiers du CREAD* N°. 97/2011, p. 111 – 145, p. 118.

⁹ Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, In the name of national security, November 2024. Accessed 18 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/msdn7sjm>

with international standards. Discussions are ongoing to determine the most effective ways UNHCR can contribute to this process. At this stage, we do not have information on a specific roadmap or the content of the proposed law."¹⁰

The legislative process is still at a very early stage. Algerian officials first announced the government's intention to draft such legislation during the 2023 edition of the Global Refugee Forum, a UNHCR conference held annually in Geneva. A strategy paper published by UNHCR's Algeria office in January 2025 discusses the "new law on refugees and asylum-seekers." It vaguely states that UNHCR "will endeavor to expand access to asylum, registration, and documentation" in Algeria, either "jointly" with the government or "by the government".¹¹ It appears indeed unclear what role UNHCR might play once the laws come into force, both in Egypt and Algeria. In Cairo, too, there is a lack of clarity regarding UNHCR's future role, as in addition to the law that has been already ratified, bylaws to the legislation are to be adopted—and this has not yet been done.

Such laws in northern Africa have been actively promoted by the EU since the 2010s. After Morocco finalised a draft asylum law in 2014, NGOs and UNHCR presented a draft in Tunisia in 2017. Algeria worked on an asylum law as early as 2012, and had requested UNHCR's assistance for its drafting.¹² In all three cases, however, no law was ever adopted. EU states hope that such legislation would provide for the externalisation of asylum procedures to northern Africa. Given the logic of the Dublin Regulation, it would be easier for EU states to classify authoritarian states as 'safe' and deport people to them

¹⁰ Email, UNHCR Algeria, 20 March 2025.

¹¹ UNHCR, Algeria multi-year strategy 2025 – 2027, January 2025. Accessed 14 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2hjwte5x>

¹² UNHCR, Appel global 2013 du HCR: Algérie, 2013. Accessed 4 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n7ejt6v>

if they put asylum laws in place. However, European fantasies of deporting third-country nationals to northern Africa and to set up ‘disembarkation platforms’, ‘hotspots’ or asylum processing centres run by EU states can be ruled out for the time being given the firm refusal of the governments in question to play along.



President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, Berlin 2015

© Sofian Philip Naceur

In fact, Algeria and Egypt are pursuing their own—albeit diverging—goals by pushing forward such bills. Egypt seems to be following the example set by Turkey, where an asylum law came into force in 2014. According to critics, the law does not offer adequate refugee protection, but rather gradually eliminated UNHCR as a decision-making authority regarding the status of refugees, and was primarily enforced in the context of the government’s nationalist and geopolitical interests, and the Turkey-EU deal.¹³ The former UNHCR official Jeff Crisp, today a known critic of the agency’s political practices, elaborates on Egypt’s possible motivations for adopting such a law:

¹³ Interview, anonymous, August 2024.

"Egypt might want to gain a greater degree of control over refugee and asylum matters, rather than delegating responsibility to UNHCR. At the same time, the government has an interest in keeping UNHCR involved in asylum-related matters in order to access the international resources that UNHCR is able to mobilise. Additionally, UNHCR's involvement provides governments with an important degree of legitimacy, helping them to counter any criticism of the way they treat refugees or asylum-seekers."¹⁴

Beside the possible aim of sidelining UNHCR in the decision-making process regarding who is to be granted refugee status in Egypt and who is not, Egypt also uses its asylum law as a bargaining chip in loan and investment negotiations with its European donors. Algeria, in contrast, is not dependent on financial injections from international lenders, and its aim seems to be to monitor and regulate UNHCR more tightly. "Rather than sidelining UNHCR, the state might want to limit its mandate even more", suggests a former UN employee.¹⁵

Additionally, the administrative architecture and government handling of refugee affairs in Egypt and Algeria differ substantially. Both states have signed and ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, as well as the 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, drafted by the Organisation of African Unity, the predecessor of today's African Union (AU). Algeria, however, approved those treaties considerably earlier than Egypt.¹⁶

¹⁴ Interview, Jeff Crisp, March 2025.

¹⁵ Interview, anonymous, February 2025.

¹⁶ Algeria signed the Geneva Convention in 1963 and its Protocol in 1967. Cairo accessed both treaties in 1981, but, unlike Algeria, maintains reservations about some of its stipulations. Algiers signed the 1969 Convention in 1969, and ratified it in 1973. Egypt joined the treaty in 1980.

Algeria's embrace of and Egypt's restrained approach towards the conventions also translates into the administrative architecture in both states. In Egypt, the recent asylum bill provides for the establishment of a state authority charged with refugee issues. So far, no such entity has ever existed in Egypt. Algeria, on the other hand, has had such a state agency in place since 1963, the Bureau for Refugees and Stateless Persons (BAPRA), created by decree and subordinated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.¹⁷ Yet, both governments transferred the responsibility for RSD to UNHCR which established branches in Egypt and Algeria in 1954 and 1984 respectively.

While the Egyptian state has been, so far, not formally involved in RSD, BAPRA "coordinates" with UNHCR. This was confirmed by the latter in an email, though the UN agency did not clarify whether BAPRA or UNHCR has the final say over asylum decisions.¹⁸ The Algerian state's 2021 response to a complaint by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) about Algeria's pushback practices is, nevertheless, a rare official confirmation in this regard. The letter of Algeria's Permanent Mission to the UN in Geneva states that "BAPRA therefore has full authority to decide whether or not to grant refugee status under Algerian law."¹⁹ Until the mid-2000s, asylum seekers were even interviewed by BAPRA, which would notify UNHCR after taking decisions on cases.²⁰ However, since then BAPRA is not directly involved in RSD and appears to only approve or reject status decisions taken by UNHCR.

¹⁷ People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, *Décret no. 1963-274 du 1963 fixant les modalités d'application de la Convention de Genève du 28 juillet 1951 relative au statut des Réfugiés*, 25 July 1963. Accessed 2 November 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/45tx4xzh>

¹⁸ Email, UNHCR Algeria, 23 March 2025.

¹⁹ Permanent Mission of Algeria to the United Nations in Geneva, *Fiche, comportant les principales informations, en relation avec les pratiques de pushbacks et leur impact sur les droits de l'homme des migrants*, 20 January 2021. Accessed 23 November 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/3z9xybdu>

²⁰ Sara Guillet, *Asylum and migration in the Maghreb: Country fact sheet Algeria*, EuroMed Rights, 2012. Accessed 16 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3br7sda4>

The wording of the 1963 decree implies that the state favours Algerian law over the Geneva Convention, as the researcher Salim Chena explained in a 2011 publication.²¹ While Algeria's constitution evokes the superiority of international treaties, signed by the president, over Algerian law, the Mission's response and the political practice in the country suggest otherwise. The letter, in fact, clearly justifies Algeria's selective application of international refugee law in the context of the state's practices of arbitrary arrest and deportation against people on the move. It argues that the Convention contains a "significant reservation", as its Article 31 states that:

"The Contracting States shall not impose penalties, on account of their illegal entry or presence, on refugees who, coming directly from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened (...), enter or are present in their territory without authorisation."²²

Yet, Algeria's government interprets this article to the effect that "refugees from countries not bordering Algeria are not eligible to apply for asylum in Algeria" and only citizens from neighboring countries would be eligible to do so. This legal twisting, however, ignores that the government consistently violates the non-refoulement principle, enshrined in the Article 33 of the Convention. Authorities do not provide for a legally binding individual assessment of a person's asylum claim before executing an expulsion, which, given the extent of the authorities' arbitrary deportation practices, constitutes a systematic breach of international law. Algeria, however, insists on a politicised application of the law:

²¹ Salim Chena, *L'asile au Maghreb: Quelle reconnaissance pour les exilés subsahariens*, p. 115/116.

²² UNHCR, *Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees*, 1951/1967. Accessed 25 November 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/5ar9b9kc>

"Algeria has always shown effective and unconditional solidarity with refugees. Our country is the land of asylum for the Sahrawi people, who have been dispossessed of their land, the land of asylum for thousands of Palestinians, the land of asylum for Syrians."

The choice of which refugees to receive—which, until today, corresponds with the aforementioned quote—has always been part of “the anti-imperialist strategies of Algerian foreign policy.” The state’s support for the decolonisation of Western Sahara remains “one of the few remnants of Algeria’s anti-imperialist period” and is “much more a tool of foreign policy than a purely ‘peaceful and humanitarian’ act”, as Chena framed it.²³ In fact, the recognition practices of UNHCR and BAPRA clearly reflect this appropriation of international refugee law. While 173,600 Sahraouis and 7,866 Syrians have been granted refugee status by UNHCR and BAPRA, the number of people of other nationalities recognised as asylum-seekers and refugees has always been low in Algeria and accounts today for less than 3,000 people.²⁴

Whereas UNHCR is generally well aware that transferring refugee responsibility to authoritarian states poses “a potential risk vis-à-vis human rights standards”²⁵, the reset of Algeria’s refugee regime appears to have been in the making since 2020. The Algerian constitution of 2008 contained a short, vague article regarding the right of asylum, which was retained in the amended 2016 version.²⁶ It can also be found in the 2020 revision of the constitution, but is now preceded by two additional sentences:

²³ Salim Chena, *L’asile au Maghreb: Quelle reconnaissance pour les exilés subsahariens*, p. 118 and 120.

²⁴ UNHCR, *Algeria fact sheet*, January 2024. Accessed 3 December 2024, bit.ly/4jHuZwQ

²⁵ UNHCR, *UNHCR country strategy evaluation: Egypt – Final report*, June 2021. Accessed 20 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/566zwpz5>

²⁶ People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria, *Constitution de la Republique Algerienne Democratique et Populaire*, JORADP, March 2016. Accessed 1 December 2024, <https://www.joradp.dz/TRV/Fcons.pdf>

"Any foreigner who is lawfully on the national territory enjoys the protection of the law in respect of his person and property. No one may be extradited except by virtue of a duly ratified international convention or by law. Under no circumstances may a political refugee who is legally entitled to asylum be handed over or extradited."²⁷

With the asylum law, the government seems to want to provide BAPRA with a stronger mandate. However, neither this law or one like it, nor a BAPRA with expanded powers, will be able to significantly alter Algeria's selective application of the 1967 refugee regime, given the state's decades-long history of using it as an instrument to nurture its foreign policy instead of strictly abiding to its stipulations. People from non-neighboring states, who have entered Algeria irregularly, will have little chance of obtaining asylum or residency in the future—whether or not an asylum law is put in place. The state's twisted interpretation of international law has, meanwhile, considerable implications for its overall handling of migration, in particular regarding its arbitrary arrest, detention and deportation practices against undocumented people.

²⁷ People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, *Constitution de la Republique Algerienne Democratique et Populaire*, JORADP no. 82, 30 December 2020. Accessed 1 December 2024, bit.ly/43JOH4X

The Harga and Algeria's Authoritarian Rollback



In this system, power targets power in order to protect power. All actions must serve the status quo, even if it means squandering a revolutionary tradition based on international solidarity.”²⁸

Thomas Serres, 2019



In February 2019, in a remarkably absurd ceremony, Abdelaziz Bouteflika was once again nominated by his clan within the regime as their candidate for the upcoming presidential election. Due to his visibly fragile health, the 81-year-old, not able to walk or talk since suffering a stroke in 2013, was unable to announce his candidacy himself. In a sports arena in Algiers, packed with regime supporters, an oversize portrait of Bouteflika was presented on stage instead. The following night, small-scale protests erupted in towns and cities in eastern Algeria, the spark that society had long been waiting for. The Hirak had begun. The chant ‘Makesh al-khamsa’ (Algerian Arabic for ‘No to the fifth [mandate]’) would continuously echo through the streets for the months to come.

On 2 April, after six weeks of countrywide mass protests, the military under Chief of Staff Ahmed Gaïd Salah ousted Bouteflika. His allies within ‘le pouvoir’ (French for ‘the power’, referring to the opaque net of regime affiliates) were arrested, prosecuted and sentenced to partly severe prison terms. Despite the blatant counter-revolutionary

²⁸ Thomas Serres, *Algeria, where is your African revolution?* Jadaliyya, 14 March 2019.

events evolving henceforth, however, the Hirak was unable to maintain its mobilisation. In March 2020, the coronavirus pandemic eventually forced the movement to cease its marches altogether. The realigned regime, now led by army chief Saïd Chengriha and President Tebboune, exploited the pandemic to crack down on the Hirak. Protesters, activists, civil society and journalists were criminalised, intimidated or forced to flee the country. The Hirak was over, the spirit of euphoria lost to resignation.

Prior to the Hirak, the hargha toward Spain had virtually exploded. Frustration over the social and economic turmoil was ever-present in society at the time. The Hirak had sparked hope across generations that the state's economic and social mismanagement could be collectively turned upside down and that the regime's elites, clinging to power nearly uncontested since Algeria's independence, could be challenged. However, the Hirak turned out to be only a brief disruption in the reign of an opaque web of regime cronies and rival factions in the state and security apparatus. When authorities reopened the land, air and maritime borders in 2021, after a year of corona-related border shutdowns, the hargha exploded once again.

By 2021, le pouvoir had firmly reestablished its uncontested grip on power; realigned in terms of individuals in charge and, in contrast to the Bouteflika era, from now on uncompromising in its handling of any kind of dissent. After Bouteflika's ouster, Gaïd Salah had not only neutralised Bouteflika's clan within the regime, but also purged the second most powerful faction of le pouvoir, led by ex-intelligence chief Mohamed 'Tewfik' Mediène. Shortly after Gaïd Salah elevated his protégé Tebboune to the presidency in the rigged election of December 2019, however, he died of a heart attack. His successor at the army's helm, Saïd Chengriha, has been in charge alongside Tebboune ever since, redirecting the power struggle within the elite toward an opaque non-public sphere.

The Hirak was not only a popular uprising against the 'issaba' (Algerian Arabic for 'gang' and a commonly used term for the regime), but also

an event providing the background noise for the regime's internal power struggles. In view of the collapse of oil and gas revenues since 2014, rival regime factions, formerly bound to a fragile truce overseen by Bouteflika, increasingly took action against each other. In a classic rentier state manner, and with Bouteflika absent since his 2013 stroke, regime factions intensified their tug-of-war over access to the dwindling oil and gas rents.



Algerians could only stand idly by – until the Hirak. Since the latter's defeat, only one option remained for many people, fully in line with a slogan that went viral on social media at that time: "First plan Hirak, second plan harga." The image of a prosperous 'New Algeria' after the departure of Bouteflika, propagated by Tebboune and the regime ever since, is strongly contradicted by the media reports about the increasing number of people once again burning Algeria's borders. In 2021, authorities started to crack down on the harga.

Previously, authorities were somewhat tolerant of Algerians crossing irregularly to Spain or Italy, but took rigorous action against intercepted groups when non-Algerians were caught among them.

If only Algerians were apprehended, courts usually handed down mild sentences on probation or fines, and authorities released arrested people after a few days. Yet, when foreigners were arrested, prosecution and judiciary cracked down harshly on the entire group, often sentencing alleged smugglers and Algerian harraga to severe prison terms on smuggling or trafficking charges. From now on, the harga from the Algerian coast turned almost exclusively Algerian. Non-Algerians had to travel to Morocco, Tunisia or Libya to irregularly cross toward Europe.

However, the winds have changed. Since 2021, authorities have become visibly tougher around the most important departure points: near Oran in western Algeria, close to the Spanish coast; and in the region of Annaba, in the proximity of the Italian islands of Sardinia and Sicily. Beach patrols have been expanded and police controls of people traveling on roads near well-known departure spots intensified around Oran, in particular in Cap Falcon, Aïn el-Turk and Canastel, and in the neighboring ‘wilayas’ (Arabic for ‘province’) of Aïn Temouchent and Mostaganem. Authorities even erected concrete walls along coastal roads in Aïn el-Turk to prevent people from carrying boats to the beach. In Annaba’s Sidi Salem, a district previously often-frequented by harraga, strong police presence makes it increasingly difficult to set sail. Apprehended harraga are now prosecuted more harshly, regardless of their nationality. Authorities also restricted the sale of boats and engines, with their legal purchase now conditional on the possession of a fishing license. Those who manage to purchase them nevertheless face confiscation and prosecution.

The self-organised harga was previously, by far, the most common way of collectively burning Algerian maritime borders. It has now become more difficult. Smuggling networks have become ever-present in the country’s north, rather than only the south. Security officials, meanwhile, are said to sell boats and engines, previously confiscated, for personal profit. The harga has also become more deadly. The wilayas most affected by the renewed harga boom are

Annaba and Oran, but also Algiers, Béjaïa, Jijel and Boumerdès – since 2020, boats increasingly steer from central Algeria to the Balearic Islands, on a longer and more dangerous route. Maria Ángeles Colsa-Herrera, director of the International Centre for Missing Migrants (CIPIMD), a Spanish NGO that documents shipwrecks and assists in the identification of deceased harraga, elaborates:

"Until 2023, fiber boats leaving Algeria for Spain mostly carried ten to 13 people. Ever since, smugglers often overload the boats with up to 23 people. This has caused more shipwrecks in the past years. Additionally, since the Spanish Coast Guards have intensified their controls near Malaga and Almería, more and more people head to the Balearic islands from central Algeria in order to avoid these patrols."²⁹

Algeria's Gendarmerie Nationale—a police force subordinated to the Ministry of Defense and in charge of security in non-urban areas—continues to regularly report about dismantled smuggling networks and seized boats or engines. In December 2024, the gendarmerie announced the establishment of a specialised unit, set up to “combat migrant smuggling and human trafficking” across the country.³⁰ The state is now increasingly busy with combating a flourishing smuggling business whose expansion the state itself has encouraged to thrive.

²⁹ Interview, Maria Ángeles Colsa-Herrera, February 2025.

³⁰ Radio Algérienne, *Arrestation de 10 individus et saisie de 7 embarcations utilisées dans le trafic de migrants à Alger*, 14 December 2024. Accessed 23 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/5n89fy2n>

Regional Alliances against People on the Move



A serious identity crisis fuels violent assertions, including the violent rejection of the ‘foreigner’, when a new ‘other’, the immigrant in a land of emigration, bursts in and confronts Algerian society with a new otherness.”³¹

Ali Bensaâd, 2009



In April 2025, a short video went viral, allegedly showing a convoy of 400 buses, escorted by Algerian security forces to the country’s southern borders. Although the number of buses has been strongly exaggerated, a staggering 4,975 people were expelled to the small town of Assamaka in northern Niger in the following three weeks, Nigerien state media reported. The deportations were preceded by vast arrest campaigns in numerous Algerian cities since early April. “It’s really crazy here at the moment, the police have taken everyone in after breaking up a lot of homes and taking all the migrants inside”, reports a man from Cameroon shortly after he managed to escape a police raid in the coastal city of Oran.³² Officers vandalised homes and destroyed or confiscated personal belongings. Authorities staged such raids in multiple other cities across the country.

Simultaneously, the Tunisian National Guard had started to violently evict thousands of people living in makeshift camps in the olive groves of the municipalities of El-Amra and Jebeniana north of

³¹ Ali Bensaâd, *L’immigration en Algérie: Une réalité prégnante et son occultation officielle*, Paris 2009, p. 29.

³² Interview, anonymous, April 2025.

Sfax. Government officials and the state-affiliated press labeled the eviction a health-related humanitarian ‘evacuation’. Anyone who did not register with the border regime service provider International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for coerced expulsion procedures (‘voluntary returns’ in the euphemistic official parlance) would be arrested and deported, officials of the National Guard and the Red Crescent had told the residents of the camps prior to the eviction. By late April, at least 9,000 people had been displaced from the camps.³³



Screenshot of a video, showing an expulsion convoy to Tamanrasset

³³ TAP, *Security forces continue dismantling sub-Saharan migrant camps in Jebeniana and el-Amra*, 24 April 2025. Accessed 25 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n9b2ya7>

At the same time, accelerated arrest campaigns were also reported in several parts of Libya. According to Alarme Phone Sahara (APS), an activist network that documents expulsions to Niger, at least 792 people were deported from Libya to northern Niger in less than a month.³⁴ Simultaneously, Tunisian authorities expelled an unconfirmed number of people, earlier arrested in Sfax and Tunis, to the wilaya of Tebessa in Algeria. The Tunisian National Guard, Libyan militias and Algerian security forces have been coordinating their crackdowns against people on the move since April 2024. In that month, Tebboune, Tunisia's President Kaïs Saïed and Mohamed al-Menfi, who governs parts of western Libya, met in Tunis and agreed to increasingly align their (anti-)migration policies henceforth. Just weeks later, the interior ministers of the three states met with their Italian counterpart in Rome to expand the coordination of migration controls in the framework of a joint alliance with Italy. A second meeting of the quadrilateral alliance convened in April 2025 in Naples.³⁵

This increasingly institutionalised coordination of reprisals against people on the move was triggered by Tunisia's sudden turnaround on migration control in early 2023. Up until then, undocumented people in Tunisia were kept in a state of manufactured precarity—similar to other northern African countries—but the Tunisian state remained mostly passive and only deported people to Algeria or Libya in some isolated cases. Since 2023, however, mass deportations to the southern and western borders have become routine in Tunisia, too. According to the World Organisation against Torture (OMCT), authorities deported more than 9,000 people to the Tunisian-Algerian border and at least 7,000 people to Libya in 2024.³⁶ Some of those

³⁴ Alarme Phone Sahara, *792 people deported from Libya to Niger in less than a month*, 25 April 2025. Accessed 2 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5xv6v763>

³⁵ Algerian Ministry of Interior, *Deuxième sommet quadripartite à Naples*, 13 April 2025. Accessed 8 May 2025, bit.ly/4kMQpcA

³⁶ OMCT, *Torture roads: Mapping of violations suffered by people on the move in Tunisia*, Volume 3, 2025. Accessed 1 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4uybbsmh>

deported to Algeria were arrested by Algerian security forces after crossing the border and expelled to Niger or Libya in so-called ‘chain deportations’, as confirmed by OMCT and APS.

Authorities in all three states have also shut down or criminalised a significant portion of the civil support and aid infrastructure for undocumented people on their respective territories. In Algeria, almost all organisations that had previously campaigned for the rights of people on the move—above all the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADDH) and the Youth Action Rally (RAJ)—were banned by courts in 2022. Aid NGOs such as Doctors of the World (MDM) and Caritas, which provided health services and emergency aid, were also forced to shut their doors.³⁷ While the closure of civic space in Algeria materialised in the context of the counter-revolutionary dynamics after the Hirak and affected a wide range of associations, NGOs in Tunisia and Libya were closed down deliberately due to their work with people on the move. In Tunisia, the state has since 2023 shut down several NGOs that offered emergency accommodation, medical assistance and legal advice, and has criminalised their leaders. In Libya, at least ten NGOs working with people on the move were forced to shut down in April 2025.³⁸

Due to the severity of the recent crackdowns against people on the move across Algeria and the destruction of a once functioning safety net for those in need, people increasingly approach the IOM office in the Algiers district of Ben Aknoun instead, either for emergency assistance or for ‘voluntary returns’. However, as IOM is overwhelmed by the demand, hundreds of people are camping along the narrow street in front of the office; authorities appear to only tolerate such gatherings in Ben Aknoun. Today, the state appears firm in its policy of

³⁷ Leïla Berrato, *En Algérie, les pressions de l’administration tétanisent le monde l’associatif*, *Vatican News*, 13 October 2022. Accessed 2 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/48ecedwf>

³⁸ Gavin Blackburn, *Libya cracks down on aid groups accused of helping migrants settle in the country*, *EuroNews*, 8 April 2025. Accessed 27 April, <https://tinyurl.com/yt33wy8j>

preventing people from setting up informal camps, which are similar to those near Sfax, in the Algiers area of Dély Ibrahim and in Magnia, all evicted by police in 2025 and 2006/2007 respectively.³⁹ At that time, the state had introduced a policy of geographically dispersing people on the move, designed to fragment their presence and visibility in urban areas. Since 2023, the Tunisian state has applied a similar approach. Recently, north of Sfax, and in April 2024—immediately after the Tunis summit—police dispersed the camps of people on the move in front of IOM’s and UNHCR’s Tunis offices.

³⁹ Salim Chena, *L’asile au Maghreb: Quelle reconnaissance pour les exilés subsahariens*, p. 140.



We are not racists, we are Africans, North Africans and Mediterraneans.”⁴⁰

Abdelmajid Tebboune, 2017



The increasing difficulty of irregularly setting sail from Tunisia since 2023 means non-Algerian harraga now often leave from Algeria instead. The Algerian state’s response to this trend has been firmly repressive. In the past few years, authorities have applied a series of new measures, many of which are aimed at suppressing the movements of people within Algeria – and not only along its shores. A man from Cameroon interviewed in Tunis, who lived in Algeria in the 2010s, recounts:

"It used to be easy to travel within Algeria. It was easy to buy bus tickets or tickets for the interwilaya [intercity taxis] in Tamanrasset or other cities in the Sahara and travel to Algiers. No question was asked at checkpoints. But, since the raids against us began in 2016, we are more reliant on smugglers. Or you have to walk long distances on foot."⁴¹

Encouraging racial profiling tactics, authorities instructed public transport companies to carry out residency and ID checks on people on the move when they try to purchase travel tickets. In 2017,

⁴⁰ Algérie Patriotique, Tebboune: “La présence des déplacés africains sur le territoire algérien sera réglementée”, 24 June 2017. Accessed 3 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mr37azm2>

⁴¹ Interview, anonymous, November 2024.

the Ministry of Transport issued just such a directive, as part of a large-scale crackdown on people on the move. Not all authorities complied with the instruction,⁴² but today's local administrations are less capable of resisting such directives given the fierce purges that were pursued in the public service since 2020. A young Ivorian man recounts how he tried in vain to take a train in Oran in 2024.⁴³ The station's staff refused to sell him a ticket. Locals, however, eventually helped him to purchase a bus ticket instead and leave for Algiers

A former employee of an NGO reports that people are now increasingly stuck in Tamanrasset and other cities in the south due to the newly applied restrictions: "There are smuggling networks that bring people to the north, but it has become much more difficult to move because the police are more rigorous in their controls on roads."⁴⁴ A woman from Guinea, interviewed remotely, confirms this and recounts her journey to the north. Smugglers dropped her and her fellow travelers off before reaching a police checkpoint south of Ghardaïa in November 2024. They had to walk on foot around the city before being picked up by the smugglers north of Ghardaïa the following day.⁴⁵

Until 2016, the arrest and expulsion campaigns were mostly temporary crackdowns. Ever since, however, they have been more frequent and better coordinated. A woman from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), who lived in Algeria in the 2010s, explains:

"Everything was fine and calm, until 2016. Then the disaster began. Back then, there was the first raid in Bouchbouk [an area near Dély Ibrahim in Algiers]. Ever since, the raids have not stopped."⁴⁶

⁴² In 2017, the wilaya of Mostaganem refused to implement the discriminatory directive in response to a public outcry on social media. *Dernière Infos d'Algérie*, *La direction des transports de Mostaganem annule la directive sur les migrants africains*, 28 September 2017. Accessed 2 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2k7bmrts>

⁴³ Interview, anonymous, March 2025.

⁴⁴ Interview, anonymous, September 2024.

⁴⁵ Interview, anonymous, February 2025.

⁴⁶ Interview, anonymous, January 2025.

In 2017, shortly after the government introduced more severe crackdowns, the presidency's chief of staff Ahmed Ouyahia said on TV that "these illegal foreigners are a source of crime, drugs and other plagues."⁴⁷ The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdelkader Messahel, framed "migrants" as a "threat to national security" shortly after. These upfront racist comments by the upper ranks of government coincided with a xenophobic campaign that, under the hashtag "No to Africans in Algeria", went viral on social media at that time. Activists believed the campaign was fueled or even initiated by factions of the *issaba* to distract the public from the socioeconomic crises, whereas others believed it was used as a tool by regime affiliates to exert pressure on rival clans within *le pouvoir*.



Footage of the April 2025 expulsions to Assamaka

© Radio Télévision du Niger

For those in power, the latter tactic was certainly not new. Immigration had already been used in the early 2000s "during the clashes between Bouteflika, who aspired to a second term in office, and those in power

⁴⁷ Lounes Guemache, *Ouyahia: l'immigration africaine est "source de crime, de drogue et de plusieurs autre fléaux"*, Tout sur l'Algérie, 9 July 2017. Accessed 18 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/239xxvxf>

who did not want that.”⁴⁸ At that time, rival camps in the regime attacked the government for being lax on immigration, as the interior minister was a Bouteflika ally. The government responded by carrying out mass round-ups against non-Algerian harrara, Ali Bensaâd recounts.

In 2017, Ahmed Ouyahia was promoted and appointed prime minister, just weeks after he condemned foreign “plagues”. Since then, the deportation campaigns have been regular, well coordinated, and follow clear patterns. Raids often take place in neighborhoods known for hosting undocumented people or in workplaces such as construction sites. After the police arrest people, they usually confiscate their personal belongings, in particular phones and cash, and regularly destroy their IDs, passports or UNHCR status documents. Testimonies recently collected by APS accuse Algerian security forces of sexual violence against women, including rape.⁴⁹ OMCT reports that female people on the move face the risk of being sexually assaulted by Algerian security forces after being arrested near the Tunisian border.⁵⁰

UNHCR’s Algiers office is well aware that the authorities regularly expel people registered as asylum-seekers or refugees. In the past, they have expressed “deep concern about the arrest and collective expulsion of asylum-seekers.”⁵¹ A recent response by UNHCR to a press inquiry, however, remains vague, claiming that the agency “does not

⁴⁸ Ali Bensaâd, *L’immigration en Algérie: Une réalité prégnante et son occultation officielle*, Paris 2009, p. 39.

⁴⁹ Alarme Phone Sahara, *Assamaka: Testimonies of deportation from Algeria*, 8 March 2025. Accessed 12 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/y3ctx8dz>

⁵⁰ OMCT, *Torture roads: Mapping of violations suffered by people on the move in Tunisia*, Volume 2, 2024. Accessed 1 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4zvcamsu>

⁵¹ UNHCR Algeria stated in a reply to press request on 13 October 2020 that since September 2020, more than 80 asylum-seekers had been expelled. In a 2022 publication, UNHCR confirmed that more than 120 people of concern to the agency have been expelled in 2021, compared to more than 300 in 2020. UNHCR, *Algeria fact sheet*, February 2022. Accessed 3 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/3w26ntu9>

have comprehensive data on expulsions.”⁵² However, like politicians using racism and xenophobia for factional battles, the destruction by Algerian security forces of IDs or UNHCR status documents, and expelling UNHCR-registered people, is anything but new: it has been reported since the early 2000s. A Cameroonian man arrested in Oran in 2023 and subsequently deported to Niger recounts how the expulsions are often carried out:

"Algerian neighbors brought the cops, so we were arrested, had our phones taken and were housed for a few days in an apartment. After a few days—I am not sure anymore how many days— we were put in a bus to Tamanrasset. There were 13 or 14 buses, the gendarmerie and the Red Cross were with us. Buses from other cities joined us, from Tebessa, Tlemcen, Ghardaïa. We stayed for a few days in Tamanrasset before they left us in the desert.”⁵³

He reentered Algeria shortly after being expelled to Assamaka—as many people do after being deported to Niger. Meanwhile, Algeria’s deportation machinery is running at full steam. The latest peak in deportations comes after their gradual expansion since the end of the coronavirus lockdowns in 2020. During the pandemic, Algeria temporarily suspended the deportations to Niger altogether. In September 2020, however, they resumed on a massive scale. According to APS, at least 6,500 people were expelled to Assamaka in that month alone. Figures published by IOM, Doctors without Borders (MSF) and APS indicate that Algeria has annually deported significantly more people to Niger since 2020 than in the years prior to the pandemic. IOM reports a total of 27,652 people expelled to Niger in 2021 and 31,110 in 2022.⁵⁴ MSF confirmed a total of 27,208

⁵² Email, UNHCR Algeria, 20 March 2025.

⁵³ Interview, anonymous, November 2024.

⁵⁴ IOM/MMC/UNHCR, *On this journey no one cares if you live or die*, Volume 2, 2024. Accessed 26 February 2025, bit.ly/3HqxXbn

deportees in 2021 and a staggering 36,083 the following year.⁵⁵ At least 26,031 people were deported to Niger in 2023 and 31,404 in 2024, according to APS.⁵⁶ Whatever the precise figure, the numbers are vast.

Expulsions to Libya also continue. Between early 2024 and February 2025, at least 1,800 people were intercepted by Libyan militias at the Algerian border and detained in the Libyan city of Ghadamès.⁵⁷ The Algerian government and security bodies only sporadically publish figures on arrests and deportations of people on the move. But the state does collect adequate statistics, according to a 2022 academic research paper by Sofiane Timtaoucine.⁵⁸ Security officials of the wilayas collect the corresponding data, including the number of detained foreigners, and share this data with the Ministry of Interior on a daily basis. Once the number of to-be-deported detainees accumulates, bus convoys to Tamanrasset are carried out. Fingerprints and photos of detainees are usually taken in Tamanrasset prior to their forced expulsion to Niger, the paper reads.

The state possesses a wide array of retention facilities across the country, ranging from police stations and gendarmerie bases, to apartments and detention centres. Apartments are used as informal and temporary places of detention in case of overcrowding in formal facilities; detention centres are often specifically designed to hold large numbers of inmates prior to their deportation to the south, and are officially called ‘waiting centres’. Those transit facilities are in use in larger cities in the north, such as Algiers, Oran or Blida, and close to expulsion points, such as Tamanrasset (for deportations to Mali and Niger), Djanet (Libya) or Reggane (Mali).

⁵⁵ Sofian Philip Naceur, *Ruthless, illegal and dangerous*, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 29 March 2023. Accessed 20 Januar 2025, bit.ly/4kRkxDV

⁵⁶ Alarme Phone Sahara, 30,000 people deported from Algeria to Niger, 31 December 2024. Accessed 10 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2cm99fyy>

⁵⁷ Interview, anonymous, February 2025.

⁵⁸ Sofiane Timtaoucine, *The Sisyphus complex of Sub-Saharan migrants in Algeria*, American University of Beirut, September 2022. Accessed 1 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/56zk7br3>

In Oran, arrested people on the move are mostly detained in a camp in Bir el-Djir or in a smaller centre in Sidi el-Houari near the city's commercial port. For years, authorities made extensive use of a former tourism camp in Zéralda, in the western suburbs of Algiers. It held large numbers of people prior to their collective transfer to Tamanrasset. Today, the main facilities in the Algiers region for detaining people prior to transfer to the south are a centre in Dély Ibrahim⁵⁹ in Algiers, and a retention facility in Blida.⁶⁰ The centre in Tamanrasset, notoriously known for holding large numbers of people prior to their forced expulsion to Assamaka, features badly-maintained residential containers and is run by the gendarmerie. As with other features of Algeria's migration control infrastructure, the country's retention practices are not new. Alongside Libya, Algeria was already considered the most important player in migrant detention in the region in the 2000s.⁶¹

The legal basis for the criminalisation of movement and the state's arrest, detention and deportation practices against harraga are two amendments, adopted in 2008 and 2009. Both were ratified after the adoption of similar laws by neighboring countries in 2003 and 2004,⁶² partly in response to EU pressure to crack down on the harraga across the region.

Law 08-11, adopted on 25 June 2008, applies exclusively to foreigners and criminalises the irregular entry and exit of a person deemed a threat to "public order, state security or the diplomatic interests of the Algerian state." It legalises expulsions if the authorities regard a person a threat to public order or the security of the state, and imposes

⁵⁹ Amnesty International, Algeria: arbitrariness Detained Asylum Seekers at Risk of Imminent, 8 February 2021, accessed 1 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/35dzkymm>

⁶⁰ Global Detention Project, *Algeria country report*, Geneva, 2020. Accessed 15 May 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/3kef8jr4>

⁶¹ Ali Bensaâd, *L'immigration en Algérie: Une réalité prégnante et son occultation officielle*, Paris 2009, p. 38.

⁶² After Morocco had adopted such legislation in 2003, Libya and Tunisia followed suit in 2004.

sanctions on transport companies or individuals for aiding a person to enter the country irregularly.⁶³ Article 46 of the law provides for the confiscation of all objects used to commit the offense, while Article 37 allows the establishment of so-called ‘waiting centres’ to detain people prior to their expulsion. Violations to the law are subject to fines and prison terms of two to five years, and, in exceptional cases, of up to 20 years. It stipulates, nevertheless, that a person has up to five days to appeal an expulsion order, and it grants people the right to contact their consular representative and a lawyer, provisions that are systematically violated by the authorities. The law is, according to the government, currently “in the process of being amended.”⁶⁴

Law 09-01 is a reform of Algeria’s penal code. It came into force in March 2009 and applies to Algerians and foreigners alike. The amendment makes irregular entries and departures outside regular border crossing points a criminal offense punishable by prison terms of two to six months and fines. The law additionally criminalises human smuggling and trafficking in persons, for which it imposes prison sentences of up to 20 years.⁶⁵ Algeria’s legal arsenal to control migration and the securitisation of movements have created “a cycle of entrapment within the country” that is “Sisyphean in nature,” in the words of Timtaoucine. Many of those expelled immediately return to Algeria, only to be often arrested, stripped of all belongings and expelled again.

⁶³ People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria, *Loi 08-11 du 25 juin 2008 relative aux conditions d’entrée, de séjour et de circulation des étrangers en Algérie*, JORADP no. 36, 2 July 2008. Accessed 11 January 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/33v6ypp8>

⁶⁴ Permanent Mission of Algeria to the United Nations in Geneva, *Fiche, comportant les principales informations, en relation avec les pratiques de pushbacks et leur impact sur les droits de l’homme des migrants*, 20 January 2021.

⁶⁵ People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria, *Loi 09-01 du 25 février 2009 modifiant et complétant l’ordonnance no. 66-156 du 8 juin 1966 portant code pénal*, JORADP no. 15, 8 mars 2009. Accessed 11 January 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ewsjnxr8>



*We take advantage of this cheap available workforce, but we refuse to grant them any safety net, in the case of a work-related accident, for example. This population has no choice but to accept informal jobs, and to be maintained in a position of illegality.*⁶⁶

Nabila Moussaoui, 2019



In April 2025, during a visit to the southwestern wilaya of B  char, Abdelmajid Tebboune indicated the possibility that his government would facilitate access to Algeria's labour market for migrant workers. In a meeting with civil society representatives, he said:

"We have no problem with sub-Saharan migrants working in Algeria. The construction sites are there and people need labour, particularly in agriculture. Provided that their entry into the country is happening in an organised manner."⁶⁷

In 2017, during a three-month term as Prime Minister that set a record for its brevity, Tebboune promised to issue residence permits

⁶⁶ Thomas Serres, *Algeria, where is your African revolution?* Jadaliyya, 14 March 2019.

⁶⁷ Madjid Makedhi, *Tebboune   voque l'emploi de la main-d'  uvre subsaharienne: "Nous n'avons pas d'objection"*, El Watan, 27 April 2025. Accessed 27 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yxd8k59v>

to undocumented people and grant them access to formal jobs.⁶⁸ However, a month later, Tebboune was suddenly dismissed and, in yet another episode of the clash of clans, replaced by Ouyahia in the prime minister's office

Immigration to Algeria, meanwhile, has substantially transformed over the past decades, to the degree that the rentier economy is today dependent on labour immigration. A 2023 research study by the Algerian Centre de recherche en économie appliquée pour le développement (CREAD) found “a downward trend in the number of legal migrant workers and a significant increase in the number of foreign workers with no social security cover.”⁶⁹ For years, fewer high-skilled workers have been migrating to Algeria, while a significant increase in low-skilled workers from mostly African countries has been recorded. According to the study, in 2000, there were only 1,000 legally employed foreigners in Algeria. By 2016, this number had risen to 92,000, but fell to only 20,000 by 2022

A major driver of this shift in Algeria's labour market is, first and foremost, the performance of the oil and gas industry, a sector crucial for state coffers, government spending and the overall development of the economy, including the job market. After independence, well-qualified workers flocked into the country in large numbers. After eight years of bloody war against colonial France, independent Algeria was in dire need of expertise and support from abroad. Engineers and teachers from Egypt and doctors from Cuba were ever-present at that time.

In the early 1970s, just years after the oil and gas industry was nationalised, the government launched large-scale agricultural and industrial projects in the south and increasingly attracted seasonal workers from Mali and Niger to Tamanrasset, Adrar or Djanet. “At

⁶⁸ Algérie Patriotique, Tebboune: “*La présence des déplacés africains sur le territoire algérien sera réglementée*”, 24 June 2017.

⁶⁹ Al-Manach, *Catégories de migrants en Algérie*, CREAD, June 2023. Accessed 2 May 2025, <http://www.almanach-dz.com/index.php?op=fiche&fiche=10091>

the time, the presence of sub-Saharan migrants was well-accepted by locals, notably because communities share common dialects (Tamasheq or Arabic), and had long-standing family or commercial ties”, a 2020 report by Raouf Farrah reads .⁷⁰

However, the economy collapsed in the mid-1980s. The attempt to rapidly industrialise the country by importing ready-made industrial plants had failed. The drop in rent revenues from energy exports accelerated the economic crisis. The government began wielding anti-immigration narratives, and between 1986 and 1988 the authorities cracked down on migrant workers in the south, deporting large numbers of people to Mali and Niger, Farrah writes. Algeria’s rentier state no longer needed its reserve workforce.



Construction site in Centre Ville d'Oran, 2024

© Sofian Philip Naceur

⁷⁰ Raouf Farrah, *Algeria's migration dilemma*, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2020. Accessed 3 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4weszv5c>

In the early 2000s, facilitated by a the rise of oil and gas revenues, the government once again launched extensive infrastructure projects to modernise transportation, secondary industries, housing and agriculture, fueling a countrywide demand for cheap labour. People flocked into southern Algeria again and renewed demand for workers arose, this time primarily in the north. Turkish and Chinese construction companies were awarded countless contracts for public infrastructure projects, but they often brought their own workers. The demand for African labour nevertheless grew substantially, also because young Algerians increasingly emigrated to Europe or elsewhere in search of work or another life. Ever since, the construction, real estate and affiliated sectors have been major employers of informal workers. A former UN employee elaborates:

"It has been a state policy for many years to limit the movement of migrants to the north. However, most of the development and housing projects are up north, because [sarcastically]: why not having a fair distribution of wealth? But when they need African labour, and they repeatedly needed that labour with social housing projects, they turn a blind eye towards their movement up north. If our borders are porous, so is interwilaya travel."⁷¹

Algeria ratified the 1990 Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families in 2005, and does provide for social and legal protection of foreign workers in certain industries. There are also protections for the significant number of foreign students, predominantly from African countries, enrolled at universities across the country. However, the government continues to systematically ignore the precarious situation of thousands of people informally employed on construction sites or who work in sectors such as craft, retail and food and household services

⁷¹ Interview, anonymous, February 2025.

In the late 2000s, Algerian civil society started more profoundly advocating for the rights of undocumented people. This trend culminated in the establishment of the Algeria Migration Platform (PMA) in December 2015, an informal coalition of civil society actors that regularly denounced human rights violations against people on the move. The alliance was composed of the LADDH, the youth association RAJ, humanitarian organisations such as MDM and Caritas, as well as trade unions. Most members of the PMA have been either banned by courts or forced to shut down since 2022, rendering the alliance largely inactive. Only the Autonomous National Union of Public Administration Personnel (SNAPAP) and the Autonomous General Confederation of Workers in Algeria (CGATA) continue to regularly, publicly express solidarity with people on the move and migrant workers, denounce hate speech against Black people, and call the government to regularise migrants workers.⁷²

Due to the near-total civil society and media blackout regarding undocumented people, the authorities' rights violations against people on the move mostly remain unnoticed. Persistently invisible is also the exploitation of people on the move, who either enter Algeria in search of work or who burn the country's borders on their way further north. Combined with the absence of labour protections, public, private and small and medium-sized companies are thus enabled by the state to capitalise on the legal limbo of thousands of people. Many businesses employ undocumented workers in times of crisis as expenses are lower. Others deliberately exploit their precarity, as exemplified by the story of a man from Cameroon who had worked in a plumber's workshop in Sidi Bel Abbès in 2023:

"The company was owned by an Algerian. But he worked with someone from Spain. We were half a dozen people from different countries. The patron did not pay us. He

⁷² Alain Chémali, *Algérie: les "conséquences désastreuses" de la campagne d'expulsion de migrants*, FranceInfo, 19 February 2018. Accessed 1 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ytyp2pk7>

only gave us accommodation, some food and sometimes some dinar for cigarettes, but no salary. When we started to complain, he threatened us and said he would call the police. So I left."⁷³

Public entities benefit from this precarity alongside private companies. In a series of videos filmed by people on the move in Oran in 2023, they document a raid by gendarmerie forces and riot police units on a large construction site, clearly recognisable as a public social housing estate. An anonymous source reported about another raid on a housing estate construction site in the wilaya of Blida, southwest of Algiers, the year before:

"There are huge construction sites here where a lot of migrants are employed. These are public projects. I am aware of one case, where salaries were not paid on payday; the gendarmerie was called instead. This only happens with Algerian companies, Turkish and Chinese [construction] companies bring their own people."⁷⁴

Since the 2000s, so-called 'bourses de travail'—often located at roundabouts where people gather and wait for employers to pick up people for day labour—have been popping up in the outskirts of Algiers and Oran. Low or extremely low pay, arbitrariness by employers with regard to agreed payments and a lack of safety are widespread in those jobs. Exploitation is also to be found in basic areas such as accommodation, transport and brokering, while smugglers and traffickers simultaneously profit from this manufactured informality. While many smugglers operate as mere informal transport businesses, human trafficking has become widespread and some of the networks running the business today constitute a serious criminal threat. This includes those that traffic

⁷³ Interview, anonymous, December 2024.

⁷⁴ Interview, anonymous, March 2025.

children and women from southern Niger to Algeria to beg for money in the streets.⁷⁵

Given the increasing presence of trafficking networks across the country, the government implemented the first national anti-trafficking action plan in 2018 and adopted an anti-trafficking law in 2023.⁷⁶ The new legislation relates to law 09-01, but includes more concrete definitions of what trafficking in persons entails. Interestingly, the Minister of Justice at that time rejected demands by members of parliament to explicitly include “migrant smuggling” in the legislation. “These are two distinct phenomena”, Minister of Justice Abderrachid Tabi said, clarifying that smuggling occurs as a result of a negotiation, whereas trafficking affects vulnerable people deprived of their freedom.⁷⁷

Given this grim reality for many who enter Algeria undocumented and the authorities’ ongoing arrest and deportation practices, Tebboune’s promises regarding labour immigration appear to mirror the European approach, aimed at filtering migration according to economic needs. This goal of regularising and commodifying human movements is clear from his imperative emphasis on the “organised entry” of only those who are needed. Yet, Tebboune’s ‘New Algeria’ still lacks legitimacy and the regime is set to once more compensate for that lack with public infrastructure projects, financed by the hydrocarbon rent, as revenues from oil and gas exports have partially recovered since 2021.

⁷⁵ Thousands of women were identified as victims of human trafficking in the 2010s, subsequently trapped in debt bondage and, as a result, forced into domestic work or prostitution to pay back debts to smugglers. Raouf Farrah, Algeria’s migration dilemma, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2020.

⁷⁶ People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria, Loi 23-04 du 7 mai 2023 relative à la prévention et à la lutte contre la traite des personnes, JORADP no. 32, 9 May 2023. Accessed 16 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3zta4ezj>

⁷⁷ Naïma Djekhar, *Lutte contre la traite des personnes: Adapter la législation nationale aux traités internationaux*, *El Watan*, 27 May 2023. Accessed 16 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mvtafwzc>

Hence, the demand for migrant labour will remain substantial. But instead of criminalising the *harka*, pursuing mass deportations and enabling businesses to capitalize on the precarity of people, the state should proactively integrate precarised people on the move into the economy, whether temporarily or not. It should engage with its African partners regarding migrant labor and human movements, accelerate continental cooperation based on human mobility and sign the AU's Freedom of Movement protocol and the 2009 Kampala Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced People in Africa. To diffuse the distortions of the rentier model, modernise the economy and protect it against external shocks, the state must profoundly turn towards the Global South—politically, economically and with regards to human movements. Algeria's borderlands could be key in this respect. Yet, the situation at some of Algeria's frontiers is currently anything but encouraging.

2.0

BORDERING ALGERIA



Border walls and fences don't work. They are at best a temporary deterrent, a band-aid on deeper socioeconomic and political cracks. These border walls and fences serve as a physical reminder of the persistent efforts to fortify boundaries.”⁷⁸

Jan Bornman, 2024



Algeria's external frontiers are vast. They consist of 1,100 kilometers of Mediterranean coastline and more than 6,300 kilometers of land borders with seven countries: Tunisia, Libya, Niger, Mali, Mauretania, Western Sahara and Morocco. For Algeria's regime, border politics remain key for consolidating the post-colonial state, but also for securing the grip on power of a neocolonial elite. Borders and their fortifications are additionally used as a bargaining chip in the relations with former colonial powers in Europe. For the communities in the borderlands, however, the state's militarisation of borders is grist to the mill of their systemic marginalisation and threatens the lived transborder realities. The anthropologist Nabila Moussaoui argues:

"Considered the only source of income in the border strip, [smuggling work] is, for the state, a solution to the high unemployment in the region. (...) Border [smuggling] is a

⁷⁸ Jan Bornman, *Border politics*, Africa is a country, 9 April 2024. Accessed 14 March 2025, <https://africasacountry.com/2024/04/border-politics>

tolerated and accepted activity in Algerian society. It is a response to an economic crisis.⁷⁹

Since 1962, the state has been pragmatic regarding its southern frontiers, in contrast to the border with Morocco. Rabat's past territorial claims and its 1963 military invasion set a course from which neither state is willing to deviate. In the south, on the other hand, ancient trade routes were revived after Algeria's independence in 1962, connecting trading hubs such as Kidal and Gao in Mali, Agadez in Niger and Ghat in Libya with southern Algerian towns.⁸⁰ Seasonal immigration from Mali emerged in the 1960s. As a result of the war between Islamist insurgents and the Algerian state in the 1990s, however, a different reality has taken hold in southern borderlands. The state had pushed armed groups toward Mali by the early 2000s, making border politics in the south increasingly security-driven. This trend was further accelerated in the 2010s by the uprisings in northern Africa, the wars in Libya and Mali, and the January 2013 terrorist attack on the In Amenas gas plant.

Consequently, the Ministry of Defense took on sole responsibility for security in the south, discharging civilian governors of their border-related competencies (including the power to expel undocumented people) and transferring them to military governors.⁸¹ "Algerian officials often argued that the southern borders have become a hub for transnational crime, including people trafficking, prostitution, arms and drug trafficking, and that terrorists have taken advantage of the migrant flows across border," notes Farrah, summarising the government's justification for this militarisation.⁸²

⁷⁹ Nabila Moussaoui, *Le trabendo ou la mondialisation par la marge*, *Politique africaine* No. 137, 2015, p. 117 – 128. Accessed 8 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ms4mm63v>

⁸⁰ Raouf Farrah, *Algeria's migration dilemma*, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2020.

⁸¹ Federica Zardo/Chiara Loschi, *EU-Algeria (non)cooperation on migration: A tale of two fortresses*, *Mediterranean Politics* 27 (2), 2020. Accessed 5 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/ywfukfpj>

⁸² Raouf Farrah, *Algeria's migration dilemma*, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2020.

Given the increasingly tense relations with Niger and Mali, the acceleration of hostilities with Morocco and Tunisia's new deportation practices, the Algerian state appears today even more bound to a security-driven approach in its borderlands. Accordingly, the state of affairs at Algeria's frontiers is extraordinarily challenging for people who are forced to burn borders to move, as the mapping of Algeria's various border regimes in this section illustrates.

The Mediterranean: "A Merciless Indicator of Failure"



Sovereignty was limited not only by economic dependence, but by demands that they ensure the geo-racialised security of the Global North. Then as now, this demand has reinforced the racially-charged violence of borders. Then as now, subordination to Europe has also left societies in the Maghreb dealing with deeply corrosive social effects.”⁸³

Yasmine Akrimi, 2025



The Algerian coast only turned into a space for burning borders in the 1990s. France started to limit the issuance of work permits to Algerians in the mid-1970s, but until 1994 people were still able to enter European soil without prior authorisation. This was when France imposed a visa regime on Algerians, in the midst of the Algerian state’s counterinsurgency against armed Islamist groups following the 1992 military coup. From then on, Algerians started to burn borders, initially by hiding on US-bound cargo ships or on oil and gas tankers. After more and more Algerians were arrested in US ports, Algerian authorities tightened security in their own ports. In the commercial ports of Oran, Algiers and Béjaïa and the gas terminal in Arzew, surveillance cameras were installed, barbed wire fences erected, and security services started patrolling the premises, rendering them effectively impenetrable in the early 2000s.

⁸³ Yasmine Akrimi, *Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Tunisia: Geo-Racialized Security and the Local Revival of Antiblackness*, Noria Research 14 January 2025. Accessed 1 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/52aewuvf>

Algerians thus started to set sail from beaches instead. From the wilayas of Oran, Mostaganem and Aïn Temouchent, they headed towards Spain; from Annaba, El-Tarf and Skikda towards the Italian islands of Sicily and Sardinia. In 2018, the first maritime crossings from Boumerdès and Béjaïa to the Balearic Islands were recorded. Since 2020, this longer and more dangerous route has become increasingly busy. A record high number of irregular arrivals of 5,846 people in 347 boats occurred in 2024.⁸⁴ This was a tripling of arrivals on the Balearic Islands compared to 2023.



Oran, Algeria

© Sofian Philip Naceur

During this period, the Spanish activist collective Caminando Fronteras has recorded, since 2021, an increasing number of shipwrecks on the routes from Algeria. After counting 231 people missing or confirmed dead in 2020 and 190 the following year,⁸⁵ the number skyrocketed in

⁸⁴ RTVE, *Más de 5.000 migrantes han ilegado en patera a Baleares en 2024*, 28 November 2024. Accessed 2 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/yfmrndac>

⁸⁵ Ca-minando Fronteras, *Monitoring the right to life 2021, 2022*. Accessed 10 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/mscu5j34>

2021, the collective's annual reports show. 464 people were reported issing in 2022⁸⁶ and 517 in 2024.⁸⁷ Since 2018, at least 2,558 people have been reported missing or confirmed dead on the routes from Algeria to Spain.

The profile of harraga leaving from Algeria shifted significantly since the early 2000s. The Algerian harraga was predominantly composed of young men for more than a decade, but the proportion of women, elderly people and entire families has increased dramatically since 2017. The number of university degree holders also grew substantially, partly fueled by bleak employment opportunities and the government's failure to diversify the economy and create non-oil jobs.

Time and again, civil society expressed its solidarity with the families of deceased or missing harraga and denounced the government's response to shipwrecks. Collectives of relatives of the disappeared and multiple NGOs have been widely involved in harraga-related struggles since the 2000s. However, with the counter-revolutionary crackdown against the Hirak, muzzling civic life, public gatherings or campaigns about the harraga have become a rare phenomenon. In 2023, as a response to a shipwreck off the coast of Tipaza, the Tizi Ouzou office of the Kabylia-based party Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) issued a statement, calling the disappearances of Algerian youth at sea a "merciless indicator of failure" of the regime's overall rule. The statement denounces the death of those who "try to cross the Mediterranean to Europe in search of a future and a horizon that the so-called new Algeria is incapable of offering them" and continues:

"True to its logic, le pouvoir has found no better response then repression by criminalising the harraga. A policy of total

⁸⁶ Ca-minando Fronteras, *Monitoring the right to life 2022, 2023*. Accessed 10 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/hjhtmdn6>

⁸⁷ Ca-minando Fronteras, *Monitoring the right to life 2024, 2024*. Accessed 29 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/wczpwb3f>

repression that drives our young people to flee cannot be a solution to keep them here."⁸⁸

Meanwhile, Algerian authorities are using the *harga* as a bargaining chip in their relations with Spain and Italy, either by suppressing human movements or by acting passively and, thereby, permitting departures. Given the historically close ties between the governments in Algiers and Rome, the crackdown on the *harga* towards Sicily and Sardinia has been more consistent since the 2000s. However, with smugglers increasingly providing for the non-Algerian *harga* from the country's shores since 2023, irregular departures towards Italy have once again risen. Italian investments in Algerian assembly plants for military equipment, large-scale agricultural projects in the Sahara and gas exploration and exploitation have ensured more consistent patrolling by Algeria on the route towards Italy compared to the western route. Nevertheless, arrival numbers are on the rise again since 2024. Yet, according to the reply by the Italian Ministry of Interior to a freedom of information request, the vast majority of arrivals in Sardinia are Algerians:⁸⁹

| | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 (13 May) |
|---|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|------------------|
| Arrivals from Algeria | 1,390 | 1,549 | 1,389 | 620 | 1,383 | 245 |
| Arrivals from Algeria in Sardinia | 1,378 | 1,544 | 1,383 | 599 | 1,383 | 245 |
| Algerian citizens disembarked in Sardinia | 1,363 | 1,496 | 1,365 | 588 | 1,366 | 241 |
| Non-Algerian citizens disembarked in Sardinia | 15 | 48 | 18 | 11 | 17 | 4 |

⁸⁸ Le Matin d'Algérie, *Harga*: “Le pouvoir feint d’ignorer un phénomène qui endeuille de nombreuses familles”, selon le RCD, 11 June 2023. Accessed 2 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/32hkh4m9>

⁸⁹ Freedom of Information request, Ministero dell’Interno, 23 May 2025.

Algeria's relations with Spain, meanwhile, remain prone to conflict and the weaponisation of migration. For years, Madrid's balancing act in its relations with Morocco and Algeria allowed the maintenance of good relations with both governments. However, Rabat's horse trading with the Trump administration in 2020 has reshuffled the cards. The US government recognised Morocco's claims over occupied Western Sahara in return for Rabat's normalisation of relations with the Israeli occupation. Spain dropped its support for Western Saharan independence and sided with Morocco, especially after the latter intensified its weaponisation of migration at the borders with the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.⁹⁰

In 2021, Algiers suspended its diplomatic relations with Rabat and severed official ties with the Spanish government a year later. Although Algeria quietly reinstated its ambassador to Madrid in 2023 after a 19-month vacancy, relations remain frosty. As a result, Algeria halted energy exports to Spain via the two fossil gas pipelines, and redirected its exports entirely towards Italy. Nevertheless, despite Algeria's sometimes lax handling of the *harga* on the maritime routes toward Spain, bilateral cooperation with Madrid against drug trafficking and human smuggling continues and was recently reinforced again, with high-level consultations on the matter restarting in 2025.

In the meantime, Morocco's intensified crackdown on the *harga* toward Spain has fueled yet another shift in migration dynamics. The rising cost for the crossing from Morocco has incentivised more and more people to depart from Algeria instead, including many Moroccans. Accordingly, an increasing number of Moroccan *harraga* have been arrested by Algerian authorities in recent years, and subsequently detained, prosecuted and later deported, explains Hassane Ammari, President of the Moroccan Association Providing Assistance for Migrants in Vulnerable Situations (AMSV). "We are currently dealing with 479 files of Moroccan citizens being detained

⁹⁰ Algérie Press Service, *Le Maroc pointé du doigt après l'assaut de 3700 migrants à l'enclave espagnols de Melilla*, 6 March 2022. Accessed 1 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/5n8drzb6>

in Algeria. In 2020, it was only 96," Ammari says, and elaborates further:

"If caught at the beach, Moroccan migrants are usually charged with leaving the territory illegally and mostly sentenced to six to eleven months in prison. Those identified as traffickers or accused of organising the clandestine migration get four to ten years."⁹¹

Against this background, deportations of Moroccans by Algerian authorities via the land border crossing between the Moroccan town of Oujda and Maghnia in Algeria have skyrocketed since 2021. They reached a staggering 1,112 in the period from 2022 to 2024, according to Ammari. Prior to the COVID19 pandemic, the number of Moroccans being deported from Algeria ranged from 100 to 150 people per year, he says.

⁹¹ Interview, Hassane Ammari, May 2025.



*The Algerian revolution cannot be confined to Algeria's borders.*⁹²

Houari Boumédiène, 1963



Algerian-Moroccan relations have been tense since the 1960s. Time and again, both states have responded to crises by closing the border, suspending diplomatic ties, imposing visa requirements on each others' citizens, or weaponising migration. Societies on both sides of the frontier are deeply interconnected through strong family and communal ties, a shared dialect and cross-border trade. After a decades-long tug-of-war over regional hegemony between both governments, the frontier is today heavily militarised and virtually sealed by a border fortification stretching over hundreds of kilometers. It is composed of a three-metre-high metal fence topped with barbed wire on the Moroccan side, and a four-metre deep and four-and-a-half-metre wide trench, partly filled up with water, on the Algerian side.

The origin of this rivalry is deeply rooted in French colonialism and the clash of two opposing political systems. Today's border demarcation was imposed by the treaty of Lalla Maghnia in 1845 after French troops defeated the army of the Moroccan Sultan, an ally of Algeria's Emir Abdelkader. By the time Morocco gained independence in 1956,

⁹² Khadija Mohsen-Finan, *Algérie – Maroc: La frontière, pilier du récit national*, OrientXXI, 23 January 2025. Accessed 12 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2aaajyah>

the monarchy's support for its neighbor's anti-colonial struggle was diluted by expansionist nationalism. Rabat began to make claims on Algerian territory, in particular areas in the wilayas of Béchar and Tindouf, feeding on the mirage of a 'Grand Maroc'. In 1961, Morocco's newly ascended King Hassan II met the president of Algeria's exiled provisional government, Ferhat Abbas, to sign a document which the king aimed at using to renegotiate "the question of the Algerian Sahara." Abbas, however, was sidelined at the eve of independence. The document was not endorsed by independent Algeria's new leaders Ahmed Ben Bella and Houari Boumédiène—likewise driven by militarism, nationalism and rent-seeking, given the Sahara's vast hydrocarbon reserves. "From now on, Algiers will refer to international law and Rabat to history," the journalist Khadija Mohsen-Finan points out.⁹³



Protest at the Moroccan-Algerian border in February 2025

©AMSV

⁹³ Khadija Mohsen-Finan, *Algérie – Maroc: La frontière, pilier du récit national*, *OrientXXI*, 23 January 2025.

Immediately after independence, Algeria opened its doors to anti-colonial resistance movements. Nelson Mandela's African National Congress established an office in Algiers as early as 1963, followed by independence movements from Namibia, Guinea Bissau, Angola and others. "Algiers the White has turned into Algiers the Red," as a 2017 documentary frames it.⁹⁴ Morocco became "anxious about the presence of a revolutionary regime on its border,"⁹⁵ with the new regime deploying confident rhetoric. "The Algerian revolution cannot be confined to Algeria's borders," Boumédiène told the Egyptian newspaper al-Ahram in 1963. In the same year, Morocco launched a military invasion of Algeria in what was later dubbed 'The Sand War'. While Cuba, Egypt and the Soviet Union supported Algeria with troops, Morocco was left relatively isolated and sought support from Israel, which provided Rabat with weapons, surveillance and training.⁹⁶ "The border was definitely demarcated by a convention signed in Rabat in 1972, ratified by Algeria in 1973 and by Morocco, much later, in 1992."⁹⁷ However, tensions remained.

In 1975, Morocco invaded Western Sahara, to which Algeria responded by hosting Sahrawi refugees in Tindouf and recognising the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). Rabat cut ties to Algeria in 1976 and Algeria closed the border for the second time after 1963.⁹⁸ In the midst of Algeria's 'Black Decade', another border closure was imposed after the bombing of a Marrakesh hotel in 1994. Rabat blamed Algerian intelligence for the attack and imposed visa requirements on Algerians. In 2004 and 2005 respectively, Morocco

⁹⁴ Mohamed Ben Slama, *La Mecque des révolutionnaires*, ARTE France/CNC, 2017. Accessed 10 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/52962pcb>

⁹⁵ Jim Wolfreys, *Ben Barka was a lost leader of the international Left*, Jacobin, 18 March 2024. Accessed 12 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yc3m6hfe>

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Khadija Mohsen-Finan, *Algérie – Maroc: La frontière, pilier du récit national*, *OrientXXI*, 23 January 2025.

⁹⁸ Nabila Moussaoui, *Le trabendo ou la mondialisation par la marge*, *Politique africaine* N°. 137, 2015, p. 117 – 128.

and Algeria revoked the visa regulations for each others' citizens, only for Algeria to reintroduce them in 2024. This latest deterioration of relations between both states kicked in after Morocco, in 2020, started to normalise relations with the Israeli occupation. In 2021, Algiers cut ties to Rabat once again after a consortium of journalists revealed the extent of which Morocco had used Israeli spyware on Algerian phones.

Meanwhile, both states have repeatedly weaponised migration. In 2005, in a highly mediatised incident, a large number of people tried to cross the border fences of Ceuta and Melilla. Responding to pressure from Europe, Morocco arrested hundreds of harraga and deported them to the Algerian border. At least 1,500 people were expelled to the borderlands. From then on, Algerian authorities would also regularly deport arrested non-Algerians to the borderlands with Morocco and force them to cross the frontier.

Authorities in both countries often respond to those expulsions by redeporting the concerned group, or preventing people's entry into their respective territory, thus trapping people in the strip of land between the two border fortifications. Since the 2000s, this practice has not ceased—and it continues to be deadly. Residents and authorities on both sides of the border regularly discover dead bodies in the borderlands. Local governments in nearby towns such as Maghnia in western Algeria struggle to handle the death toll. A plot of land for a new cemetery was only allocated by the authorities in Maghnia in 2022, while the town's morgue continues to be overloaded, time and time again.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Maghreb Emergent, *À la frontière algéro-marocain, traces des drames migratoire entraînés par sa militarisation, les prisons et les risques de mort*, 16 March 2024. Accessed 12 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n9yzxjr>



*Algiers has not found a way to reconcile its security concerns with an agile and well-thought-through migration policy driven by pragmatism, coherence and respect of human rights.*¹⁰⁰

Raouf Farrah, 2020



After Algeria's independence, ancient Saharan trade routes between northern Mali and southern Algeria were revived and quickly became a backbone of the region's informal economy. Seasonal labour migration from Mali became an integral part of the southern Algerian economy. Algeria has traditionally shown a more pragmatic approach to mobility in the south given the government's understanding that human mobility and informal trade play a fundamental economic role in border areas, as highlighted by Farrah in his 2020 report. The war in northern Mali in the 1990s pushed many Malians to flee to Algeria, settle in cities and town near the border and use communal ties to obtain Algerian citizenship:

"Algeria tolerated the presence of Malians (...) for political reasons. It determined that to avoid a spill over of violence from northern Mali at a time when Algerian security forces were stretched thin by their own 'civil war', the best policy

¹⁰⁰ Raouf Farrah, *Algeria's migration dilemma*, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2020.

was to maintain good relationships with both the Malian government and the Tuareg rebels."¹⁰¹

When armed conflict reemerged in northern Mali in 2012, the Algerian state responded with a more distinct security-driven approach and started to fortify and militarise the border. The army erected a 50-km-long electronic fence near the town of Bordj Badji Mokhtar and built a sand berm, that stretches today over hundreds of kilometers along the frontier. The military's special forces were deployed and 13 new bases for gendarmerie units set up in regions bordering Mali.¹⁰² As a response to the arrival of more than 11,000 Malian refugees, a temporary camp was erected in the town of Timiaouine. In 2020, Algerian security forces installed a barbed wire fence separating the sister towns of Tinzaoutine, preventing residents and traders from crossing the border. The fence was removed after a series of protests as "part of a more extensive contestation by populations on both sides of Algeria's southern borders of the militarisation of the frontier, which has exacerbated marginalisation and social exclusion", and the death of one protester in clashes with security forces. However, tensions between residents and the state never fully ceased.¹⁰³

Algeria conducted mass expulsions of Malians in the 1980s, but only normalised that practice in the 2000s. At that time, authorities started to deport both Malians and people of other nationalities to Mali, via Tinzaoutine. After the 2012 uprising in northern Mali, expulsions were redirected to Niger and only occurred sporadically at the Malian border, until 2017. In the following 15 months, Algeria expelled at least 3,100 people to Mali, Amnesty International reported.¹⁰⁴ People

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Oscar Nkala, *Algeria seeks new border security systems as war clouds gather over Mali*, DefenceWeb, 22 November 2012. Accessed 20 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/3ycvnp5z>

¹⁰³ Raouf Farrah, *Algeria's migration dilemma*, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2020.

¹⁰⁴ Amnesty International, *Forced to leave: Stories of injustice against migrants in Algeria*, 20 December 2024. Accessed 25 November 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/2sravvj3>

were arrested across the country, transferred to a detention centre in Reggane, bussed to the border near Bordj Badji Mokhtar, and forced at gunpoint to cross the border and walk on foot to the Malian town of In Khalil, 18 kilometers away.

In March 2018, a protest was staged in front of Algeria's embassy in Bamako by deported Malians, denouncing their expulsion. Since the pandemic, however, expulsions to Mali have ceased altogether. IOM continues to 'voluntarily return' people by plane and expelled 87 Malians from Algiers to Bamako in February 2023 and 149 people in February 2024.¹⁰⁵ But no deportations via the land border with Mali have been recorded in recent years, says Ousmane Diarra of the Malian Association of the Expelled (AME). He elaborates:

"We only receive flights at Bamako airport from Tunisia, Algeria or Morocco with expelled Malian citizens, all of these flights are organised by IOM. Up to three times a month, such a plane arrives here."¹⁰⁶

In April 2025, relations between Algiers and Bamako reached a new low. After two surveillance drones were shot down on both sides of the border, accompanied by claims from both governments of violations of sovereignty by the other's military, Algeria closed its airspace for aviation traffic to and from Mali and recalled its ambassador. This latest deterioration of relations has been long in the making. In the 2000s, President Bouteflika made multiple attempts to provide security beyond the state's southern borders. He institutionalised cooperation with Algeria's neighbors by establishing, together with Mali, Mauretania and Niger, a joint military committee, the Centre d'État-Major Commun Opérationnel Conjoint (CEMOC) in Tamanrasset in 2010. When the war in northern Mali started in 2012,

¹⁰⁵ IOM, *Returning home: A journey of dignity and hope*, 17 July 2024. Accessed 1 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/739u3bc5>

¹⁰⁶ Interview, Ousmane Diarra, November 2024.

Algeria emerged as a mediator between Bamako and Tuareg rebels under the umbrella of the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA). The government facilitated the 2015 Algiers peace agreement between the CMA and the central government in Bamako that settled the conflict, at least temporarily.



Since the military coups in Mali in 2020 and 2021, the joint handling of the instability in northern Mali by Algiers and Bamako gradually came to an end. The military junta of Assimi Goïta terminated the Algiers accords in January 2024, rendered the CEMOC nonoperational, allied with the Russian mercenary group Wagner, and in summer 2024 launched a joint attack with Wagner on Tuareg rebels in Tinzaoutine near the Algerian border. Grotesque footage that went viral at the time showed Algerian soldiers watching the bombings on the other side of the border. Goïta's junta staunchly opposes Algeria's continuous

reception of Malian opposition figures, including those affiliated with the now regrouped CMA, while the presence of Wagner troops at its border constitutes a “red line” for Algiers.¹⁰⁷ Given this recent escalation of events, Algeria has clearly lost its former positioning as a provider of security in the Sahel. Burning borders at the Algerian-Malian frontier was once a common practice and well-accepted by authorities in both countries. Instability and the escalation of violence have now turned large parts of the borderlands into highly-militarised no-go-zones.

¹⁰⁷ Raouf Farrah, *Algérie-Mali: chronique d’une rupture annoncée*, Twala, 10 April 2025. Accessed 11 April 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/378te9dm>

Niger: The Deportation Routine



*The ‘illegality industry’ is productive: it constantly reproduces its object of intervention in ever more distressing forms, which in turn leads to its reinforcement.*¹⁰⁸

Ruben Anderson, 2016



For decades, there have been two main topics shaping Niger-Algeria relations: migration and fossil gas transport. In 2002 both governments started to explore, together with Nigeria, the possibility of building a pipeline connecting Nigeria’s vast fossil gas reserves with consumers in Europe. The Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline (TSGP) would stretch over more than 4,100 kilometers, 2,310 of which were in Algeria, 1,037 in Nigeria and 841 in Niger. Negotiations stalled several times, and were only revived in 2024 after Niger’s Prime Minister Ali Mahamane Lamine Zeine arrived in Algiers, accompanied by seven ministers, for negotiations with Algerian officials in regards to the TSGP and the establishment of a free trade zone.¹⁰⁹ Two months after the bilateral summit, the Algerian Minister of Energy Mohamed Arkab declared that both governments had agreed to push the pipeline project forward, confirming that technical studies are currently being updated.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Ruben Andersson, *Europe’s failed ‘fight’ against irregular migration: ethnographic notes on a counterproductive industry*, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, LSE Research Online, 2016, p. 8. Accessed 4 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2wmr6fbr>

¹⁰⁹ Fayçal Metaoui, *Une importante délégation ministérielle nigérienne à Alger*, RFI, 14 August 2024. Accessed 30 November 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/bdfs7ty>

¹¹⁰ Zhor Hadjam, *Nouvel élan pour un projet stratégique*, 1 October 2024, El Watan, p. 6.

Since April 2025, however, Nigerien media and the Niamey government, now closely allied with the military regimes in Mali and Burkina Faso, have been outspokenly rebuking Algerian authorities for their deportation practices to Assamaka. Since 2017, Nigerian officials had repeatedly slammed Algeria for deporting non-Nigerians to Niger, but to no avail. In April 2024, Algeria's ambassador to Niger was summoned by the government given the "violent nature" of the expulsions, "carried out without respect for the rules", officials stated in local media.¹¹¹ Niamey's tone vis-à-vis Algiers has become even more severe since April 2025, when Nigerien state officials responded to Algeria's latest deportations by threatening to withdraw from the TSGP project.

In December 2014, Algeria and Niger agreed on a repatriation deal that facilitates the expulsion of Nigeriens from Algeria. The agreement was a response to the death of 92 people in the Nigerien desert in 2013 and the increasing presence of Nigerien women and children in Algerian cities, begging for money in the streets. In the same month, more than 3,000 people were deported from Algeria to Assamaka.¹¹² Almost all of the deportees were women and children. While authorities justified the expulsions as a means to combat the begging networks, Niamey had itself called for such deportations. In a 2017 meeting with Amnesty researchers, Niger's Minister of Interior Mohamed Bazoum claimed that the begging networks are "responsible for promoting a negative image of Niger abroad" and that forced returns would discourage people from irregularly migrating to Algeria.¹¹³

The 2014 expulsion deal led to smooth cooperation in 2015, but when

¹¹¹ Alarme Phone Sahara, *Deportations of migrants from Algeria to Niger*, 26 April 2024. Accessed 1 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/3a89mss3>

¹¹² Abdoulaye Massalaki, *Algeria and Niger start repatriation of 3,000 illegal migrants*, Reuters, 10 December 2014. Accessed 3 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yc6e6kh5>

¹¹³ Amnesty International, *Forced to leave: Stories of injustice against migrants in Algeria*, 20 December 2024.

Algeria started to conduct mass expulsions to Assamaka in 2016, it quickly triggered opposition from Niamey. Since 2017, authorities also increasingly deport non-Nigeriens to Niger, establishing the pattern of enforcing so-called 'official' and 'non-official' convoys. The official convoys involve cooperation with Nigerien authorities. After transferring arrested people on the move from cities across Algeria in bus convoys to Tamanrasset, people are detained in a gendarmerie-run retention centre before being transported in trucks to Assamaka and handed over to Nigerien authorities, IOM and aid groups. In the non-official convoys, predominantly non-Nigeriens are grouped together, trucked from Tamanrasset to the so-called 'Point Zero' at the border and forced to walk 15 kilometers to Assamaka, mostly at night. The spokesperson of APS, Moctar Dan Yaye, explains how authorities have responded to the non-official expulsions:

"In 2021, small direction signs have been installed by IOM and local authorities all along the way from Point Zero to Assamaka 15 kilometer away. Every 500 meter, there is now a sign to indicate the way to Assamaka, so people do not get lost in the desert anymore."¹¹⁴

This installation is also a response to the annual increase of expulsions in recent years. After Algeria's Minister of Interior said in 2018 that 27,000 people have been expelled since 2015, authorities deported more than 14,000 people in 2018 alone.¹¹⁵ With authorities in Assamaka repeatedly overwhelmed by the numbers of deportees, NGOs and the border regime service provider IOM opened offices in the city of Agadez and in Assamka, a village of only 1,500 inhabitants. APS is present in the area since 2018, while MSF runs a health facility in the village. As a response to the continuous arrival of large numbers

¹¹⁴ Interview, Moctar Dan Yaye, September 2024/March 2025.

¹¹⁵ Achira Mammeri, *L'Algérie a rapatrié 27.000 migrants subsahariens: "Nous avons le droit de préserver notre sécurité"*, Tout sur l'Algérie, 22 March 2018. Accessed 3 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/46d6c8ec>

of deportees, the Italian NGO Cooperazione Internazionale opened a facility in Assamaka in 2023, providing assistance for up to 3,500 people in the scope of a project cofinanced by the Italian government. In 2020, IOM facilitated the erection of a fixed border police post, funded by the Italian government, too. It replaced a truck-borne mobile post, previously deployed to Assamaka and equally provided by IOM.¹¹⁶



Border post in Assamaka, 2023
© Alarme Phone Sahara

Meanwhile, among those arriving in Assmaka are more and more people who were arrested in Tunisia, subsequently deported to Algeria, rearrested on the Algerian side of the border and then expelled to Niger—an increasingly common practice at that frontier. “These chain deportations happen regularly since early 2024”, confirms Dan Yaye. Nigerien authorities have also normalised what are dubbed ‘counter-pushbacks’. As a reaction to the regularly occurring humanitarian emergencies in Assamaka caused by Algeria’s

¹¹⁶ IOM, *IOM supports safe migration with new police post at Niger’s border with Algeria*, 17 October 2020. Accessed 4 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/3s4yzvj4>

expulsion practices, Nigerien security forces started to systematically filter people according to their origin. People coming from member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or the Alliance des États du Sahel (AES)—the confederation of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, established in 2023—are allowed entry. People of other nationalities are deported back to Algeria. “This concerns people from Bangladesh and Yemen”, says Azizou Chehou of APS.¹¹⁷ People from Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad or Sudan are also affected, adds a humanitarian source in Niamey.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Interview, Azizou Chehou, March 2025.

¹¹⁸ Interview, anonymous, September 2024.

Tunisia: Algeria's Semi-Permeable Frontier



The international projection of revolutionary sovereignty, a transgressive and emancipatory force, has been replaced by a narrow conception of national sovereignty. Unable to transcend the rivalry with its Maghrebi neighbors, this sovereignty has become limited, chauvinist, and Machiavellian.”¹¹⁹

Thomas Serres, 2019



Since Algeria's independence, the borderlands with Tunisia have been a hub for cross-border movements and trade, with societies on both sides of the frontier deeply interconnected by strong family ties and cross-border economies. Algerians are a backbone of Tunisia's coastal tourism industry, but also travel for medical tourism in Tunis extensive treatment is provided to patients from Algeria and Libya by dozens of clinics and health facilities. Algeria and Tunisia grant each others' citizens visa-free entrance and preferential conditions regarding the allowed length of sojourn. Informal trade across the border is mostly tolerated by the authorities and covers a wide array of services and goods, partly driven by lower taxation in Algeria for many products and the complementary output of local industries. Yet, policies of both governments maintained a state of economic disintegration and prevented the increase in formal trade, a shortfall both governments claim to take more seriously now.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Serres, *Algeria, where is your African revolution?* Jadaliyya, 14 March 2019.

In August 2024, in a highly symbolic move, the train line connecting the eastern Algerian city of Annaba with Tunis was reopened after a 30-year-long disruption.¹²⁰ The peripheral train line between Constantine in Algeria and Haïdra, in Tunisia's wilaya of Kasserine, is also said to be under review for relaunch. Both governments have also restarted initiatives to boost economic cooperation and develop the borderlands. In 2024, a newly established bilateral commission for the development of border regions, which includes the governors of five Algerian and seven Tunisian wilayas, held its first session. They announced a mechanism for jointly combating wild fires, the establishment of a free trade zone, and bilateral schemes for the vocational training of Algerians in the Tunisian tourism sector and for Tunisians in Algeria's petroleum industry.¹²¹

The priority in bilateral relations in the past years, however, has been the increased coordination of intensified reprisals against undocumented people, carried out by both states on their respective territories since 2023. Prior to that year, the vast majority of people on the move crossed from Algeria towards Tunisia, either in search of work in Tunisia, or on their way to Libya or Italy. After Tunisian authorities joined their neighbors' uncompromising approach towards undocumented people and started staging regular raids against people on the move in 2023, mass deportations to the borders with Algeria or Libya have also been normalised. Algeria responded to this new reality on its northeastern border by increasing the presence of security forces and carrying out pushbacks, as well as chain deportations, to either Niger or Libya.

According to OMCT, Tunisia deported more than 9,000 people to Algeria in 2024 alone, while another wave of expulsions to the Algerian wilaya of Tebessa was carried out in April and May 2025.

¹²⁰ Radio Algérienne, *Train Tunisie-Algérie: lancement officiel ce samedi, 8 August 2024*. Accessed 2 May 2025, <https://news.radioalgerie.dz/fr/node/50014>

¹²¹ Algérie Press Service, *Le développement des régions frontalières algéro-tunisiennes "au coeur des priorités"*, 31 January 2024. Accessed 9 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/5a8ph5a9>

The first such expulsion to Algeria was recorded in July 2023, but they have since become a regular practice. However, “forced displacement and expulsion to Algeria would only take place in the event of saturation of detention facilities in Libya and would not be part of a clearly established cooperation with Algeria.”¹²² Prior to 2023, Tunisia’s National Guard had only conducted such expulsions in isolated cases.¹²³ Algerian security forces continue to handle irregular movements at the border to Tunisia with the aim of preventing people from entering. This is done through deterrent action – shooting in the air when groups of harraga are detected – or by assisting people to return to Tunisia, as confirmed by OMCT and a person interviewed in Tunis.¹²⁴

This newly-created constant state of emergency for people on the move at the Algerian-Tunisian border fuels violence and exploitation by non-state actors, and is frequently deadly. In 2024, at least 38 dead bodies were discovered in areas near the border, including twelve Syrians and 21 people from African countries.¹²⁵ Since 2024, OMCT has also raised the alarm regarding the high risk of people on the move being subjected to sexual violence, kidnappings and trafficking by criminal groups, as well as the risk of being abused by members of Algerian security. After two-and-a-half years of highly mediatised crackdowns against people on the move, the Tunisian state shifted its handling of undocumented people from a passive “policy of non-accommodation”¹²⁶ to an approach that mirrors the Algerian

¹²² OMCT, *Torture roads: Mapping of violations suffered by people on the move in Tunisia*, Volume 2, 2024.

¹²³ In 2015, ten people detained in the Ouardia detention centre in Tunis were expelled to the Algerian border, while 53 people were forcibly deported from Sfax to Libya in 2019. OMCT, *Torture roads: Mapping of violations suffered by people on the move in Tunisia*, Volume 1, May 2025. Accessed 1 March 2025.

¹²⁴ Interview, anonymous, April 2025.

¹²⁵ OMCT, *Torture roads: Mapping of violations suffered by people on the move in Tunisia*, Volume 3, 2025.

¹²⁶ Sophie-Anne Bisiaux, *Politique du non-accueil en Tunisie*, FTDES/Migreurop, June 2020. Accessed 5 May 2025, <https://ftdes.net/rapports/ftdes.migreup.pdf>

model: the systematic geographical dispersal of people on the move and the imposition of regular heavy reprisals. Tunisia has now, too, turned people on the move into some kind of bargaining chip used in the counterrevolutionary tug-of-war for power and relations with external powers.



*The detention centres in Ghadamès are like hell on earth.*¹²⁷

Humanitarian source, 2025



Similar to the border with Mauretania, Algeria's frontier with Libya remains a blind spot. Little information about the border, its fortification, cross-border trade or the movement of harraga is known to a wider public. Since 2011, Algeria's silent border has been subjected to similar securitisation and militarisation as the country's southern and western frontiers. The 2011 uprising in Libya, which turned into a long-lasting series of wars and armed conflicts, prompted Algeria's government to fortify this border and install surveillance infrastructure. The deadly terrorist assault on the In Amenas gas plant in 2013 further reinforced this trend; the attackers entered the area via Libyan territory.

Accordingly, in 2012, Algerian authorities started to erect a sand berm along the border to Libya, partly equipped with electronic surveillance and stretching over hundreds of kilometers south of the Libyan city of Ghadamès.¹²⁸ Authorities in western Libya have, for their part, erected a sand berm running in parallel to the Algerian one. In 2023, Libyan militias, affiliated to the Government of National

¹²⁷ Interview, anonymous, February 2025.

¹²⁸ Querine Hanlon/Matthew M. Herbert, *Border Security Challenges in the Grand Maghreb*, US Institute of Peace, 2015. Accessed 20 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/4t8va2z6>

Unity in Tripoli, announced the erection of electronic surveillance observatories on the border with Tunisia and, in 2025, deployed troops to the borderlands with Tunisia to conduct regular patrols. However, not much is known regarding Libya's efforts to fortify the border with Algeria, while the area around Ghadamès and the town of Debdeb on the Algerian side of the border remain a hub for cross-border movements.

Since 2023, people on the move arrested near the Tunisian border by Algerian security forces are not only expelled in chain deportations to Niger, but also to Ghadamès. The first known expulsion of this kind occurred in spring 2024, a humanitarian source confirms.¹²⁹ In early 2025, at least 100 people were held in the city's border guard facility, the source explains, though without being able to confirm if those held in the centre were arrested in Libya or deported from Algeria. Between early 2024 and February 2025, at least 1,800 people were expelled from Algeria to Ghadamès after Algerian security arrested them near the Tunisian border.

In May 2024, a group of 37 Syrians was arrested near the town of Debdeb by Algerian security forces, stripped off all belongings and transferred to In Amenas where they were sentenced illegally entering the country, reported the London-based NGO Shoa'a for Human Rights.¹³⁰ After spending five days in a gendarmerie-run detention centre in In Amenas, the group was detained in the city of Illizi for three months, then transferred to the Sidi el-Houari detention centre in Oran and grouped together with other Syrians already incarcerated there. In September 2024, a group now comprising 71 Syrians was bussed back to Debdeb, driven to the border, dropped off in the desert and forced to walk on foot to Ghadamès. These few accounts about expulsions provide a rare glimpse of the situation at this frontier,

¹²⁹ Interview, anonymous, March 2025.

¹³⁰ SHOAA for Human Rights, *An unknown fate awaits hundreds of Syrian migrants detained in Algerian prisons*, 12 December 2024. Accessed 20 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/56aapxcx>

where Algerian security forces apply similar policies they also pursue at the borders to Mali, Niger and Morocco. Algerian authorities are to sustain a security-driven approach at the Libyan border for the time being, given that political instabilities and armed clashes between rival Libyan forces are expected to continue.

3.0

STATE COOPERATION



*As a prototype of the rentier state, Algeria benefits from an international context that favours the maximisation of its geopolitical rents: the security rent, the hydrocarbon rent and the migratory rent.*¹³¹

Salim Chena, 2011



Since the 1991 ministerial summit in Berlin—considered today to have kicked-off the “Europe-wide, coordinated combat against irregular migration”¹³²— the EU and its member states succeeded in establishing partly comprehensive cooperation ‘migration management’ frameworks with almost all states in the bloc’s southern and eastern neighborhood, with only two exceptions: Algeria and Syria. Algeria is considered to be extremely reluctant to formally integrate into the European border regime and near-consistently refuses to take part in Europe-funded projects on ‘border management’, a term referred to hereafter as ‘state cooperation on the suppression of movement’. Algerian authorities have, nevertheless, extensively engaged with the border regime industry, adopted narratives and policies similar to those promoted by the EU and its affiliates, and used migration as a

¹³¹ Salim Chena, *Portée et limites de l’hégémonie algérienne dans l’aire sahélo-maghrébine*, In: *Hérodote* 2011/3, No. 142. Accessed 4 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5aehyz5t>

¹³² Fabian Georgi, *Migrationsmanagement in Europa*, VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, Saarbrücken, 2007.

bargaining chip vis-à-vis the Global North and in relations with some of its African neighbors.



Election campaign poster, Oran 2024

© Sofian Philip Naceur

Despite Algeria's "passive compliance with European immigration and asylum policy"¹³³ and its cautious collaboration with European authorities in this regard, government officials have, for decades, maintained a distinct third-world rhetoric regarding EU border externalisation policies in northern Africa. Algeria's reluctance to engage too closely or formally with the EU is also driven by Morocco's particularly active integration into the EU border regime, which the EU has rewarded with the allocation of extensive funding, grants or loans to Rabat over the past decades. Algerian officials are also "persuaded

¹³³ Salim Chena, *Portée et limites de l'hégémonie algérienne dans l'aire sahélo-maghrébine*, Hérodote 2011/3, 142.

that external cooperation may be a source of regional instability and affect internal security,” claim Federica Zardo and Chiara Loschi in a policy paper.¹³⁴

Under President Tebboune and army chief Chengriha, however, the state has initiated a cautious turnaround and expanded its bilateral (anti-)migration cooperation with Italy, Germany, IOM and EU agencies such as Frontex, as well as the League of Arab States (LAS). The following section will outline how this cooperation has evolved over recent decades (Chapter 3.1) and provide a mapping of corresponding projects and programmes relevant for Algeria’s cooperation with the EU and its member states on the suppression of movement. To be highlighted in this respect are Algeria’s (non-) collaboration on returns (Chapter 3.2), the supply of equipment to the Algerian police by European companies (Chapter 3.3), police training for officials (Chapter 3.4), and the role of IOM and UNHCR in Algeria’s various border regimes (Chapter 3.5).

¹³⁴ Federica Zardo/Chiara Loschi, *EU-Algeria (non)cooperation on migration: A tale of two fortresses*, 2020.



*The principles of sovereignty and non-interference are part and parcel of the Algerian political culture and contributed on building the state's legitimacy.*¹³⁵

Federica Zardo/Chiara Loschi, 2020



The basis of Algeria's engagement on (anti-)migration cooperation with the EU is the 2002 EU-Algeria Association Agreement, which entered into force in 2005. The agreement provides for a common organisational structure at several levels, annual meetings of the EU-Algeria Association Council and the EU-Algeria Informal Dialogue on Migration and Mobility. This usually convenes once a year, either in Algiers or in Brussels.¹³⁶ In recent decades, Algerian authorities have nevertheless maintained a distinct reluctance to engage with formal EU schemes for (anti-)migration collaboration. However, in 2024, the EU confirmed that Algeria and the bloc had reinforced their "engagement on migration", following an Algerian "request for enhanced support in the voluntary return of migrants residing in Algeria to their countries of origin."¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Federica Zardo/Chiara Loschi, *EU-Algeria (non)cooperation on migration: A tale of two fortresses*, 2020.

¹³⁶ EU Commission, Reply to Parliamentary Inquiry E-003670/2022, filed by MEP Özlem Demirel, 23 January 2024. Accessed 15 May 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/mwjmue4f>

¹³⁷ Council of the European Union, Migratory situation on the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic routes, Presidency paper 12988/24, Brussels, 13 September 2024. Accessed 27 November 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/56xv3c9w>

Algeria participates in two regional programmes funded by the EU under the Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). One is entitled Migrants Protection, Return and Reintegration (MPRR North Africa), implemented by IOM and focused on ‘voluntary returns’. The other concerns regional police cooperation and is led by Interpol, aimed at combating criminal networks engaging in human trafficking and migrant smuggling.¹³⁸ While the MPRR in Algeria is to be substantially expanded in terms of the allocated budget, none of the projects implemented under the European Union Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) exclusively target Algeria. The state only participates in broad regional projects, including the MPRR, and continues to reject its participation in EU-funded ‘border management’ projects. Zardo and Loschi elaborate on why Algeria initially endorsed the EUTF but later withdrew from the scheme:

"The Algerian U-turn is both related to the strong border management component of the EUTF North Africa window, hardly in line with Algerian veto on cooperating on border issues (...) and to the perceived negative externalities of the EU programme. Similar dynamics are visible in the Algerian reaction following the signature of the 2016 EU-Turkey statement that re-directed migration flows towards the Central Mediterranean route and put a lot of pressure on the Algerian authorities. At first, the Ministry of Interior claimed that Algeria needed external support. (...) However, as soon as this request entailed an EU offer to strengthen joint information gathering along the sub-Saharan borders, Algerian authorities withdrew from the proposal and refused to cooperate."¹³⁹

¹³⁸ In 2023 and 2024, the MPRR supported the IOM-facilitated ‘voluntary return’ of 8,550 people and received funds worth EUR 85.6 million, while the Interpol project (EUR 5 million) consists of “building technical capacities of law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute criminal networks engaging in migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons.” EU Commission, *Reply to Parliamentary Inquiry E-003042/2024*, filed by MEP Özlem Demirel, 14 April 2024. Accessed 15 May 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/np2jtdbh>

¹³⁹ Federica Zardo/Chiara Loschi, *EU-Algeria (non)cooperation on migration: A tale of two fortresses*, 2020.

The Algerian government is nevertheless participating in EU-funded fora that facilitate informal exchanges on (anti-)migration policies and provide for the training of law enforcement and civilian officials. Algerian authorities are, accordingly, actively engaged in multiple regional cooperation activities organised in the scope of bilateral projects as well as in schemes run by EU bodies, UN or UN-affiliated agencies or international organisations. It cooperates with:

- EU Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex)
- EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL)
- International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)
- UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
- Interpol
- LAS
- IOM (Chapter 3.5)
- UNHCR (Chapter 3.5)

The EU does not provide any direct funding for the Algerian state. The “EU’s financial support for programmes covering Algeria is primarily channelled through international partners rather than directly to the Algerian government”, the EU Commission stated in its reply to a parliamentary inquiry by Özlem Demirel, a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) from the German party Die LINKE.¹⁴⁰ One of the implementing organisations of the NDICI-funded EUROMED project, the Vienna-based ICMPD, confirmed in a reply to a press request that Algeria participated in peer-to-peer conference events organised under the umbrella of this project.¹⁴¹ However, Algeria has not filed any requests for small-scale projects that are offered to states participating in this scheme and, thus, only cautiously engages with the programme, according to ICMPD.

¹⁴⁰ EU Commission, *Reply to Parliamentary Inquiry E-000521/2025*, filed by MEP Özlem Demirel, 2 April 2025. Accessed 15 May 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/ycxxtpmw>

¹⁴¹ Email, ICMPD, 10 January 2025.

Algerian officials are, nevertheless, regularly attending conference events and informal exchange fora regarding (anti-)migration cooperation, including the 2018 and 2024 editions of the Vienna Migration Conference organised by ICMPD and the latter's Annual Border Management Conference in 2023 and 2024.¹⁴² Algeria is also a member of the EU-funded Euro-African Dialogue on Migration and Development (Rabat Process), an informal conference and cooperation structure run by ICMPD, that has brought together 57 states from Europe and Africa since 2006. Algerian officials additionally take part in Frontex-led events, the agency confirmed in response to an inquiry by MEP Demirel, as mapped out in the table below¹⁴³:

| Activity | Date | Location |
|--|----------------------|-------------------|
| Joint Frontex-Afripol Workshop on Risk Analysis and Cross-Border Crime | 9 September 2019 | Algiers, Algeria |
| 1st Euro-Arab Border Security Conference | 1-2 December 2021 | Amman, Jordan |
| Frontex-AIMC Joint Workshop on Respect of Human Rights at the Border | 6 September 2022 | Cairo, Egypt |
| Joint Regional Workshop on Document Fraud and the Border | 22 -24 November 2022 | Warsaw, Poland |
| Frontex-Afripol Fundamental Rights Workshop | 15 May 2023 | Online |
| Workshop on Firearms countertrafficking organised under EMPACT Firearms jointly by Portugal, Frontex and NAUSS | 23-25 May 2023 | Hammamet, Tunisia |
| Second Workshop on combatting firearms trafficking in partnership with NAUSS | 17 -19 July 2024 | Warsaw, Poland |
| 2nd Euro-Arab Border Security Conference | 16-17 October 2024 | Lisbon, Portugal |
| 7th meeting of the Euro-Arab Working Group on Steering Cooperation in Border Management and Security | 21 January 2025 | Lisbon, Portugal |

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Frontex, *Reply to Parliamentary Inquiry Ref. Ares(2025)2314733*, filed by MEP Özlem Demirel, 21 March 2025.

As this list illustrates, however, Algeria does take part in projects for state cooperation on the suppression of movement, even if only to a limited extent compared to other states targeted by the EU and its affiliates. Frontex highlights in its reply to Demirel’s request that Algeria is a beneficiary of the EU4BorderSecurity project, consisting of EU-funded capacity building efforts in the southern EU neighborhood, and has participated in regional activities organised by various partners, including by the Arab Interior Ministers Council (AIMC)—a key institution of the Arab League—and AIMC’s “scientific body,” the Saudi Arabia-based Naif Arab University for Security Sciences (NAUSS).

The NAUSS is not only an elite university that offers defense and security-related studies on its campus in Riyadh, but also provides for training programmes and informal exchange events on state cooperation on the suppression of movement. In 2022, IOM and NAUSS jointly established the Arab Centre for Technical Cooperation on Migration and Border Management (ACTC-MBM) and signed off on the second phase of the project in 2025, featuring a projected budget of USD 6 million until 2029.¹⁴⁴ The scope of the centre’s work ranges from data collection and migration governance to the provision of capacity building and informal government exchanges. Algeria has signed a memorandum of understanding with NAUSS and, in April 2025, hosted a high-level conference in Algiers for more than 150 participants dubbed the “Scientific Forum on Investigation and Surveillance Methods for the Smuggling of Migrants and Human Trafficking”, jointly organised by IOM, NAUSS and Algeria.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ IOM, *IOM and NAUSS strengthen regional cooperation on migration and border governance*, 13 May 2015. Accessed 16 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4kt368fc>

¹⁴⁵ IOM, *Arab experts convene in Algiers for high-level scientific forum on combating migrant smuggling and human trafficking*, 16 April 2025. Accessed 16 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/dfu26c82>

Algerian authorities also cooperate with the EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) and participated in two regional training schemes: the CTINFLOW project covering issues such as counter-terrorism, cyberterrorism, “strategic communication for countering extremist content online” and “countering terrorist infiltrations at borders”;¹⁴⁶ and the police component of the EUROMED project, involving events and training on drug trafficking, irregular migration, and criminal finances.¹⁴⁷ Algeria also took part in the Central Mediterranean Contact Group in the late 2010s, a now defunct informal exchange forum, and extensively participates in human trafficking-related cooperation programmes with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). These include training, workshops and exchange events between law enforcement officials. For years, UNODC activities in Algeria have mostly been run in cooperation with the United Kingdom.¹⁴⁸ In 2024, UNODC launched a new training scheme (funded and supported by the United Kingdom) for Algerian officials on “investigation techniques to dismantle criminal networks involved in human trafficking and migrant smuggling.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Within the CTINFLOW programme component between AIMC and CEPOL, the latter provided 20 officers of Algeria’s National Gendarmerie with a workshop in Zéralda in 2019 on “open source intelligence gathering”. The workshop was organised in the midst of the Hirak uprising and fueled speculations later on, that knowledge provided under the scheme was possibly used by authorities during the crackdown against the movement in 2019 and 2020. Similar workshops have been organised by the German Federal Criminal Police Office in 2013, 2017 and 2018, all providing training related to Open Source Intelligence gathering for Algerian police authorities. Privacy International, The EU training regime teaching neighbours how to spy, 10 November 2020. Accessed 12 March 2025, privacyinternational.org/long-read/4289/revealed-eu-training-regime-teaching-neighbours-how-spy, and; Bundestagsdrucksache 19/892, Reply of the German Federal Government to a parliamentary inquiry filed by DIE LINKE, 23 February 2018, Berlin. Accessed 13 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yeysetxw>

¹⁴⁷ CEPOL, *Reply to Parliamentary Inquiry E-003041/2024, filed by MEP Özlem Demirel, 5 March 2025.*

¹⁴⁸ For years, Algeria and the United Kingdom have collaborated on issues such as the combat against terrorism and human trafficking, and launched a strategic dialogue in 2020. The anti-terrorism-related cooperation was reinforced after the In Amenas attack in 2013, as employees of a BP joint venture were taken hostage during the crisis.

¹⁴⁹ UNODC, *Algeria, UNODC and the UK launch a new project on special investigative techniques to dismantle human trafficking and migrant smuggling criminal networks, 13 November 2024.* Accessed 16 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n8x28uu>

The Swiss government, in the context of its bilateral (anti-)migration cooperation with Algeria, facilitates exchange visits of Algerian governmental delegations to Switzerland (for instance, in April 2024), and has allocated funding for migration-related projects in Algeria. In response to a press request, the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) said the government in Bern provided EUR 291,866 for a project implemented by the Italian Refugee Council in 2014 and 2015 to support the “drafting of legislative and administrative proposals in the field of mixed migration”. Switzerland also contributed EUR 20,000 to an ICMPD-led project (with a total budget of EUR 117,000), implemented by the Italian Refugee Council in 2011, that included “training and study tours” for “key institutional actors (...) on international protection, the asylum system and migration management.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Email, Staatssekretariat für Migration, 7 March 2025.

3.2

Algeria's (Non-)Collaboration
on Returns

*This [colonial migration] policy put in place a set of measures, decrees, laws and administrations that moved between the selection of migrant bodies and the overall organization of colonial and post-colonial society on both shores of the Mediterranean, always at the service of the Metropole.*¹⁵¹

Wael Garnaoui/Montassir Sakhi, 2024



Besides the EU-Algeria Informal Dialogue on Migration and Mobility, the Algerian government maintains a multitude of bilateral cooperation mechanisms with European governments, in particular with France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Algeria has taken part in a bilateral informal migration dialogue with Switzerland since 2013, tailored to ensure the implementation of the repatriation agreement both states signed in 2006. Algeria has also agreed to bilateral readmission deals with Germany (1999), Italy (2000), Spain (2004) and the United Kingdom (2006). A 2008 agreement with France not only contains provisions on forced expulsions but also provides for collaboration on (anti-) migration policies and human trafficking.

Generally, however, Algerian authorities are considered largely reluctant to cooperate with European states on the forced return of

¹⁵¹ Wael Garnaoui/Montassir Sakhi, *From colonization to schengenisation*, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2024. Accessed 1 May 2025, rosaluxna.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/From-colonization-to-Schengenisation-.pdf

Algerians. Time and time again, they have used readmission requests as a bargaining chip in their diplomacy with Europe. Contrary to neighboring states such as Morocco and Tunisia, Algerian consulates in Europe have a long track record of refusing to issue travel documents for Algerians facing expulsion orders.

France frequently faces this situation. The vast majority of Algerians in Europe reside in France, and French government officials regularly make public comments considered offensive by the Algerian government. Algeria increased its cooperation with the French authorities on expulsions in 2023—2,562 Algerians were expelled in that year, compared to 1,882 in 2022.¹⁵² In 2024, the government responded to France backing Morocco's claims over Western Sahara by slowing down the issuance of travel documents for Algerians subjected to expulsion orders. In March 2025, Algeria suspended its collaboration with the cities of Marseilles, Montpellier and Nice altogether, and canceled consular appointments for detained Algerians, reportedly as a reaction to the tension between both governments following the earlier arrest of Algerian-French writer Boualem Sansal in Algiers.¹⁵³

Forced expulsions of Algerians from Italy to Algeria are insignificant and only accounted for 22 people in 2023, compared to Italy's deportation of 187 people to Morocco and 2,308 to Tunisia, according to a 2024 report.¹⁵⁴ Figures provided by the Italian Ministry of Interior (see table below) based on a freedom of information request indicate the discrepancy between the annual number of expulsion orders issued by the authorities and the actual number of forced expulsions

¹⁵² Radio M, *Malgré une météo défavorable: la "harga" ne faiblit pas*, Algeria Watch, 26 February 2024. Accessed 25 February 2025, <https://algeria-watch.org/?p=91919>

¹⁵³ Tristan Cavert, *Tensions Paris-Alger: l'Algérie suspend ses relations consulaires avec la ville de Nice*, *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 11 March 2025. Accessed 14 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/24tsvu4d>

¹⁵⁴ National Guarantor for the Rights of Persons Deprived of Personal Liberty, *Report to parliament 2023, 2024*. Accessed 16 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2tbfbjxm>

(note that the figure provided by the Ministry of Interior does not match the aforementioned number):¹⁵⁵

| | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 (20 May) |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------------|
| Removal order from national territory issued (Algerians) | 1,805 | 1,976 | 1,948 | 1,040 | 1,673 | 495 |
| Total returns of Algerians | 10 | 7 | 26 | 67 | 54 | 31 |
| ‘Voluntary’ returns | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

With Germany and Switzerland, expulsion procedures have run more smoothly in recent years, a trend also linked to Algeria’s stable diplomatic relations with both governments. After only 57 Algerians were forcibly expelled from Germany to Algeria in 2015, the number increased to 504 in 2017, and accounted for 474 in 2023 and 546 in 2024.¹⁵⁶ Switzerland’s “cooperation with Algeria in the area of returns is now not only working satisfactorily, but very well,” the Swiss government stated in a 2024 reply to a parliamentary motion.¹⁵⁷ Switzerland’s State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) stated in response to a press request that the 2006 repatriation agreement only covers returns on regular scheduled flights. However, in 2023, charter flights for expulsions to Algeria were organised for the very first time.¹⁵⁸ In 2018, the governments in Bern and Algiers intensified their collaboration on the matter, leading to a substantial annual increase in expulsions since 2019. Between 2021 and 2024, 1399 Algerians were deported to Algeria, compared to 740 people between 2007 and 2017.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Freedom of Information request, Ministero dell’Interno, 23 May 2025.

¹⁵⁶ Bundestagsdrucksache 20/14946, Reply of the German Federal Government to a parliamentary inquiry filed by DIE LINKE, 11 February 2025, Berlin. Accessed 16 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/myh9hpdw>

¹⁵⁷ Motion 23.3032, Reply of the Swiss Federal Council to a parliamentary motion filed by the FDP, 10 May 2023. Accessed 10 March 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/t6y6p9cs>

¹⁵⁸ Email, Staatssekretariat für Migration, 4 March 2025.

¹⁵⁹ Interpellation 17.3796, Reply of the Swiss Federal Council to a parliamentary interpellation.

In the same email, SEM confirmed that between 2022 and 2024, 252 Moroccans were deported to Morocco in ‘maritime expulsions’, performed in collaboration with France. However, the SEM denies that maritime expulsions to Algeria have ever been implemented. In 2024, despite the mostly smooth collaboration on expulsions, a charter flight from Geneva to Algiers was canceled at short notice. This fuelled reports that Algeria had blocked the expulsion as part of a response to a series of racist reports in Swiss media outlets framing Algerians as ‘criminals’.¹⁶⁰

The Algerian government’s (non-)collaboration on the return of its citizens continues to be framed as a strategy applied to exert pressure on European governments. Ultimately, however, by refusing to facilitate the release of Algerians detained in European detention centres, the Algerian government is weaponising their fates for political ends. This policy is not an effective means to counter the trend in EU capitals to increasingly support Morocco’s claims over Western Sahara, but rather a void attempt at concealing Algeria’s lack of effective responses to this issue. Those refusals, thus, showcase paralysis, not political resolve.

tion, 15 November 2017. Accessed 10 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n7bbrrp>

¹⁶⁰ Antonio Fumagalli, *Ein Ausschaffungsflug nach Algerien wird kurzfristig verschoben. Weil das Regime über die Schweiz verärgert ist?*, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 12 April 2024. Accessed 1 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/3wm4vp86>

Equipping the Police: The Mirage of Technology Transfer



*Regulation by means of cyclical expulsions, but also by putting people under pressure, to the point of generating an 'economy of repression' from which the agents responsible for carrying it out benefit."*¹⁶¹

Ali Bensaâd, 2009



Fueled by the substantial increase of hydrocarbon revenues since the early 2000s, Algeria has extensively modernised its military and police apparatus. It has ramped up imports of military and security good from Russia, China, South Korea, Italy, Germany and others, and has erected assembly plants for equipment across Algeria. By establishing assembly plants for military, police and civilian vehicles, authorities aim to curb dependency on imports for strategic goods whilst creating employment and facilitating technology transfer. Accordingly, multiple factories for military goods and a wide range of military and civilian vehicles have been erected in Algeria since the 2000s. However, most of these facilities remain highly dependent on the supply of spare parts from partners abroad, making the declared goals of industrialisation and technology transfer mere lip service.

After ex-President Bouteflika and former German Chancellor Angela Merkel agreed on a EUR 10 billion arms and security deal in 2008, the German arms supplier Rheinmetall opened an assembly plant for the multi-purpose tanks 'Fuchs' and 'Boxer' in Aïn Smara near

¹⁶¹ Ali Bensaâd, L'immigration en Algérie: Une réalité prégnante et son occultation officielle, Paris 2009, p. 37.

Constantine, in cooperation with Algeria's Ministry of Defense.¹⁶² Since 2011, the German government approved the export of EUR 2 billion of kits for armored vehicles, to be assembled in the plant. In Sétif, an assembly plant for helicopters, run by a joint venture of the Italian company Leonardo and Algeria's Ministry of Defense, has been under construction since 2020.¹⁶³ Relevant for Algeria's continuous crackdowns against people on the move, however, are those plants that produce vehicles and equipment for the Algerian police and gendarmerie.

As part of the 2008 deal, the German automotive giant Daimler established three factories for Mercedes Benz vehicles in Tiaret, Rouiba in Algiers and Oued Hamimine in Constantine. Between its official opening in 2014 and 2022, the Tiaret plant run by the Société algérienne de fabrication de véhicules de marque Mercedes Benz (SAVAF-MB) assembled a total of 18,265 Sprinter transporters in various editions, and 10,985 4x4 vehicles of the Mercedes Benz G-Class.¹⁶⁴ Algerian police authorities and the gendarmerie are today largely equipped with these cars, and deploy them for raids against people on the move but also for crackdowns against protests – for instance, during the Hirak uprising in 2019 and 2020, when Sprinter vans were lined up almost constantly in Algerian cities or used to block highways to prevent people from joining marches in urban centres. SAVAF-MB is a joint venture between Daimler and the Algerian state, with a majority share of 51% for the latter. It also supplies public schools with buses, the Ministry of Health with ambulances and public companies with vehicles needed for their operations.

¹⁶² Akram Kharief, *Le saga du Boxer IFV en Algérie*, Mena Defense, 29 October 2019. Accessed 16 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2w2ffs4a>

¹⁶³ Abdelkrim Amarni, *Des hélicoptères seront fabriqués à Sétif*, L'expression, 26 March 2019. Accessed 17 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ydu2nsk9>

¹⁶⁴ Algérie Press Service, *Tiaret: livraison de 562 véhicules de marque Mercedes Benz fabriqués à l'usine d'Ain Bouhekif*, 27 June 2022. Accessed 2 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/4nx9b4tx>

The 2008 deal also created the Société algérienne pour la production de poids lourds de marque Mercedes Benz (SAPPL-MB) which runs an assembly plant for military trucks in Rouiba. Shareholders are the Algerian Ministry of Defense (17%), the state-owned Société nationale des véhicules industriels (34%) and Daimler (49%, initially in cooperation with the Emirati Aabar investment fund). The company was created in 2012, started production in 2015 and assembles various Daimler military trucks. The third plant in Constantine supplies SAPPL and SAVAF with diesel engines. SAPP in particular remains highly dependent on the supply of spare parts from Germany, the export of which requires government approval – as they are considered military goods under German law.



Promotion footage of a G-Class

© SAPPL-MB

Also relevant for migration control purposes is another assembly plant established as a joint venture between the Algerian state and the German defense company Hensoldt. The Société Commune Algérienne de Fabrication de Systèmes Electroniques SPA in Sidi Bel Abbès, western Algeria, builds optronic products.¹⁶⁵ Hensoldt

¹⁶⁵ Hensoldt, *Annual report: Combined management report and consolidated financial statement 2023, 2024*. Accessed 1 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5erastjm>

produces equipment such as surveillance radars, thermal imaging cameras and night-vision devices. However, it is unclear what exactly the Sidi Bel Abbès plant manufactures. In its reply to a press request, Hensoldt's Germany branch refused to disclose any further details regarding its activities in Algeria.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Email, Hensoldt, 20 March 2025.

Training the Police: The Berlin-Rome Axis in Full Swing



*The army and the police constitute the pillars of the regime; an army and a police force which are advised by foreign experts.*¹⁶⁷

Frantz Fanon, 1961



Algerian police authorities—in particular the national police, the General Directorate of National Security (DGSN), and its subordinate, the Directorate of Border and Immigration Police (PAF)—have a long history of collaborating with European security agencies. Beside its cooperation with CEPOL and Interpol via EU-funded projects, Algeria has received training and equipment from Spain, Italy and Germany. As far back as 2006, Algerian authorities collaborated extensively with Spanish and French police bodies on the suppression of movement, and signed a deal to jointly combat clandestine immigration with the Spanish intelligence agency National Intelligence Centre.¹⁶⁸ By 2018, Spanish police had trained at least 336 Algerian police officers “to control borders and fight terrorism,” while both governments inked an agreement underpinning a joint investigation unit, aimed at hindering the hargra and preventing terrorism.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The wretched of the earth*, Grove Press, New York, 1963, p. 172.

¹⁶⁸ Ali Bensaâd, *L’immigration en Algérie: Une réalité prégnante et son occultation officielle*, Paris 2009, p. 38.

¹⁶⁹ InfoMigrants, *Spain-Algeria form joint efforts against illegal immigration*, 22 May 2018. Accessed 24 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/7c98ecm4>

In recent years, however, Algeria has intensified its training projects with EU member states, in particular Germany and Italy. In January 2025, Algeria's Minister of Interior, Brahim Merad, and his Italian counterpart, Matteo Piantozzi, signed a bilateral protocol enabling training activities in Algeria's police academy, Ali Tounsi, and Italian police schools. The agreement covers good practice exchanges and train-the-trainers components, and focuses on the "combat against illegal migration, drug trafficking and organised crime networks."¹⁷⁰ In response to a freedom of information request filed in March 2025, the Italian Ministry of Interior refused to disclose further details regarding the training protocol or its stipulations, citing public security and public order concerns.¹⁷¹

German police authorities, meanwhile, have provided training, exchange visits and equipment for Algeria's DGSN and the PAF since the 2000s. Similar to the training projects implemented in countless other countries, the German Federal Police mainly cooperate with Algeria on projects in the area of airport security and the detection of forged IDs, documents and certificates, including visas. Measures implemented by the German Federal Police for Algeria between 2014 and 2018 are mapped out in the table below:

¹⁷⁰ Algérie Press Service, *Algérie-Italie: signature d'un protocole de coopération en matière de formation policière*, 29 January 2025. Accessed 5 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/244rvs8y>

¹⁷¹ Freedom of Information request, Ministero dell'Interno, 12 May 2025.

| Activity | Date | Partner | Location |
|--|-----------------------------|---------|--------------------|
| Information visit at Frankfurt/Main airport ¹⁷² | 13-15 October 2014 | PAF | Frankfurt/ Main |
| Training in the area of combating document fraud (scheduled) | 2014 | | Algeria |
| Training in the area of combating document fraud (scheduled) | 2014 | | Algeria |
| Equipment aid: Document inspection technology (50 thread counters/75 UV hand lamps, scheduled) | 2014 | | |
| Equipment aid: Document inspection technology (75 document viewer devices with bag, scheduled) ¹⁷³ | 2014 | | |
| Basic training on police identity checks ¹⁷⁴ | 4 - 11 September 2018 | PAF | Algeria |
| Training aid: Document and certificate security ¹⁷⁵ | 23- 25 April 2018 | PAF | |
| Financing of a planned audit by the company VERIDOS to strengthen the expertise for evaluating the quality of the local site for the fabrication of identity documents | 26 - 29 October 2018 | PAF | Algeria |
| Equipment aid: 50 forensic lenses, 100 folding lenses ¹⁷⁶ | 2018 | PAF | |

¹⁷² Bundestagsdrucksache 18/3979, Reply of the German Federal Government to a parliamentary inquiry filed by DIE LINKE, 9 February 2015, Berlin. Accessed 13 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/b7858m2f>

¹⁷³ Bundestagsdrucksache 18/2286, Reply of the German Federal Government to a parliamentary inquiry filed by DIE LINKE, 5 August 2014, Berlin. Accessed 13 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/8uznxs9b>

¹⁷⁴ Bundestagsdrucksache 19/5521, Reply of the German Federal Government to a parliamentary inquiry filed by DIE LINKE, 6 November 2018, Berlin. Accessed 13 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2h6v9spt>

¹⁷⁵ Bundestagsdrucksache 19/3782, Reply of the German Federal Government to a parliamentary inquiry filed by DIE LINKE, 13 August 2018, Berlin. Accessed 13 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/36e7388r>

¹⁷⁶ Bundestagsdrucksache 19/8783, Reply of the German Federal Government to a parliamentary inquiry filed by DIE LINKE, 27 March 2019, Berlin. Accessed 13 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ykspv3jx>

Since 2019, however, the Federal Police' training programmes for DGSN and PAF on document fraud have substantially expanded, according to an inquiry in the German Bundestag filed by MP Clara Bunger of Die LINKE, outlined below:¹⁷⁷

| Year | Activity | Partner |
|------|---|---------|
| 2019 | Basic training on document and certificate security | PAF |
| 2019 | Equipment for training courses (50 forensic lenses, 100 folding lenses) | PAF |
| 2019 | Basic training on police identity checks | PAF |
| 2019 | General tasks of the Federal Police; first aid training | PAF |
| 2019 | Exchange of information and experience regarding returns; joint workshop | DGSN |
| 2020 | Delivery of 3 thermal imaging devices | PAF |
| 2020 | Delivery of 20 document inspection devices | DGSN |
| 2023 | Basic training on document and certificate security; document specialist | DGSN |
| 2023 | Document and certificate training (advanced level); multilateral training-for-trainers for AFRIPOL network (with officials from other beneficiary countries) | DGSN |
| 2024 | Multiplier course for document and certificate security | DGSN |
| 2024 | Exchange of information and experience regarding returns; drafting of a training programme for escort officers | DGSN |
| 2024 | Fact finding trip: investigation/coordination of investigation regarding regarding the combat against criminality | DGSN |
| 2024 | Visit by a five-member management delegation/exchange on police topics | DGSN |

¹⁷⁷ Bundestagsdrucksache 20/15109, Reply of the German Federal Government to a parliamentary inquiry filed by DIE LINKE, 13 March 2025, Berlin. Accessed 20 March 2025, <https://ds.server.bundestag.de/btd/20/151/2015109.pdf>

The Federal Police additionally facilitated two regional EU-funded training sessions, an expert meeting and a conference on document and certificate security, in which DGSN officials participated. These events were held in Egypt, Algeria, Ghana and Tunisia between 2022 and 2024 for Afripol, the multilateral police organisation of the AU.¹⁷⁸ The second German police body active in training and exchange formats with Algeria is the Federal Criminal Police Office (Bundeskriminalamt, BKA), a police authority with intelligence competencies. Cooperation has been in place since the 2000s, but is mostly concerned with training DGSN officials in areas such as bomb disposal, forensic technology and issues related to state security, rather than migration-related topics.

Algerian authorities have, meanwhile, clearly adopted newly acquired expertise from the training with German officials. They apply tightened security checks for international flights at Algerian airports, for instance. Prior to entering the gangway and again ahead of boarding a plane, IDs and visas are meticulously checked by what the ‘border management’ industry calls a ‘second line officer’. As ICMPD says with regard to its training of Pakistani border control authorities in recent years, these second line control points “are staffed by trained officials and equipped with advanced forensic tools to detect fraudulent travel documents.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ ICMPD, *ICMPD efforts led to 16% increase in preventing irregular migration from Pakistan*, 6 February 2025. Accessed 17 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2xy8z7eu>

3.5

The UN's Migration Control Service Providers



After being prohibited in doing any development work in Algeria, IOM has turned today into some kind of travel agency, solely charged with returns.”

Humanitarian source, 2024¹⁸⁰



Equally well-incorporated into the ‘migration management’ architecture in Algeria are the UN refugee agency UNHCR and the UN-affiliated border regime service provider IOM. The scope of their activities and their leverage with the authorities has changed substantially over the years. The changing migration dynamics in the region are fueling yet another shift in the way the government embeds them in the country’s border regimes.

UNHCR first opened an office in Algiers in 1984. IOM was only able to establish a branch in Algeria in 2016, though a host country agreement was signed with the government in 2007.¹⁸¹ Both organisations are ultimately bound to tiptoe around the government, given Algeria’s general reluctance in providing foreign and international entities significant room to maneuver, a diplomat formerly deployed to the country suggests: “Quiet diplomacy is the order of the day; every day.”¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Interview, anonymous, February 2025.

¹⁸¹ Sara Guillet, *Asylum and migration in the Maghreb: Country fact sheet Algeria*, EuroMed Rights, 2012.

¹⁸² Interview, anonymous, August 2024.

Given Algeria's embrace of the 1951/1967 refugee regime, the establishment of BAPRA in 1963 and the comparatively small number of people applying for asylum, UNHCR always operated in close cooperation with the state and within clearly-set boundaries. It was only in the mid-2000s that the agency abandoned—or was forced to abandon—its policy of extensively renewing UNHCR status documents for people under its mandate. This subjected those affected by the de facto annulment of their partial protection status to legal uncertainty and an increased risk of being expelled.¹⁸³ The change of procedures coincided with increasing arrivals in northern Algerian cities of people from western and central African states, and growing numbers of asylum claims.

In the near future, UNHCR's room to maneuver may shrink further, as the frictions between the state and the agency in recent years have contributed to the government's recent decision to draft an asylum law. If such a bill is adopted, UNHCR's Algeria branch could become a mere service provider for the state, only able to offer legal advice, consultancy and training, rather than being a (at least theoretically) mandate-driven UN body.¹⁸⁴ The government's selective application of international refugee law will have even less of a counterweight in a mandate-driven institution such as UNHCR, effectively limiting the enforcement of the 1951/1967 Convention to the Sahrawi population in Tindouf.

IOM, on the other hand, finds itself in a paradoxical situation. While the government intends to substantially expand coerced expulsions by plane in the framework of IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programme (AVRR), authorities have gradually limited

¹⁸³ Salim Chena, *L'asile au Maghreb: Quelle reconnaissance pour les exilés subsahariens*, p. 120/121.

¹⁸⁴ UNHCR Algeria continues to provide Algerian government officials with periodical training about refugee rights and international protection, targeting magistrates and senior members of the gendarmerie and the DGSN. UNHCR, *Algeria fact sheet*, February 2022. Accessed 3 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/3w26ntu9>

its ability to deploy missions outside of Algiers, and has scaled down other activities formerly pursued by the agency in Algeria. A humanitarian source, well informed on the matter, elaborates:

"Algeria wants to do less deportations via land borders and do more deportations by plane instead. Since 2023, IOM has, for the first time ever, proper negotiations with the government and discusses cooperation. They [the authorities] want to substantially expand voluntary returns from Tamanrasset."¹⁸⁵

In 2023, however, authorities prohibited an IOM team to provide humanitarian assistance for a group of people on the move in Tebessa and transferring transfer them to Algiers, after they were forcibly expelled from Tunisia. IOM received government approval for the mission, but local authorities refused access and forced the team to return to Algiers empty handed, the source explains. IOM had to cut down its humanitarian footprint, and is, from now on, to solely focus on coerced expulsions—an adjustment IOM is also due to make in Tunisia and other countries in the region. Another source formerly employed by the UN in the region explains:

"IOM has turned today into some kind of travel agency, solely charged with returns. They should change their name into 'International Organisation for Expulsions', or even better; 'International Organisation for Supposedly Voluntary Expulsions.'¹⁸⁶

Expulsions from Algeria to western African states organised by IOM have increased in recent years. The first IOM-organised collective expulsion flight from Tamanrasset to Niamey, carrying 166 Nigeriens,

¹⁸⁵ Interview, anonymous, September 2024.

¹⁸⁶ Interview, anonymous, February 2025.

took off in October 2019. After this, coerced returns—mostly in cooperation with the Algerian Red Crescent and the state-owned airline Air Algérie—were gradually ramped up following the end of the pandemic. In 2020, such flights were organised to Ivory Coast, Liberia, Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali, whereas the number of annual ‘voluntary returns’ increased from 1,100 in 2021 to 2,442 in 2023.¹⁸⁷ The latest annual target number for the AVRR programme of 3,000 people is expected to be raised to a staggering 10,000 people per year, a former UN employee explains.¹⁸⁸ While UNHCR is struggling with a severe funding crisis, European governments—in particular France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the Netherlands, but also the EU—continue to pour substantial financial resources into its AVRR projects, in Algeria and elsewhere, either via the EU’s MPRR project, or in synergy with it.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ IOM, *IOM launches USD 8.3 million appeal to scale up its AVRR programme in Algeria*, 10 May 2021. Accessed 1 January 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mskammkf>; and; IOM, *Return an reintegration key highlights*, 2024. Accessed 17 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/46rjjhme>

¹⁸⁸ Interview, anonymous, March 2025.

¹⁸⁹ IOM, *France, IOM cooperate on project to strengthen migration management in Algeria*, 23 July 2024. Accessed 1 December 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/au7d3f9f>

4.0

REDEFINING SOVEREIGNTY



We today can do everything, so long as we do not imitate Europe, so long as we are not obsessed by the desire to catch up with Europe. Europe now lives at such a mad, reckless pace that she has shaken off all guidance and all reason, and she is running headlong into the abyss; we would do well to avoid it with all possible speed.”¹⁹⁰

Frantz Fanon, 1961



In the past three decades, a multitude of state and non-state actors—including international organisations, NGOs, charities, and UN agencies—have gradually managed to successfully incentivize states, state entities and fractions of the private sector, civil society and the media in the Global South to reproduce a migration control dogma and implement corresponding policies, tailored to nurture the commodification of human movement and to maintain the availability of a precarised workforce, in the North and South. Algeria is clearly no exception: it has been lured into cooperation schemes ranging from EU-funded cultural events to free-of-charge migration control workshops for police officers and public servants.

¹⁹⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The wretched of the earth*, Grove Press, New York, 1963, p. 312.

However, the resources possessed by Algeria give it substantial leverage to counter the palpable effects of this governance dogma, a dogma that subverts South-South integration beyond the coordination of anti migration reprisals, and maintains the Algerian state's role as an intermediary between northern and southern elites, on the one hand, and populations (mainly) in the south, on the other. Or, as Fanon—post mortem buried in the sleepy town of Aïn Kerma in El Tarf—once put it:

"The national bourgeoisie of underdeveloped countries is not engaged in production, nor in invention, nor building, nor labor; it is entirely canalised into activities of the intermediary type."¹⁹¹

After independence, Algeria became an outright “Mekka of Revolutionaries.” The new regime in power—still mesmerised by its recent past and well-nourished with eloquent figures such as Ben Bella and Bouteflika—supported anticolonial struggles across the globe, providing refuge to and backing for movements in Namibia, Rhodesia, Guinea Bissau, Angola, Vietnam, Palestine, Brazil and even Canada, France and the United States.¹⁹² At that time, there was not only the imaginary possibility of a post-colonial state that would radically turn towards the South, but concrete initiatives that sought to make it a reality. Today, however, only traces of this once staunch anti-imperialist alignment remain. The Algerian state and its affiliates maintain an imagery and a rhetoric nurtured by the spirit of the post-colonial Algeria of the 1960s and 70s. Today, however, the international solidarity occasionally vocalised by the state is a conditional and selective one that borders the regime's internal tug-of-war over access to hydrocarbon revenues and, at best, the “anti-imperialist strategies” of foreign policy.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, p. 150/152.

¹⁹² Mohamed Ben Slama, *La Mecque des révolutionnaires*, ARTE France/CNC, 2017.

Accordingly, those factions in control of the post-Hirak government are compelled by one main goal: to preserve their uncontested access to the hydrocarbon rent generated by Sonatrach, Algeria's state-owned oil and gas giant, and its western partners. The post-colonial elites have failed to prevent the "nationalisation of the robbery of the nation,"¹⁹³ as progressive currents in the independence movement that envisioned a different Algeria were marginalised or entirely eliminated, in favor of an opaque web of regime cronies and rival camps in the state and security apparatus. These are the same factions that have been in control since independence and are driven, above all, by rampant rent-seeking and reflexive nationalism.

Ferhat Abbas' 1963 draft of Algeria's constitution, recently reexamined in academic papers, not only repudiates "the cult of the person, personal power, and any totalitarian regime of any kind" but "condemns racism and fanaticism" and is bound to democratic and socialist principles.¹⁹⁴ This once-possible path stands in stark contrast to today's systemic reprisals against people on the move, their precarisation, and the widespread racism (re-)produced by the state and large parts of society. Unable and unwilling to confront the distortions of the rentier economy or to effectively counter the corrosive effects of EU border externalisation in Africa and the Mediterranean, the Algerian government nourishes the country's alienation from its southern neighborhood by fueling racism and continuing with intermediary repression, helped along by EU agencies, EU governments, UN-affiliated bodies and neighboring states.

However, the crackdowns against people on the move and their "degrading treatment at the hands of [Algerian] authorities in this

¹⁹³ Frantz Fanon, *The wretched of the earth*, Grove Press, New York, 1963, p. 48.

¹⁹⁴ "Art 1: La République Algérienne condamne expressément le racisme et le fanatisme (...); Art 2: La République Algérienne répudie le culte de la personne, le pouvoir personnel et tout régime totalitaire de quelque nature qu'il soit." Massensen Cherbi, *Ferhat Abbas' draft of Algeria's 1963 constitution: visions of a Muslim democrat*, The Journal of North African Studies, p. 1 – 32. Accessed 17 May 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2025.2492108>

so-called ‘brotherly’ country” now echo increasingly loudly across the continent, as shown by a recent statement by APS and four other African solidarity networks, including the Southern Africa Migration Network (SAMIN) and the Maghreb Sahel Migration Network (RMSM).¹⁹⁵ Instead of reinforcing the commodification of human movements and (anti-)migration cooperation with Europe, the state should proactively integrate people on the move into the economy (whether temporarily or not), engage with its African partners on migrant labor and human movements, and accelerate continental cooperation based on human mobility. To diffuse the distortions of the rentier model, to modernise the economy and to protect it against external shocks, the state must profoundly turn towards the Global South—economically, politically as well as with regards to human movements. Or as Moussaoui puts it:

“Algeria should embrace Africa, and an economic approach is not sufficient. We should facilitate circulations of goods and knowledge.”¹⁹⁶

For decades, initiatives have been promoted at the AU level that could provide for exactly the kind of continental dynamic needed to counter Europe’s destructive meddling in African affairs and turn the page on the overall handling of migration. In 2006, Algeria hosted the first AU expert meeting on migration and development, in which delegations adopted a draft African Common Position on Migration and Development, later endorsed by the Executive Council of the AU Commission. The pioneering document recognises the increasing impact of migration on AU member states but rebukes the “selective migration approaches adopted by developed countries” that “target African expertise” and “constitutes an additional threat

¹⁹⁵ APS/SAMIN/RMSM, Statement by collectives of migrant rights organisations against the expulsions ordered by Algeria, Niamey, 17 May 2025.

¹⁹⁶ Thomas Serres, *Algeria, where is your African revolution?* Jadaliyya, 14 March 2019.

to African economies.”¹⁹⁷ The Common Position emphasises that “the fundamental causes of this phenomenon” are “the disparity in development, conflicts and political instability”. It opts for “a broader development framework” instead of pursuing a security-driven approach to migration, displacement and mobility, as pushed forward by northern states.

Regarding concrete initiatives, however, the current state of affairs is grim. The AU’s Freedom of Movement protocol, introduced in 2018, was signed by only 32 out of 55 member states and ratified by a meagre four countries. Not a single state in northern Africa has signed or ratified the protocol.¹⁹⁸ The AU’s 2009 Kampala Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced People in Africa was signed or ratified by significantly more governments. Yet, states in northern Africa remain once again largely absent – Tunisia being the only country in the region that has signed the protocol.

Algeria, along with its eastern neighbours, should abandon attempts to fortify the north of the continent. It should return to a path that will accelerate its integration and cooperation with the South, and aim towards what the prominent Marxist Samir Amin once called ‘delinking’—a policy of political solidarity between countries of the south, based on regional integration and the diversification of trade and investment, with priority given to the periphery and the semi-periphery instead of further allying with Europe.¹⁹⁹ However, major obstacles for any kind of regional integration or a rapprochement with neighboring countries remain. They include the tensions with authorities in Niamey, Bamako and particularly with Rabat, given

¹⁹⁷ African Union, *African common position on migration and development*, June 2006. Accessed 25 February 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2fbch2tf>

¹⁹⁸ African Union, *List of countries which have signed, ratified/acceded to the Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Rights of Residence and Right of Establishment*, 2018. Accessed 16 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yckyke55p>

¹⁹⁹ Corinna Mullin, *Border Imperialism in the Maghreb*, Transnational Institute, Amsterdam, January 2025. Accessed 3 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/5n76ps7r>

Morocco's increasingly close ties to the Israeli occupation. Algeria's military continues accordingly to stage large-scale military exercises in its borderlands, most recently at the border with Libya in In Amenas and near Tindouf, ironically dubbed "the impregnable fortress".²⁰⁰

This continuously challenging state of affairs at some of Algeria's borders has, for the time being, no end in sight. Algiers could nevertheless turn towards the AU and, as a first symbolic but powerful step towards a more profound integration with the continent, sign the African Union's Freedom of Movement protocol as well as the Kampala Convention. Meanwhile, the Trump administration's massive funding cuts for UN agencies and development projects across the globe will have also a major impact on Algeria, and put the government's selective solidarity to the test, given that the humanitarian operations in the Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf are heavily affected by those cuts. For years, the US was among the most important donors to programmes in the camps. They are now struggling to deal with the funding gap that needs to be urgently bridged to maintain the humanitarian operations for tens of thousands of Sahrawi refugees.²⁰¹ So far, however, Algeria has not stepped in.

²⁰⁰ Rafik Tadjer, *Algérie: l'Armée mène un exercice à la frontière avec le Maroc, Tout sur l'Algérie*, 22 May 2025. Accessed 23 May 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/42a72uve>

²⁰¹ USAID/Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, *Algeria assistance overview*, September 2024. Accessed 5 January 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/ymj5cbb9>

**Forum Tunisien
pour les Droits Économiques et Sociaux**

2, rue de France, Immeuble Ibn Khaldoun (ex-National), 2e
étage, appartement 325, Tunis – Bab Bhar 1000.

contact@ftdes.net
(+216) 71 32 5129

June 2025