

Illegal Immigration in Southern Algeria: Exploring Potential Integration**Dr. Tahar ABBOU***

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In recent times, illegal immigration has emerged as a significant concern not only for European nations but also for North African countries, traditionally viewed as transit points for illegal immigrants heading to Europe. However, with political upheavals in Tunisia and Libya and the implementation of stringent measures by European authorities, Algeria has increasingly become the ultimate destination for these migrants. Official data provided by the Brigade for the Fight against Illegal Immigration and the Courts of Adrar and Tamanrasset- two southern provinces sharing frontiers with Mali and Niger respectively- confirm that Algeria has become a hosting country. Despite stringent border controls enforced by the military, the activities of smugglers continue to facilitate the arrival of thousands of Africans annually in regions like Tamanrasset and Adrar. The dire living conditions endured by these immigrants, particularly in districts such as "B'ni Waskut" in southwestern Adrar, render them susceptible to involvement in delinquency, criminality, and prostitution. The paper proposes a project-oriented approach focusing on integrating these immigrants into local development initiatives, thereby preventing the negative consequences on the region.

Keywords: Illegal immigration, Adrar, Tamanrasset, Integration, economic development schemes

الهجرة غير الشرعية في جنوب الجزائر: إمكانيات الاندماج

أصبحت الهجرة غير الشرعية في الآونة الأخيرة مصدر قلق كبير ليس فقط للدول الأوروبية ولكن أيضاً لدول شمال أفريقيا، التي كان يُنظر إليها تقليدياً كنقاط عبور للمهاجرين غير الشرعيين الذين يتجهون إلى أوروبا. ومع الربيع العربي في كل من تونس وليبيا من جهة، ووضع إجراءات صارمة من قبل السلطات الأوروبية، أصبحت الجزائر وبشكل متزايد الوجهة النهائية لهؤلاء المهاجرين. البيانات الرسمية التي قدمتها فرقة الدرك الوطني لمكافحة الهجرة غير الشرعية ومحكمتي أدرار وتمنراست - مقاطعتين جنوبيتين تشتركان في الحدود مع مالي والنيجر على التوالي - تؤكد أن الجزائر أصبحت بلداً مضيئاً. على الرغم من الضوابط الحدودية الصارمة التي تفرضها مجموعة حرس الحدود، إلا أن أنشطة المهربين ما زالت تسهل وصول آلاف الأفارقة سنوياً إلى مناطق مثل تمنراست وأدرار. إن الظروف المتردية التي يعيشها هؤلاء المهاجرون، لا سيما في مناطق مثل "بني وسكت" في جنوب غرب أدرار، تجعلهم عرضة للانخراط في الجريمة والاتجار بالمخدرات والدعارة. نقترح من خلال هذا المقال مشروع يركز على دمج هؤلاء المهاجرين في مبادرات التنمية المحلية، وبالتالي منع الآثار السلبية لهذه الهجرة على المنطقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهجرة غير الشرعية، أدرار، تمنراست، الاندماج، مشاريع التنمية المحلية

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١. Introduction

It is important to mention at the beginning of this research study that, it was not possible to get data about illegal immigration from official sources, that is, the Anti-illegal Immigration Squads, due to the bureaucratic barriers. Therefore, we will principally rely on newspaper reports, interviews and briefings by officials in the Algerian government and representatives of some Non-Governmental Organizations. The research work deals with the flows of illegal immigrants from Sub-Saharan countries and the consequences of this phenomenon on the national security and the economy in Algeria. It also examines the economic and social consequences of the African immigrants on the Algerian society. The last part of this research work is devoted to the Algerian policies to deal with this phenomenon. In the context, we are going to examine the political and security approaches to face the flows of African migrants in Algeria.

٢. Background

The political changes witnessed in the past few years under the context of the Arab Spring, on the hand, and the social economic and political situation in Africa and particularly in Sub-Saharan countries, on the other, gave birth to important flows of refugees and migrants, legal and illegal, towards safer areas. According to Benjamin Stora¹ in a speech at a conference at the University of May 19th, 1945 in Guelma, in the East of Algeria: "The geopolitical changes in Libya, Yemen, Iraq and Syria have thrown millions of people on the road to forced exile." The situation has become more alarming to the extent that it led to the reopening of former camps and the construction of walls to control the flows of migrants. These migratory flows are not only a result of wars and conflicts, but also to shortage of food, lack of freedom and political oppression. Turkey hosts ١,٥ million Syrian refugees, and Lebanon ١,٤ million in and in Europe more than one million migrants have arrived since ٢٠١٥.

Algeria has the largest border to the south with ٤,٣٥٠ kilometers, which makes preventing illegal immigration from sub-Saharan countries a very difficult task. Smugglers have found in transporting illegal immigrants a lucrative activity, they often use illegal uncontrolled tracks during the night to avoid being intercepted by the border security forces. According to an official in the Algerian government: "Smuggling illegal immigrants' cell in Agadez, in the north of Niger, towards Libya, and Algeria

¹ Benjamin Stora is a French historian, expert on North Africa, who is widely considered one of the world's leading authorities on Algerian history. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Stora

estimated its monthly income at ١٤٠ million Euros, and these funds are recycled in the activities of smuggling, terrorism and incitement.”

٣. Definitions

Migration in general and illegal immigration or undocumented immigration has become one of the most important subjects of interest to the international community for the past three decades. Researchers and academics as well as politicians have attempted to define this phenomenon. According to the Cambridge dictionary: “an illegal immigrant is someone who lives or works in another country when they do not have the legal right to do this”. From an American perspective, Barry Chiswick defines illegal immigration as being an issue which arises from a divergence between whom the United States will accept as an immigrant and the desire of some foreign nationals to live and work in this country. (Chiswick, ١٩٨٨: ١٠٢). In contrast, the Europeans have not yet come out with a standard definition to illegal immigration, they gave it a broad definition reduced in the term ‘undocumented immigrant’ or ‘*les sans papiers*’.

٤. The Reasons of Illegal Immigration

The main reasons of the important flows of people from the Sub-Saharan countries are listed in the following:

- Armed conflicts in the Sahel and the spread of terrorist groups linked to al Qaeda (AQMI), Ansar e-Eddin, and the Tuareg rebellion (MNLA) against the central Authority in Mali has caused security crises (Tahar Abbou, ٢٠١٧: ١٦٨).
- The new born boundaries drawn by the Europeans more than a century ago when they shared the African territories at the Berlin Conference (Crowder, ١٩٧٦: ٦٢) are real time bombs making the level of social cohesion weak. They triggered a number of ethnic conflicts, some of them developed into ethnic cleansing and genocides, Rwanda ١٩٩٤ as an example, which caused the death of ٨٠٠,٠٠٠ people and the displacement of thousands of others.
- The failure of the post-colonial state in Africa in building nation state far from the ethnic considerations, which gave birth to the existence of forms of ethnic or regional domination of political life in many Sahel states (Falola & Dauda, ٢٠١٧: ٣٢٦).
- Social, economic and political injustice in many African countries resulted in situations of political frustration that lead to the emergence of movements of rebellion and political violence.
- Illegal migration from the Sahel region expresses the desperation of the peoples of these countries because of unemployment and poverty, ٨٠ percent and ٦٠ percent of the populations in Chad and Niger live on less than \$١ a day respectively. The spread

of infectious diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS in the absence of the state care led thousands of people to leave to the southern cities in Algeria (Berkouk, ٢٠١٥).

٥. Migration in the Algerian Legislation

Since ١٩٦٦, Algerian authorities have issued a number of laws, executive decrees and regulations to control the presence of foreign nationals in its territory.

٥.١. Deportation and repatriation of undocumented immigrants: The placement of an illegal immigrant in a detention centre should not exceed ٣٠ days. It can be renewed if the procedures of the deportation order to their country of origin have not finished (Journal Officiel, ٢٠٠٨:٤).

٥.٢. Access to employment for foreign nationals: Access to work for foreign nationals is submitted to the issue of a work permit, which is delivered only in case the work requires high skills and qualifications which cannot be filled by an Algerian citizen. If the work duration is less than three months, only a work temporary leave is required, and it can be renewed once (Journal Officiel, ١٩٨١: ٦٨٣).

٥.٣. Access to public services: Health care in public hospitals is free for both Algerian citizens and foreign nationals regardless their situation (Journal Officiel, ٢٠١٨: ٣). Concerning education, integrating the children of foreign nationals in the Algerian educational system faces a lot of issues related to the differences in the cultural backgrounds. Besides, the teaching language in Algeria is Arabic which makes some foreign nationals reluctant for reasons related principally to preserving their identity.

٦. The Flow of immigrants and Its Impacts on Algeria

٦.١. The Security Challenge

Fighting against illegal immigration has become one of the major issue for the Algerian government. The long borders with its seven neighbours, with a total distance of ٦,٩٧١ kilometres makes the task of the Borders Security Forces more and more difficult (Saad, ٢٠١٢: ٧١). Smugglers have developed new methods to transport illegal immigrants from sub-Saharan countries to Algeria. According to Pascal Reyntjens, Chief of Mission chez International Organization for Migration (IOM): “Algeria has become the final destination for many Sub-Saharan illegal immigrants after the collapse of the political regime in Libya, and the break out of conflicts because of the spread of weapons brought from Libya. According to a report released by Al-Jazeera Studies Centre, ٤٥ million pieces of weapons were smuggled from Libya to ١٤ countries (Amijin, ٢٠١٤).

The number of Africans who chose Algeria as their final destination is estimated at ٢٠٠,٠٠٠ people. Following the circumstances resulting from the political changes in

Tunisia and Libya, the number of illegal immigrants in Algeria has dramatically increased and the problems have been exacerbated because of competition amongst various criminal gangs involved in trafficking, drugs, weapons, money counterfeiting and terrorism. This competition resulted in the spread of terrorism in the Sahel region: especially with the complicity of terrorist groups with smugglers of illegal immigrants through the exchange of information in return for profit sharing.

. Geographical factors particularly the length of the southern borders of Algeria, the hard climatic condition in the Sahara and the difficult tracks used by smugglers which make them away from the border security forces' control helped, to a large extent, the flourishing of trade in drugs and weapons. The low population density and the tribal nature in the border areas also helped in spreading these suspicious activities.

. The spread of organized crime, Illegal migrants are in need of funds especially those who consider Algeria as a transit country so they need important funds to cross the northern bank of the Mediterranean.

. Another security challenge the Algerian authorities lies in the recruitment of some illegal immigrants in spy networks working as secret agents for foreign countries (Drif, ٢٠٠٩/١٠: ١١١). In April ٢٠١٨, the Court of Ghardaia, in the south of Algeria, treated a spy case in which a group of foreign nationals was working for a foreign country

٦,٢. The Health Care Challenge

The number of illegal immigrants in Tamanrasset, one of the southern cities in Algeria which shares a long border with Niger, is estimated between ٢٥,٠٠٠ and ٣٠,٠٠٠ from ٤٥ nationalities, all ages included, living in appalling conditions helped in spreading diseases. Most of illegal immigrants live in ghettos with no running water and lack of health care which made them vulnerable to diseases (Drif, ٢٠٠٩/١٠: ١٠٩). The health risks are increasing as a result of the contact of the local population due to the lack of control and supervision resulting in alarming figures of HIV infected people. Pasteur Institute in Algiers announced ٧٢٣ new cases of HIV / AIDS recorded nationwide during the first three quarters of ٢٠١٧ to be added to a total of ١١,٣٨٥ people who have been diagnosed with HIV since the beginning of the epidemic in ١٩٨٥.

The Algerian government with the partnership of the United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) decided to build the first research centre in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in Tamanrasset. "This centre will be useful in addressing the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS," says Bourouba. "Besides the scientific research conducted there, they will gather important information about the spread of the disease in Algeria and the region. With more accurate data we will be better positioned to fight the virus." (Boumedjout, ٢٠١٢)

٦,٣. The Economic Impact

Since the collapse of Gaddafi regime in Libya, the number of Sub-Saharan migrants has increased. The economic boom which Algeria knew during the decade from ٢٠٠٥ to ٢٠١٤ due to the rise of oil prices in the world market (See table below)

attracted many Africans who used to work in Libya before the civil war. Issa, a highly skilled bricklayer from Mali told me that he had worked for more than ١٠ years in Libya before leaving to Adrar, in the south of Algeria, because of the war. He added that some of his friends preferred to migrate to Europe. The economic boom in Algeria generated enough jobs for the local people and for the African immigrants in different sectors including agriculture, construction, domestic services, etc.

Table ١. Crude Oil Prices – Historical Annual Data (Adapted)

Years	٢٠٠٥	٢٠٠٦	٢٠٠٧	٢٠٠٨	٢٠٠٩	٢٠١٠	٢٠١١	٢٠١٢	٢٠١٣	٢٠١٤
Average Price/barrel	٥٦,٦٤	٦٦,٠٥	٧٢,٣٤	٩٩,٦٧	٦١,٩٥	٧٩,٤٨	٩٤,٨٨	٩٤,٠٥	٩٧,٦٨	٩٣,١٧

Source: <https://www.macrotrends.net/٢٥١٦/wti-crude-oil-prices-١٠-year-daily-chart>

The impact of illegal immigration generally fluctuates from beneficial to disadvantageous. On the one hand, it is argued that migration reduces unemployment in the countries of origin while it increases it in the host countries (Rezouni, ٢٠١٠: ٢). The presence of African migrants in Algeria has generally good effects on the economy. In the large southern cities like Tamanrasset, Adrar, Ghardaia and Wargla

٦,٤. The Social Impact

٦,٤,١. The Negative Social Aspects

The important flows of illegal immigrants brought some negative social phenomena which put the Algerian authorities in front of big challenges. Illegal immigrants encouraged bribery and corruption; they attempt to obtain documents to stay legally in the Algerian territory what ever the cost. Some of them are involved in producing, consuming and commercializing drugs and some traditional African spirits. The spread of sorcery especially among Nigerian women who sell products prepared for witchcraft constitute a serious threat to the society (Saad, ٢٠١٢: ٩١). The spread of begging: Thousands of women and children are exploited by criminal groups in begging. In the context, the Ministry of Interior Affairs in an interview with the daily newspaper *Echourouk* announced the number of ١٤,٠٠٠ Africa migrants who were exploited by Niger criminal group in begging in Algerian cities. The Director of Studies in Charge of Migration at the Ministry of the Interior Affairs, Hassane Kassimi, said: “Algeria has saved ١٤,٠٠٠ women and kids from the hands of a Niger criminal group that has begun organizing themselves in the national territory in order to exploit this fragile category of migrants in begging.” (Aouimer, ٢٠١٨)

٦,٤,٢. The Positive Social Aspects

The presence of thousands of migrants (legal and illegal) from ٤٥ nationalities and from different religious and cultural backgrounds transformed the two southern cities: Adrar and Tamanrasset into cosmopolitan cities. The inhabitants of these two cities have become familiar with some African dishes like *Shinkava*^٢, *Mainama*^٣, *Fura*^٤; these

^٢ - *Shinkava* means rice. Dish made from rice can be referred to as *shinkava* when served with vegetables.

^٣ - *Mainama* is a Hausa word which meat seller whether fresh, roasted or fried, and *nama* is meat.

^٤ - *Fura* is a Hausa dish made from crushed cereal with or without milk. It is just like tea to Arabs

dishes are served in popular restaurants everywhere. African music is also gaining ground, you can enjoy some African rhythmic music while walking in the streets in these two cities. African dressmakers are also contributing to this rich and varied culture, a visitor to Adrar or Tamanrasset can go to an African dressmaker and order a *Bazane* or a *Bobo* that fits them and they can get it ready in one or two hours.

Linguistically, local African languages like: Hausa, Zarma, Peul, Bambara, Wolof, Swahili, etc. are commonly used among the members of the different communities which makes of Adrar and Tamanrasset two cosmopolitan cities. Religiously, for centuries, Islam has been the unique religion, now you can see Christians and animists living in harmony with Moslems. In Tamanrasset and in Adrar, to a lesser extent, the local people talk about fast-paced changes in their cities, within few years they say the two cities may have their own Africa town, like China town in Paris, which makes them vibrant multi-cultural cities (Bensaad, ٢٠٠٩: ٥٠). Thus, this diversity is a positive addition to the society and it should be dealt with, at the official level, positively. In the context, António Guterres, the General Secretary of the United Nations says: "Societies today are multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural. And that is a richness, not a threat" (Guterres, ٢٠١٩)

٧. The Algerian Approaches to Deal with Illegal Immigration

The Algerian official position in dealing with illegal immigration issue has been changing according to internal and external factors. The internal factors are generally determined by the attitude of illegal immigrants and the local people's reactions. Some parts in Algeria, like Béchar, Dely Brahin (a district in Algiers) and Wargla witnessed in the past few years violent clashes between local people and illegal immigrants. The main reasons of these incidents were the involvement of illegal immigrants in criminal attacks, prostitution and non-respect of the local traditions. The external factors are generally expressed in the position of the international community including the European Union, the United Nations, the NGO's and some humanitarian activists who often criticize the Algerian approach in dealing with migration issue.

٧,١. The Political Approach

The Algerian authorities have attempted to find political solutions to the phenomenon of illegal immigration by helping Sub-Saharan African countries. In this context, Algeria led peace talks between the MNLA (the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad) and the central government in Mali to achieve peace in northern Mali and therefore eliminate one of the reasons of people displacement. Similarly, Algeria conducted mediation between the CRA (La Coordination de la Résistance Armée) and the central government in Niger to achieve peace and order in the northern region in Niger to avoid the displacement of people to the Algerian southern cities. Furthermore, Algeria cancelled the debts of some poor African countries to help the economic development in these countries.

٧,٢. The Security Approach

Under the consequences of the economic crisis which has hit Algeria for the past four years due to the fall of oil prices and the rise of organized crime including human trafficking, trade in drugs, prostitution and money counterfeiting, the Algerian government has alternatively adopted the security approach. The campaigns of repatriation suggest figures of ٦٠٠٠٠ irregular migrants deported each month, that is, ٧٢٠٠٠٠ per year through the two major border points, in Guezzam on the Niger border and Tin Zawatin on the Malian border. Algeria has regularly been harshly criticized by the European Union and particularly the former European colonial powers who are responsible to a large extent for poverty and underdevelopment in Africa as mentioned by Walter Rodney (Rodney, ١٩٧٢: ١١٨), and Rhoda Howard (Howard, ١٩٧٨: ٦٨-٧٢).

The Algerian government strongly rejected the European and international organizations' accusation for non-respect of human rights and the international treaties and conventions governing migration. It officially condemned the reports of some organizations that are attempting to distort its image in the file of African migrants who live on its territory, claiming that they are mistreated. Interior Ministry's representative refused to accuse Algeria from certain parties and organizations of mistreatment of migrants who had arrived in Algerian territory, saying: "The Algerian state is deeply committed to this issue and takes into account the humanitarian aspect. Raids are carried out to protect them and if we carried deportations this does not mean that we are Nazis, this falls within the framework of combating crime."

٨. Conclusion

Considering the causes and consequences of migration, legal and illegal, the international community should immediately act to improve worldwide stability through promoting democracy and sustainable development in migrant exporting countries. The security approach brings many deficiencies the most important of which the non-respect of human right through the arbitrary deportation of illegal immigrants. It is high time for the Algerian government to adopt a policy based on integrating the African immigrants into the Algerian society. There many successful models throughout the world where immigrants from different ethnic groups and different cultural and religious backgrounds live in harmony. This diversity gives the society its strength and cultural richness. Visitors to the two large cities in the south of Algeria, Tamanrasset and Adrar notice the conditions under which thousands of Africans live. A situation that leads to predict serious consequences in the near future, the spread of infectious diseases, the rise of criminality, drug dealing and prostitution. Therefore, it is recommended that urgent action should be taken by the Algerian government to integrate these African immigrants in the society. In this respect, it is suggested to create a department of immigrants' affairs under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior Affairs. This department conducts a survey to get precise data about the number of these immigrant by sex, age, country of origin, qualifications and skills. These data should be available to the different economic sectors (construction, agriculture and services) through the existing local institutions known as *les bureaux de main d'oeuvre*. Besides, the Ministry of Education should be involved in this programme to prevent the spread of ignorance and its serious consequences among the children of these immigrants. In this respect that immigrants should be given the choice to enter Algerian schools or, as far as possible, establishing community schools, for example, 'the Malian school', the

Nigerien school, etc. The Ministry of Housing is also concerned in this programme aiming at integrating the immigrants in the society. Immigrants should be given access to housing. These policies should go hand in hand with security measures in conformity with the national legislation and the international treaties and conventions.



Source:

https://www.google.com/search?q=map+of+algeria+in+english&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=^KTrDzIo°O_MbM%٢٥٣A%٢٥٢C·hW٩s٣ojnQGJhM%٢٥٢C_&vet=1&usg=AI&-kTXW-pAOqDhBiPj٢skejWMyangU·A&sa=X&ved=٢ahUKEwjZ٢vKBgPTiAhUJ·uAKHcATCLMQ٩QEwAXoECAQQBg#imgsrc=fgYeHW٢Pj°aAQM:&vet=1

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