

# IRREGULAR MIGRATION FROM ALGERIA

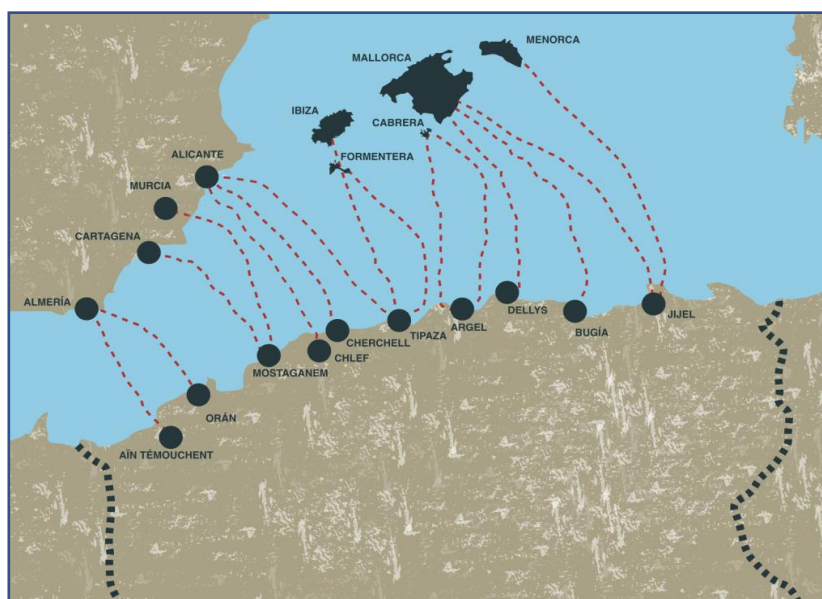
A report conducted by the **Algerian Debate Foundation**  
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## 1. Migration from the Algerian perspective (Elharga)

Algeria has been witnessing the phenomenon of irregular migration since 2002, especially along its western coasts. This phenomenon is considered new, with evolving methods over time, making it difficult to determine the exact number of those who have migrated irregularly due to many missing individuals. The term for irregular migration in Algeria is known as "Elharga," which means burning everything that connects the migrant to their homeland, including official documents in order to completely sever ties and seek another country. It also signifies by passing legal boundaries in a clandestine manner to reach another country, awaiting the regularization of their legal status to become legal migrants like regular immigrants. Irregular migrants tend to follow coastal regions, particularly in cities like Oran, Chlef, Tlemcen, Aïn Témouchent, Mostaganem, Annaba, Béjaïa, Skikda, and El Tarf, as key departure points for crossing into Europe, being closer to Spain (Almería, Balearic Islands, and other Spanish islands) and Italy as well. Observers are puzzled by the reasons for Algerian youth migration, especially noting recent instances of affluent youth, families, doctors, and judges leaving Algeria irregularly. This complexity in irregular migration in Algeria is attributed not only to financial circumstances but also to many factors, including the conservative nature of Algerian society, traditional family constraints on youth, and political reasons, which are equally significant. The routes taken by migrant boats departing from the eastern coasts of Algeria towards the Balearic Islands.

**Image: Main routes from Algerian shores to Europe**



Source: "Commando Frontiers"



## 2. The reasons

The reasons for the phenomenon of irregular migration or what is known as "(Elharga)" in Algeria are diverse and interconnected. Corruption has been the prevailing nature within Algerian society for decades, and the governing system has become engulfed in a system of corruption, making corruption in Algeria the legitimacy that the ruling system employs to sustain itself. Legal, political (belonging), financial (professional), social (poverty rate), social media (electronic alienation), in addition to social and religious constraints, have become incentives for leaving the country in search of a place where young people can achieve their ambitions beyond the sea. Moreover, the widespread presence of networks involved in irregular migration and their significant financial returns push many young people to head directly towards them to leave the country for transit areas in Europe. We can further dissect the reasons for the phenomenon of irregular migration as follows:

### A) *Legal Status (Belonging)*

Considering that the law is the system that regulates the life of citizens in a state, the application of the law and justice for all are among the most important indicators of a state's progress and development. However, in Algeria, the term "contempt" appears as a youthful expression of the lack of law enforcement or its absence, and the failure of the young person or citizen to obtain the irrigates, making them different to respecting or applying the law. They also do not feel a sense of belonging to the state and continuously contemplate irregular migration to find a country that upholds their rights and enforces the law for everyone, Their thoughts are directly focused on Europe, Reviewing the percentage of irregular migration in 2019 shows a decrease to less than half the average during that year. The reasons for this decline can be rebutted to the fact that the youth were experiencing a significant social and political popular movement aimed at bringing about the desired change and establishing a legal and social system that preserves their rights, dignity, and sense of belonging to the homeland, Despite the introduction of a new legal system represented by the 2021 constitution and the establishment of youth bodies such as the Supreme Youth Council and the National Observatory for Civil Society by the new government post-2019 to build an important system that caters to the youth and fosters their sense of belonging, the youth's connection to the homeland or institutions remains absent for other reasons.



## ***B) Electronic Exile***

Referring to the online domain, we find that young people in Algeria, like their counterparts in other countries around the world, are highly connected to social media and extremely interested in social networking platforms, especially Facebook and Instagram. According to the annual report of the international consulting agency "Data Reportal" on the Internet and social networks for the year 2021, there were 23.95 million users, with 22.10 million users aged 18 and above. They use social media in Algeria, equivalent to 75.4% of the total population aged 18 and above. Most young people use Facebook. In a statement by the former Prime Minister, Mr. Noureddine Bedoui, at the National Forum on Illegal Immigration in the capital in 2019, he confirmed that social media and youth songs incite young people to undertake dangerous migration, which is actually evident as we have noticed the presence of Facebook pages, Instagram accounts, and YouTube channels that encourage illegal migration, followed by hundreds of thousands of Algerian youth, such as the page "tchatchi," which attracts up to half a million views from Algerians. This young man, known as "tchatchi," conducts interviews with Algerian youth migrants in Europe in an irregular manner, sharing their stories that directly or indirectly encourage the young followers. Additionally, there are pages directly stimulating illegal migration, such as "Burning in Europe" and "Elharga," among many others, leading Algerian youth to experience a premature sense of exile within social media platforms, encourage in them towards illegal migration, especially when they witness live stories of those who migrated irregularly and succeeded, or others who have become influencers on Instagram, sharing daily photos and videos about life in Europe.

## ***C) The Economic Situation***

The economic situation can be linked to the phenomenon of irregular migration, especially in relation to unemployment. According to official statistics for the year 2022, the government confirms that the number of unemployed individuals in Algeria is 2 million. This is based on those benefiting from the unemployment allowance approved by the government in 2022, amounting to around 100 euros monthly, disbursed to the unemployed graduates from universities and training institutes, totaling 400,000 annually according to the Algerian news agency. However, the percentage seems higher due to the conditions for receiving this allowance, which is merely a temporary aid provided by the government up to the age of 40 and not a substitute for work. Despite these policies, the number of unemployed and job seekers in the public sector increases every year. In this regard, the government



is exploring other solutions such as providing loans to youth and encouraging them to establish small and startup businesses, investments, among others. Nevertheless, bureaucracy remains the primary obstacle facing those wishing to benefit from these measures. The current unemployment rate in Algeria is 11.60% in 2023 according to statistics from trading economics and the International Labor Organization. This percentage is 1.1% lower than in 2022 when it was at 12.70%. Despite the decrease, it remains a slight decline despite the government's efforts, prompting young people to consider irregular migration or seeking opportunities abroad to escape unemployment.

#### ***D) The Social Situation***

Poverty is among the main incentives driving young people towards irregular migration (Elharga) in Algeria. Despite being one of the richest countries in Africa, especially in terms of natural resources such as oil, gas, and recent agricultural focus, the poverty rate in Algeria has slightly declined compared to the government's policies aimed at eliminating this social phenomenon. According to the second Arab report on multidimensional poverty by the United Nations for the year 2023, Algeria is placed among the countries with a poverty rate of 27.8% which has decreased from 30.05% in 2013. This decrease, though small, still serves as a motivation for irregular migration to Europe, especially among the youth seeking hope to escape poverty. The lack of available work opportunities in the form they perceive, drives them to seek better income and living standards, which they believe can be found in Europe. Dr. Nourredine Bekis, is a political sociology expert, highlights that irregular migration due to poverty poses a significant challenge for the government, exposing its ability to implement successful policies in managing and governing the state with such wealth.

The phenomenon of irregular migration in Algeria is primarily a political issue and is not directly related to the poverty of the state, as the state itself is not poor.

#### ***E) The Phenomenon of human trafficking***

The phenomenon of human trafficking along the Algerian coast has witnessed an increase in recent years, especially after the development of the equipment used by these smugglers to transport people by sea along the Algerian coast. Unlike in the past, where it was limited to the western region of Algeria, the youth are encouraged to engage with these traders due to the speed and variety of equipment they possess. They use what is commonly referred to among the youth as the "fast" boat, which is a Zodiac boat equipped with a fast engine that can cross the sea in about 3 to 4 hours to reach



the transit countries of Spain or Italy. The cost of a single trip for a young person is 5000 euros, and sometimes 6000 euros, to reach the other shore. Despite the strict surveillance along the Algerian coast, the number of departures is increasing due to these criminal networks. Restrictions on civil and social freedoms, religious pressure on teenagers and youth from conservative society, and often a noticeable lack of prospects related to self-awareness and cultural activities are also reasons for irregular migration.

### **3. The repercussions**

Many negative impacts of irregular migration on Algerian society and the state are highlighted Among these repercussions are:

- Emergence of the phenomenon of missing persons: Since 2022, at least 464 individuals have lost their lives in 43 separate drowning incidents while attempting irregular migration, compared to 191 individuals in 2021. Additionally, 1583 deaths were recorded between 2018 and 2022, with over 103 deaths in 2023. These figures, provided by organizations concerned with irregular migration, are approximate but reflect the reality, as there are unreported or unregistered missing persons.
- Increase in human trafficking networks: One of the repercussions is the rise in smuggling networks, particularly in human trafficking across the sea, enabling them to make quick and substantial profits due to the diversity of methods and mechanisms.
- Spread of crime: Most irregular migrants are from uneducated, non-educated, or non-degree-holding backgrounds, leading them to resort to alternative means of survival such as crime, drug trafficking, and vulnerability to exploitation by prostitution and drug networks.

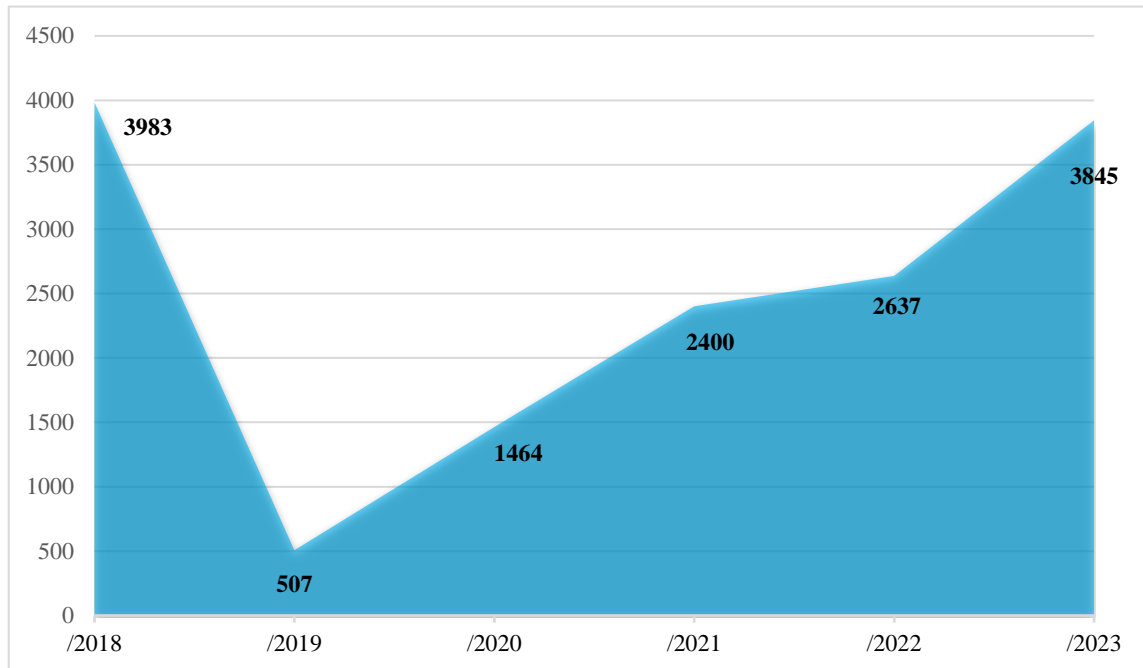
### **4. Official statistics on the number of irregular migrants**

Approximately 3,000 migrants from Algeria reach the Spanish and Italian coasts annually, with numbers varying by year and the nature of the migrants.

The numbers dropped to only 507 migrants in 2019. In recent years, Algeria has become a transit area for Africans from sub-Saharan countries, including irregular migration of skilled individuals, families, and young children, a trend previously absent. According to a report by the Euro-

Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor in July 2023, titled "Practices Related to Searching for and Identifying the Identities of Missing or Deceased Persons During Migration in North Africa," irregular migration has increased significantly after 2019.

**Graphic: Algerian migrants crossing irregularly to Europe**



*Source: "Euro-Mediterranean Rights Report"*

## 5. Confrontation and Response

Algeria has adopted a series of deterrent and socio-political measures in an attempt to combat this phenomenon in recent years. The deterrent measures have raised any concerns as they label irregular migrants as criminals subject to legal prosecution, similar to human traffickers. There is some leniency from judges towards irregular migrants in certain cases, where the judge may impose a fine of \$200 on those attempting illegal migration. Among the deterrent measures are:

- Article 09-01 dated February 25, 2009, which considers smuggling migrants as arranging for the unauthorized exit of individuals from national territory for direct or indirect financial gain or other benefits. Smuggling migrants is punishable by imprisonment from 3 to 5 years and a fine ranging from 300,000 to 500,000 Algerian dinars, approximately 2500 euros.



- Article 545 of Maritime Law 05-98, which stipulates that anyone who clandestinely boards a ship intending to embark on a journey is subject to imprisonment from 6 months to 10 years and a fine of 10,000 to 50,000 Algerian dinars, around 300 euros. The same penalty applies to any crew member or employee assisting in boarding or disembarking a hidden passenger, providing supplies, or facilitating clandestine boarding. The vessel involved in the offense is responsible for the expenses of repatriating foreign passengers who boarded clandestinely.
- Article 175 of Law 01-09 amending Algerian Penal Code 12, which states: Without prejudice to other applicable legislation, any Algerian or resident foreigner leaving national territory unlawfully while passing through border checkpoints by impersonation, using forged documents, or any other fraudulent means to evade presenting necessary official documents or complying with laws and regulations, faces imprisonment from two to six months or one of the two penalties. The same penalty applies to anyone leaving national territory through non-border checkpoints.

Procedurally, the following measures have been taken:

- Establishment of a specialized committee within the Ministry of Interior to combat human trafficking.
- Opening the door for civil society to contribute to combating the phenomenon of human trafficking according to the new law issued in 2023.
- Establishment of national bodies focusing on youth such as the Supreme Council for Youth and the National Observatory for Civil Society.
- Allocation of a €100 unemployment grant to 2 million unemployed youth.
- Supporting startups and small enterprises and allocating programs for project and idea proposals for university students.

## **6. Solutions and recommendations**

In this paper, we present proposed solutions from the perspective of the Algerian government and the solutions we find suitable. Regarding the Algerian government, President Abdelmadjid





Tebboun reaffirmed during his meeting with local media on January 22, 2020, that the proposed solutions for irregular migration include:

- Raising awareness about its risks and involving families in this matter since the reasons for irregular migration are diverse and not necessarily linked to political situations or poverty, as there are doctors who migrate in irregular ways.
- Striving for equality in employment opportunities for Algerians.
- Signing agreements with some European countries to send youth abroad to closely observe the conditions there.
- Seeking assistance from psychologists because the problems are complex and challenging to solve.

On our part, we propose the following recommendations:

- More focus on developmental and simple projects within mediate solutions to maintain hope within the country, such as creating simple economic projects to quickly integrate youth into the national economy, away from all bureaucratic aspects that increase despair among them.
- Valuing creative work and volunteerism and prioritizing them in various fields, especially in schools, and giving them great importance for the benefit they provide to the youth in connecting them to the internal and societal environment so that the youth feel their importance within the country.
- Adopting a legal system to address the phenomenon of irregular migration from its roots by providing legal frameworks to protect the victims and hold the exploiter sac countable, whether in the real or virtual realm.
- Establishing a national observatory to raise awareness of the risks of irregular migration and provide psychological support to those considering irregular migration, following up with and guiding them, and integrating them into society.
- Creating an observatory to confront the phenomenon of irregular migration at the level of Mediterranean basin countries, aiming for multi and bilateral cooperation, issuing periodic recommendations and solutions, presenting proposals to governments, monitoring the



reimplementation within exporting or transit countries, exchanging experiences, and cooperating in the field of combating human trafficking.

- Encouraging peaceful solutions to political and security problems to achieve political stability.
- Signing agreements with transit and destination countries to repatriate and return irregular migrants to their countries of origin.
- Monitoring electronic content and creating a dedicated platform to report content that encourages irregular migration.
- Increasing the penalty for human trafficking to 20 years instead of 5 or 10 years.
- Expanding aid and support for unemployed youth by the state, similar to the unemployment grant in Algeria, so that the youth can support themselves even in a simple way.
- Engaging with vulnerable and marginalized groups in remote areas and shadow regions exposed to social ills, providing guidance, awareness, and offering psychological, social, and even scientific and vocational solutions for them.



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