



The Impact of Illegal Immigration of Africans on Algerian Society

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Abstract ;

This study aims to shed light on the phenomenon of illegal immigration, as it has become one of the most pressing contemporary issues, posing a real threat on security, social, and economic levels—both globally and nationally. The study focuses on the Algerian case, specifically the province of Tamanrasset, which serves as a major transit point for migrants coming from the Sahel countries. This is particularly relevant in light of the growing crises in the region, such as the Azawad conflict, organized crime, and smuggling. The study seeks to understand the deep-rooted causes that contribute to the escalation of this phenomenon and to analyze its impact on Algeria as a host country, by examining its consequences on local security, economic resources, social structure, and political stability. The study concludes that illegal immigration to Algeria—and in particular to the province of Tamanrasset—has become an increasing burden on local authorities, as it directly affects public security, drains material and human resources, and contributes to the aggravation of social problems. This calls for the development of comprehensive policies that address the phenomenon at its roots while balancing humanitarian considerations with the requirements of national sovereignty.

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1. Introduction

The phenomenon of migration has attracted the attention of many social researchers and specialists in population studies, due to its connection with numerous social, economic, and psychological issues. Like many countries around the world, Algeria is witnessing a widespread prevalence of this phenomenon—both legal and illegal—due to a variety of diverse factors. What is particularly noteworthy is that Algeria has undergone significant transformations, especially in the economic field, which has elevated its status and made it a point of interest for many foreigners, particularly those coming from Africa. These migrants often resort to all possible means, including illegal immigration, in their attempts to settle in Algerian territory. Algeria has witnessed this trend since its independence, the first wave being directed toward Nigeria in 1963, when Algeria hosted hundreds of Malians and Nigerians fleeing miserable living conditions in their respective countries. Algeria is now also seen as an important transit country for migrants moving onward. This prevalence happens in southern Algeria, mainly in the Tamanrasset area, where a large quantity of the migrants stem from Mali and Niger, in addition to numerous other African nationalities.

Despite the intensive efforts of security personnel to curb this phenomenon, it continues to pose a threat to the region. According to the Provincial Gendarmerie

Group of Tamanrasset, the number of migrants apprehended by the gendarmerie across the province and deported to their home countries is steadily increasing. Many of them are also imprisoned on various charges, especially those related to forgery and drug possession.

Tamanrasset is considered one of the provinces most affected by the influx of illegal migrants. Migrants usually enter through three main routes: first, In Guezzam and its surrounding areas; then the city of Tamanrasset and its surroundings; followed by In Salah and its surroundings. They often fail to reach other destinations such as Ghardaïa, Ouargla, or Adrar due to the checkpoints and security patrols carried out by various authorities, including the gendarmerie, police, and customs.

It is also reported that the province of Tamanrasset spends tens of billions of dinars annually on transporting and deporting migrants to the southern borders near In Guezzam, in addition to tens of millions of dinars for providing them with food during the process.

In light of the information regarding the issue of illegal immigration in Algeria, in particular the province of Tamanrasset, the research problem and its hypotheses can be established as follows: Research Problem: What are the causes and motivations behind the increasing incursion of illegal immigration to the province of

Tamanrasset, and what are its social, security, and economic effects for the region?, Two hypotheses can be proposed:

The influx of illegal immigration into Tamanrasset is attributed to unique economic and social conditions within the countries of origin of these migrants, and Algeria's emerging transformation into a transit and destination state fueled by socioeconomic improvements.

The increase in illegal immigration is producing significant repercussions in Tamanrasset province, including rising rates of crime, draining of local resources, and heightened security and administrative burdens on the local authorities.

1-Study Concepts:

1.1- The Concept of Migration:

Linguistically, the term "migration" is derived from the word *hajara*, which means to move away or to distance oneself. The verb *hājara* means to leave one's homeland and move from one place to another. Migration refers to the movement of people from one homeland to another. In ancient times, Arabs did not recognize homelands based on the political borders known today; however, this did not imply the absence of a concept of homeland. For them, the homeland referred to the place where a person lived alongside their tribe. (Ahmed, 2010, p. 02)

Terminological Definition: Migration is a geographical phenomenon representing population movement in the form of the movement of people from place to place, it involves a change of usual residence for an individual. Migration refers to the relocation from one residence to another with the intention of residing for a long time in the destination location. (Omar, 2010, p. 04)

Legal Definition: In international law, migration is defined as the permanent departure of an individual from their country to the territory of another state. From this definition, it is clear that international legal doctrine emphasizes the migrant's intention. Therefore, if a person leaves a territory with the intention of returning to it—regardless of how long they are gone—this is not considered migration from the perspective of international legal doctrine.

1-2- Definition of Illegal Migration: In its general sense, illegal migration refers to the act of crossing into a country unlawfully—without official travel documents or without the approval of the host country's authorities—whether on foot or using some form of transportation. It is essentially the act of breaching borders and infiltrating another country without adhering to the laws and regulations governing the movement and travel of individuals. This includes cases such as overstaying a visa, which transforms legal migration into illegal.

The definition of illegal migration by international organizations stipulates movement from one country to another by a migrant taking entry clandestinely without a visa or permit, (Othman & Nour, 2008, p. 17) and without prior let or future authorization. Simply put, it means that a migrant is entering clandestinely without travel documents, usually by land borders, along undocumented routes or crossing maritime borders either by boat or other vessels. The century old history of suffering from illegal migration in terms of people carrying out clandestine or unauthorized entry into their destination country has remained largely uncurbed because it is a priority or national security issue that is difficult to continuously monitor, particularly along the coastal areas. Alternatively, illegal migration across air borders is rare because an airport is a high security area with strict surveillance.

To accurately define migration, it is important to take into account both the migrant's intent and the duration of their stay in the host country or location. For instance, some European countries define migration as leaving one's country and settling abroad either permanently or for an extended period, while others do not consider movement between European countries as migration.

1-3- African Migrants:

Operationally, this term refers to any individual from African countries who enters Algeria illegally through its southern border strip, whether on foot, on animals, or using four-wheel-drive vehicles operated by specialized networks.

2- Types of Migration:

The term immigration in foreign languages typically refers to individuals or groups who enter a foreign country with the intention of establishing permanent residence—in other words, it denotes inbound migration. The word migration refers to people who move from one country or place to another either periodically, seasonally, or for work purposes. Some scholars believe that this term refers to all movement that occurs within the borders of a single country. However, when the movement crosses the borders of a state, it is referred to as emigration, meaning outbound or international migration.

From the aforementioned definitions of migration, some types of migration emerge, such as internal migration, which occurs within the country and can be either seasonal or permanent, and external migration, which can be either inbound or outbound. Both of these types can occur through legal or illegal means. Although migration waves have been witnessed globally for a long time, the international focus on regulating this phenomenon did not become prominent until the mid-20th

century. At that time, many countries sought to establish bilateral, regional, and international agreements to mitigate its negative effects by creating a framework and system for balancing and aligning the interests of both the migrant and the receiving country and its people. Developed countries took various measures and actions to define and reduce the flow of migrants coming from the Global South. In 1977, a policy of return (repatriation) to the countries of origin was implemented, marking a significant turning point in the phenomenon toward illegality.

Algeria is witnessing this phenomenon in both its forms due to its geographical location. On one hand, it monitors continuous attempts to cross the coastal borders towards European countries, which are among the primary destinations for illegal migrants seeking work and better living conditions, or fleeing from legal, security, and administrative persecution, or even being captivated by the allure of these countries.

However, Algeria sits at a crossroads due to its geographical location and vast borders. Because of this, it is both a transiting and destination country for varying currents of African and Moroccan migrants through different border passages, especially in the southern regions like Illizi, Adrar, and Tamanrasset. These regions, in particular, and Algeria in general, form a three-dimensional zone in the migration process. It is divided into: a region targeted by

migrants, a transit area to overseas countries, and a crossing zone from the vast southern desert to the coastal north. (Watan, 2009)

3- Factors of Illegal Migration for Africans in Algeria:

Generally, several factors contribute to the emergence of this phenomenon, ranging from natural, social, economic, and political factors. Although economic factors—according to many researchers—are considered the most prominent, the key factors can be outlined as follows:

3-1- Natural Causes:

-Desertification, drought, and harsh climates in African countries have resulted in a decline in living standards, widespread poverty, and the emergence of diseases and epidemics. This drives people to leave their homeland in search of better living conditions, such as the drought that affected Niger and Mali in the 1970s, which led to economic and living difficulties. These challenges became the main reasons for the settlement of waves of African migrants in southern Algeria since then. (Mohammed, 1986, p. 46)

-The vastness of southern Algeria provides greater opportunities for illegal migrants in terms of movement and mobility.

-The length of Algeria's borders, which extend across 7 African countries, and the total length of these borders reaching

approximately 6,921 km, makes it difficult to monitor.

In addition to Algeria's geographical location, which serves as a main gateway and link between Africa and Europe, particularly through its southern regions like Tamanrasset, which is considered a three-dimensional area in the migration process. It is divided into: a region targeted by migrants, a transit area to overseas countries, and a crossing zone from its vast southern desert to the coastal north.

3-2- Economic Causes

In general, the economic development and prosperity experienced by receiving countries have become a problem for them, especially considering the massive influx of migrants. One of the main causes of illegal migration is poverty, which is considered one of the most important factors leading individuals to leave their countries. This is compounded by famine, the spread of epidemics, the lack of economic reforms, the impact of globalization, foreign debts, and the social disparities in many African countries.

Despite possessing vast natural resources, the industrial stagnation in these countries has made their populations rely on agriculture as a primary resource. However, this resource has been unable to meet the citizens' needs due to harsh natural conditions, leading to the rapid spread of poverty and unemployment, both of which are strong drivers of migration.

Additionally, these countries are witnessing a steady rise in population growth year after year, which has resulted in widespread famine threatening their populations. This puts pressure on the living resources of the receiving countries and leads to the loss of a considerable human workforce in the countries of origin.

Furthermore, there is a demand for unregistered migrant labor to avoid taxes in various sectors, especially since the legal penalties related to the residence or employment of migrants are limited to small fines and imprisonment for no more than six months.

3-3- Political Causes:

In certain places in Africa, civil wars or ethnic and tribal issues can produce instability and insecurity. These conditions often force people within countries to migrate out of those countries (often forced migrants or refugees) to escape conflict and persecution and find a safer place. The beginning of the 20th century saw large movements of refugees, whether as individuals or groups, often due to wars, conflicts, or human rights violations which were premised upon ethnic, religious, or political initiatives.

An example of this is the Nigerian-Malian conflict in the early 1980s, where Algeria set up refugee camps that were later closed after the conflict between the two countries was resolved. This shift opened the door to illegal migration as many refugees turned

into illegal residents in the southern provinces, especially in Tamanrasset.

-The leniency of Algerian legislation concerning illegal migrants.

-The presence of migrant smuggling networks, which are largely responsible for the influx of migrants.

-The spread of wars between countries over borders following the withdrawal of colonial powers.

-The widespread availability of small arms without proper control.

-Religious, tribal, and ethnic conflicts.

-The absence of strict laws and a clear political approach to limit the phenomenon of illegal migration.

4- Means of Illegal Migration:

These means range from material to human resources dedicated to assisting and supporting illegal migrants. They are centered in various North African countries and take the form of networks known as "corridors" or "human trafficking." This involves the illegal entry of migrants, which is considered a violation of the United Nations Migration Protocol, under which human trafficking is classified as an international crime. (Taleb, 2010, p. 23)

These networks consist of guides with extensive knowledge of the desert and its rugged, winding, and difficult paths, as

well as knowledge of water points and fuel stations.

In addition, the networks include drivers specialized in desert navigation or driving on sand. These networks also possess means for falsifying official documents, 4x4 vehicles, and mobile phones to avoid border patrols and customs officers. The migrants may also travel covertly, using animals or walking on foot, either by night or by day, due to the vastness of the borders.

5- The Impact of Illegal Migration on Society:

There is no doubt that illegal migration poses serious risks to society, especially in southern Algeria, where this type of migration is highly active. The effects of this phenomenon are reflected at various levels, including:

5-1- Economic Impact:

-Illegal migration contributes significantly to increasing unemployment rates among the local population, as migrants form a labor force exploited by traders, farmers, and contractors in exchange for low wages.

-The financial burden on the state's budget is increased due to expenses related to housing, feeding, and transporting these migrants, especially the costs involved in returning them to their home countries.

-Migrants develop methods of fraud and document and financial paper forgery,

spreading them in the markets. This negatively affects the value of the dinar and the national economy, in addition to the difficulty of implementing economic programs effectively in areas with high migrant populations, which hampers local development (Omar, 2010, p. 14).

5-2- Social Impact:

It contributes to the spread of social vices such as drug trafficking, theft, prostitution, assaults, fraud, and forgery.

- The emergence of social deviance networks.

- The widespread phenomenon of begging.

- Increased pressure on social facilities and services.

- A negative impact on the values and ethics of society, leading to the rise of homelessness and the spread of informal settlements (Omar, 2010, p. 13).

5-3- Health Impact:

The health impact is mainly evident through the spread of infectious and fatal diseases, such as AIDS, malaria, etc. The movement of migrants has become a real threat to the regions where they reside, such as the Wilaya of Tamanrasset in the far south of Algeria, which has the highest rate of AIDS cases nationally, in addition to rising mortality rates and childhood mortality. This is because migrants are often living in difficult and impoverished

conditions and in neighborhoods, the residences of which have inadequate hygiene and health care services. In light of that, the spread of disease and epidemics is awfully easy in light of lack of vaccinations, high costs of medicine and treatment, and now the growing costs of healthcare altogether.

5-4- Security Impact: Illegal immigration is a key factor in the formation of various smuggling networks and insecurity. The increasing number of illegal migrants among the local population contributes to the rise in crime and the emergence of illegal activities such as drug smuggling, currency counterfeiting, and the falsification of identity documents, travel, and residency papers. In addition, there is an increase in international criminal organizations involved in human trafficking, drug trafficking, and arms smuggling, which ultimately threatens the security and overall stability of the state.

Conclusion:

Although the phenomenon of immigration in general, and illegal immigration in particular, has received significant scientific attention, unfortunately, there have been no effective solutions applied to limit this growing issue or even organize it or harness it for the benefit of both the receiving and exporting countries. This is especially true due to its negative impacts on Algerian society, particularly those that are evident in the southern border

provinces of Algeria, which are adjacent to the African Sahel countries. It thus poses a direct threat to the security and stability of these countries, given the other crises affecting the Sahel, such as the Azawad crisis, human trafficking, arms, drugs, gold smuggling, organized crime networks, and other crises. Therefore, as researchers, we can say that there is an urgent need to reconsider this phenomenon and intensify international efforts to address it. Especially since Algeria attracts migrants, and Algerians themselves are also emigrating, especially given the poor utilization of these migrant resources on the one hand, and the losses incurred in deporting and repatriating them to their home countries on the other hand.

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