



MIGRANT WORKERS IN ALGERIA
A JOURNEY OF LOOKING FOR A SAFE
AND HOPEFUL HAVEN:
PAST, REALITY AND DREAMS



MADAR PROJECT
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Center for Research in Applied Economics for Development

Head of the Project:	Khaled MENNA
Interviews and writing:	Soumia BOUCHOUK Hanane MANSOUR
Photography:	Akram MENARI Rachid AYADI
Translation:	Habiba SELLAMI
Design:	Kaouther KIRAM

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MADAR NETWORK





About MADAR

This work was carried out in the framework of the Maghreb Action on Displacement and Rights (MADAR مدار Arabic for 'path') Network Plus project, which aims to improve the humanitarian protection of vulnerable, displaced people in contexts of conflict in the central Maghreb region of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia.

MADAR is a multi-country network of professionals from civil society and research organisations, led by Professor Mariangela Palladino at Keele University.

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About the booklet

The interviews, conducted by a team of researchers from the Center for Research in Applied Economics for Development, fall within the MADAR work package, which addresses the issue of the integration of migrants into the informal economy in Algeria.

This booklet has been prepared in collaboration with researchers and photographic artists. The booklet collects accounts and photos of immigrants of different nationalities. The migrants expressed their appreciation for the initiative and saw it as a way to express their opinions. They shared their experiences regarding migration, its causes, arriving in Algeria, and the process of searching for work.

A journey to look for a haven of rest... but with an unknown future



My name is Mervat, I am 39 years old, from Syria, specifically from Hamah. I graduated from Damascus University.

Despite the difficult events that our country has witnessed since 2011, migration was not part of my plan. I preferred to stay with my family, as I love the smallest details of my life that I left behind... my mother's bread, my father's scent, and our ancient home...

However, fate had another plan that changed the course of my life forever as I got engaged to a man, from my city Hamah, who later migrated and settled in Algeria. At that

time, I was between a rock and a hard place, between leaving my family and moving away from my country, or staying....

What prompted me to migrate was that I could no longer bear seeing the bodies lying in the streets, nor breathing the smell of death, bombs, and bullets. I moved to Algeria reluctantly to join my husband despite my heart's attachment to my family and homeland...

Settling in Algeria was not an easy matter. I was psychologically exhausted despite obtaining a job within my university specialty as a physical masseuse in a health care center in the capital Algiers... It was not easy because I suffered from loneliness and longing to the point that I was withering day after day. I was happy that I was working in a job within my university studies field.

Before the wounds of war and devastation I left behind were healed, I discovered that I had breast cancer ... The treatment journey was tough and increased the depth of my wounds and sadness but fortunately, god surrounded me with people from Algeria who were my support. My husband was the source of my energy, despite the chemotherapy sessions that left me with nothing.... I rose from the ashes like a phoenix, soaring for the sake of the people I love...

Yes, I finally overcame the disease and gained the opportunity to see a new sunrise through the window of my house overlooking the wide sea, which expanded the dreams and ambitions that I seek to reach.

Ten years after we moved to Algeria, our situation is still settled. I still want to prove myself in the labor market in Algeria and make people benefit from what I have learnt in the University of Damascus. However, we are still struggling to obtain our most basic civil rights.

Regarding returning to my country, this is out of the question because there is nothing left to return to after the departure of family and loved ones...

Mervat

Algeria... from a transit country... to a stable destination...

I am Ajana, Senegalese, I am 30 years old. I came to Algeria in 2018, using it as a transit country in order to reach the other shore of the Mediterranean Sea, but I am still living here... with no intention of migrating again...

I am the eldest son of a family of five children. Because of the unemployment and poor living conditions that the residents of my village suffer from, I decided to migrate to a European country, after I was encouraged by some friends who succeeded to reaching the other shore via the Mediterranean Sea, using Algeria as a transit country...



Once I arrived in Algeria, I started looking for a job in order to save the necessary money to continue my migration path since I spent all of my savings during my migration to Algeria. I worked in several professions, including carrying goods, until I moved to the capital, where I found a job that suited me in the field of construction, which is the profession that most migrants coming to Algeria prefer and master. I have worked for many construction companies, one of which was the building workshop for the Great Mosque of Algiers. Currently, I work for a private construction workshop.

Despite my irregular status, I have never been harassed or subjected to a deportation attempt. On the contrary, my current workplace is a safe haven for us as migrant workers.

I have never been cut off from my country of origin; rather, I transfer what I earn from my work to my family there in order to open a business that covers their needs.

Frankly, over the years, I got used to living here, and I made many friends with many Algerians. Currently, I have completely abandoned the idea of migrating to Europe and have redefined my goals in order to improve my living conditions, such as starting to learn English and Chinese, which will help me to deal with the Chinese construction companies that I work for. I have also decided to work on my passion in the sewing industry, and undertake training that will make me a specialist in this field...

I am really glad for the great training opportunities offered in Algeria, which gave me new horizons that I will work hard to achieve, whether here in Algeria or in my country of origin.

Ajana

From senior positions in multinational institutions to a fashion designer..



My name is Jamila, I am 44 years old, originally from Niger and Mali. My knowledge of Algeria goes back to the year 1999 when I came here thanks to a university scholarship to study. My choice of Algeria was purely coincidental, as at that young age I did not have sufficient information about it. In 2008, I came back to Algeria, along with my husband who was established and had a study office there...

I believe that Algeria is a country that gives you many opportunities to develop yourself. Here, I studied several specializations, such as marketing, international trade, interior design, as well as fashion design...

After holding senior positions in several multinational companies, I left all of that to follow my passion for sewing. At that time I bought my first sewing machine. Then I developed a marketing plan targeting the African community residing in Algeria, including diplomats' wives and university students. However, what greatly surprised me was the turnout of many Algerian women on my designs, as they admired my work and the African touch that I added... and this is what encouraged me even more to continue this adventure.

I cannot describe to you the passion my customers have for my designs, as they become loyal to everything I create. I attend many exhibitions to introduce my brand.

Currently, after everything I have done in order for my brand to see the light, I do not have the right to open my own store according to the law banning foreigners residing in Algeria owning a business with a majority or full share. Therefore, I no longer want to continue. I ask myself every day, what is the next step? I always think about giving up.

No one listens to my preoccupation as a businesswoman who wants to develop her business. Despite being a regular resident and eager to expand my project to create job opportunities, being non-Algerian is enough to limit my ambitions here in Algeria...

My dream is that cooperation agreements will be concluded between African countries, in order to protect migrants from unsafe migration paths, and open up regular ones...

Jamila

Algeria from a transit country, to my final destination...

I am Mamadou from Mali, I am 45 years old. I have been in Algeria for approximately 13 years as an irregular migrant... Honestly, Algeria was not part of my plans, to either go or settle there!

However, since my arrival, my outlook on this country has radically changed.

Like many migrants coming from the desert, I worked as a cobbler, since it does not require owning a store; it is enough to have a stable place in which you can place your equipment to become a cobbler.

Therefore, I chose one of the most popular streets located in the heart of the Algerian capital, to place my table there and wait for customers in need of my services.

Through my daily dealings with the people of this ancient popular neighborhood, I became familiar with the neighborhood's corridors and mastered the local dialect... I have a feeling of belonging to it because of the years I have spent here. Now, I have become known among the residents here as a jokester. Some of them come to get their shoes repaired, and many others have become my friends. I have never had my table confiscated or been arrested by the police, as evidenced by the fact that I have not changed my chosen spot since my arrival, although they know about my irregular status, but they see nothing wrong with what I am doing.

Despite my difficult circumstances and my simple job, from which I do not earn much, thanks to it, I was able to pay off my family's debts in my country of origin, Mali, and improve their financial conditions there. This was enough for me to stay in Algeria, and to abandon the idea of migrating to Europe, as I do not need to take risks on a journey that might not be completed...

I cross overland to Mali whenever I can to visit my wife and children. I will return there to settle with my family, as soon as our business project sees the light.

My dream is that efforts will be intensified between the two countries in order to organize matters related to foreign workers, so that we will be able to work without fear of deportation...



Mamadou

From Scholarship to Struggle: Navigating the Job market search as a black African woman



My name is Faith and I am 30 years old. I am from Kenya, a regular migrant, but there is not much time left until my residence card expires, because I have completed my years of study at the Algerian university, so it is about time for me to return to my homeland...

I come from a middle-income family, my father works in the education sector, as he is the sole breadwinner for our large family... because most of them do not have stable work.

The difficult economic situation in Kenya leads the majority of students to abandon their studies at university because they cannot afford the expensive university fees in addition to the ethnic wars that destroyed many areas of Kenya.

Therefore, I have chosen to apply for a scholarship in Algeria and how happy I was when I was accepted.

Upon my arrival in Algeria, I faced many difficulties, including the language and integration into the new society. I had to take supplementary lessons in French, before joining university to study medicine in Algeria. After seven years of studying and learning, I graduated as a general practitioner...but this did not give me the right to work for Algerian hospitals and clinics.

As students we graduated we graduated from the same university and obtained the same certificate to practice medicine, but in the labor market, I have fewer chances compared to my Algerian colleagues, as all my applications to exercise the profession as a practitioner were rejected on the pretext that I am not Algerian and have dark skin.

It hurts that I am unable to practice the profession I studied for years because of racist ideas.

By the end of my studies, I did not have many options to pay my daily expenses, so I worked as a nanny, took care of some patients at home, and even worked as a maid... any job except for the medical profession which I could not practice despite my graduation with the recognition of the Algerian university...!

Faith

“ I do not consider myself a migrant... All the Arab countries are my homelands...”

I am Hazem from wounded Syria; I am 41 years old, a graduate of Damascus University. I spent ten years of my life in Algeria as a stateless person; I am neither classified as a migrant nor as a resident...

I came to Algeria in 2012; I got a job the first week of my arrival, thanks to my university diploma and my experience in the field of physical massage, which is a very in demand specialty in health centers here in Algeria. This allowed me to deal with a large number of Algerians. I built relationships and integrated into the Algerian society.

The means of staying in Algeria have multiplied, especially after the disappearance of the means of returning to Syria...

I did not return to my country, but I took a piece of it that lived by my side, she is my wife, whom I chose from my city of Hamah. I currently live in a rented house with my wife and daughter, work together to overcome life's difficulties.

I believe that with the knowledge I have in the physical massage profession, I can contribute to this field here in Algeria and make my mark. If I regularize my administrative status... which is a situation that made me very tired, I will be able to advance my work, settle my family's papers. Otherwise I would have to return to where I came from... But I have no place in my country, no home and no family there.

As for returning, I have no place in my country, no home, and no family there. I believe that my future is in Algeria. I wish our situation would be looked into publicly so we will be able to live a decent life.... Aren't all the Arab countries my homelands? I consider Algeria as a homeland.



Hazem

Does the woman have another fate that she can choose for herself... even if she is a refugee?



I am Sabaa, a Yemeni paramedical student and also a refugee. A few days ago I celebrated my twenty-fifth birthday.

I lived and grew up in Saudi Arabia, then moved to Algeria in 2015 after obtaining the baccalaureate degree to study at the Algerian university, because of my inability to pay the tuition fees for university studies in Saudi Arabia, and even the costs of life there were high. As a Yemeni resident in Saudi Arabia, I consider Algeria a good destination for studying with low costs.

Happy Yemen, as it was always called, is no longer happy. It is experiencing the misery of war and tribal conflicts in addition to epidemics and diseases, which have made the situation even darker. In light of these tragic conditions, it is no longer strange to talk about severe famine.

In my country, there is no infrastructure or potable water, even electricity is not available to everyone and is not available most of the time...

I didn't just move to Algeria because Yemen was suffering from war, I had ambitions. But my return to Yemen might cost my life. My stay in Saudi Arabia cost my family a lot of expenses and fees but the matter is deeper than that....

I came from an Eastern society based on ideas that place women in a narrow mold that limits her freedom and exerts terrible pressure to destroy her dreams and ambitions. I thought that in Algeria I would have opportunities that could give me the freedom I aspire to, but I was shocked by the reality that mentalities do not differ between the society that I left behind and the one hosting me. I suffer from harassment because I am a single girl living on my own. Neither the refugee affairs service gave me a safer place, nor is the society here fair to my situation, as a refugee, a Yemeni, a Student with no sense of belonging, far from my homeland.

I am still looking for my stolen freedom that was denied by the customs of an Eastern society that reduces my existence to a limited scope. and I find another, more open viewpoint that embraces my dreams and ambitions.

Sabaa

An abused childhood, then a journey into the unknown... to becoming a beautician...

My name is Chantal and I am 22 years old. I am from Ivory Coast. I grew up in a simple family in a humble village. No features of luxury cross my mind when I remember my childhood, on the contrary, poverty was clearly visible in our daily lives.

Chicken... This food may seem affordable to everyone, but in our village no one owns enough money to buy a chicken, as it is very expensive. That's why my family gathers once a year for it, and that one time, only a small amount of it is given to us, as children...

Poverty was not my motive for migrating and leaving my village... I was a child and did not realize the situation at all... but I left for very specific reasons. I did not live an ordinary childhood. My innocence was violated by a human monster when I was barely eight years old and I was unable to talk about what had happened to me. Then, I was exploited again I was exploited again by a woman when I was ten years old. She was a woman who I never thought could harm me.

They violated my childhood and accused me of their crimes, only because my voice was weaker than their harsh voices because I was a child. My first journey was to Ghana, where I stayed with a woman who also spared no effort in exploiting my weakness.

I gave birth to a child resulting from a fleeting relationship, where the only solution was to follow my child's interest and fate, so I moved to live with his biological father, who migrated to Algeria which was not among my plans, nor was reaching the other shore among my dreams.

I left my country of origin by a decision to which I was not a party, and then I migrated to Algeria against my will in search of a better future for my son. who began to grow up and study in an Algerian school.

Today, here I am, having gained a fair amount of experience as a beautician. I learned the foundations of the profession in the most significant beauty centres in Algeria. I earned money from my work and I met many people who played a positive role in refining my personality and giving me opportunities for self-development.



Algeria is a destination for learning, gaining experiences, and self-development, but it is difficult to work under appropriate conditions. So, my next destination is my country of origin, since I want to open my own beauty salon there.

I want them to realize that, despite the fact that her childhood was violated, her journey gave her a lot of strength and self-confidence...

Chantal

A couple of months after our interview with her, Chantal returned to her country of origin, carrying with her life experience and the determination to face the future that she hopes will be brighter than her past.

Today, Chantal has a voice that is more solid and resonant...



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