

MADAR Network – ALGERIA

This policy brief is based on data collected as part of the projects commissioned by MADAR in Algeria.

POLICY BRIEF

Algeria: A Land of Opportunities and a Place of Vulnerabilisation for Migrants



Analysis and recommendations

Traditionally seen as a country of emigration, Algeria has increasingly become both a destination and a transit country for a large number of migrants, particularly those from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East – two regions grappling with economic decline, armed conflicts, and climate-related crises. Immigration to Algerian territory has also increased as a result of strengthened cooperation between the European Union (EU) and North African countries, which has made crossing the Mediterranean more difficult. This has forced many migrants to flee increasingly inhospitable countries such as Tunisia and Libya, leading them to settle in Algeria – either temporarily or more permanently.

Algeria is not merely a fallback destination; for some migrants, it offers hospitality and economic opportunity. For others, however, the experience is defined by extreme poverty and repeated rights violations. This policy brief examines the diversity of experiences encountered by migrants on Algerian territory, shaped by the intersection of three major factors:

- The migration policies and practices implemented by Algerian authorities,
- The ambiguous role of the informal sector in the integration process,
- The diversity of migrant profiles and the support they receive from various solidarity networks.

Key messages

- *Algeria's migration policy is largely security-oriented, characterised by cycles of crackdowns and temporary relaxations. This dynamic exacerbates migrants' vulnerability and undermines the protection of their fundamental rights,*
- *The informal economic sector may provide many migrants with economic opportunities, but it is characterised by deep precariousness and harsh working conditions that increase the risk of exploitation,*
- *Integration experiences in Algeria vary widely, depending on the migrants' profile, skin colour, and the support networks available to them,*
- *To ensure better migration governance, Algerian authorities should implement a national integration strategy that promotes migrants' access to the labour market and to healthcare.*

A differentiated policy shaped by political choices, the economic context, and the availability of community support

1. Migration management: Between repression and opportunism

Algeria's legislation on the entry, residence, and movement of foreign residents and non-resident nationals – first adopted in 1966 and further tightened in 2008 – is highly restrictive and dissuasive, particularly for irregular migrants, whether they are entering or leaving Algeria irregularly. The conditions for obtaining residency are particularly restrictive, leaving many individuals without any form of protection on Algerian soil and exposed to various forms of abuse. As for foreign nationals holding a residency permit, they are subject to close monitoring and face numerous restrictions on their rights and freedoms.

Particularly since 2017, Algerian authorities have intensified operations of repatriation and deportation of Sub-Saharan migrants towards the Sahara, near the border with Niger. These practices – widely criticised for their violence and reliance on racial profiling – have been repeatedly condemned by civil society. The alternation between waves of arrests and periods of calm reflects the opportunistic approach of the Algerian authorities to migration issues, in which migrants are either tolerated or repressed depending on the political and economic context.

2. The informal sector: Both a means of survival and a source of vulnerability

The informal economy is estimated to account for around 40% of Algeria's GDP, according to the International Labour Organisation. This significant share is largely due to the rigidity of the formal labour market, which excludes a significant number of workers – particularly migrants. The applicable legal framework makes it extremely difficult to obtain work or residency permits, thereby confining the majority of migrants to the informal sector. However, while the informal economy provides opportunities – offering migrants relatively easy access to jobs in the absence of a contract or regular residency – it is also a factor of precariousness. Migrants working in the informal sector are particularly vulnerable to abusive working conditions, such as long hours of work, low wages and hazardous work environments. Therefore, although informality offers a means of survival, it exposes migrants to often precarious working conditions and a high risk of exploitation.

3. Diversity of migrant profiles and trajectories

Migrants' experiences and their level of integration in the Algerian society vary significantly depending on their profiles and trajectories. While some migrants – particularly those from the Middle East – arrive in Algeria through regular air travel, many others – especially those from Sub-Saharan Africa – undertake perilous overland journeys that render their situation even more precarious upon arrival. Black migrants face an additional barrier to integration due to the racial discrimination to which they are subjected. Since access to long-term residency permits is nearly impossible for all migrants, their integration relies primarily on solidarity networks among migrants. Rooted in family or personal ties, these solidarity networks are a vital means of survival for migrants, in a context where formal support structures are almost entirely absent.

Migrant women: Specific challenges

Often working in domestic roles – where the risk of exploitation is particularly acute – migrant women in Algeria face numerous challenges. For those in an irregular situation in particular, access to healthcare and to reproductive health services remains limited.

Actionable recommendations for better migration governance

1. Develop and implement a National Integration Strategy

Although Algeria ratified the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in 1963 and the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers in 2004, it has yet to adopt specific legislation on migration and/or asylum. The only existing legal framework concerns the entry, residence, and movement of foreign nationals, and it imposes severe penalties for irregular migration. Algeria should develop and implement a comprehensive national integration strategy that guarantees migrants access to justice, healthcare, employment, and housing.

2. Facilitate access to the formal labour market

The Algerian state should take measures to ensure equal treatment between migrants and nationals, and to provide a minimum level of protection to all workers, regardless of their administrative status. Access to the formal labour market should be facilitated, and greater recognition should be given to the skills and qualifications of migrants.

3. Ensure better protection for migrant women

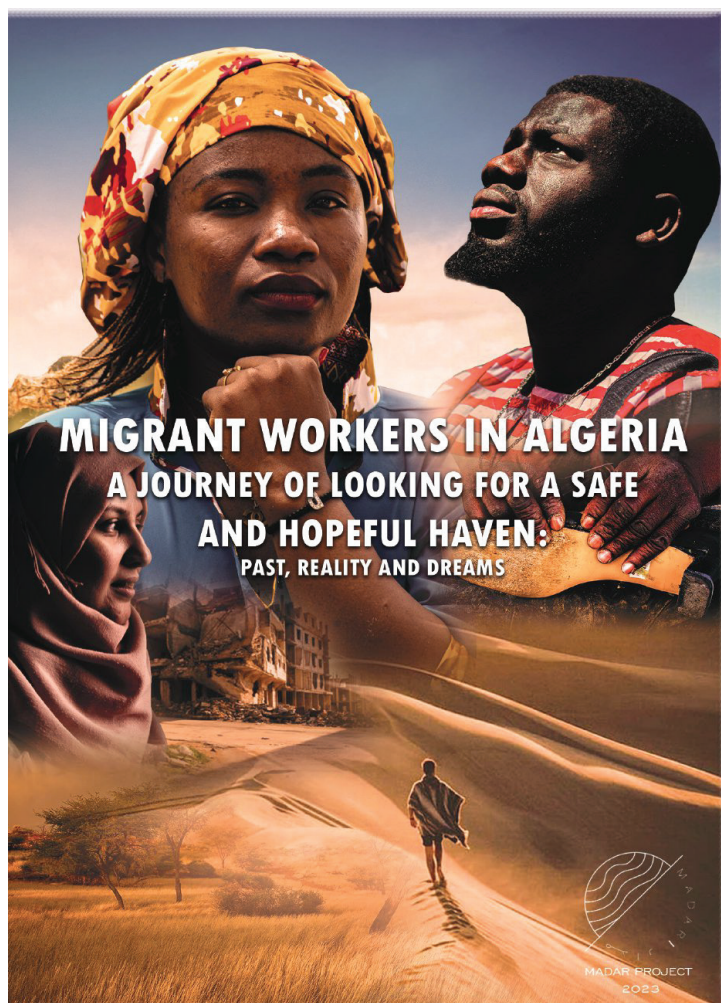
Algerian authorities should take into account the specific situation of migrant women and actively work to combat all forms of violence, to which they are more exposed than men, including sexual exploitation, forced labour, and human trafficking. The Algerian state should also ensure that all migrant women and girls, regardless of their legal status, have access to public healthcare services, including preventive care and reproductive health services.

4. Combat prejudice and foster a shift in mindsets

Although Algeria has signed the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, migrants continue to face discrimination based on their religion, ethnic origin, or skin colour. To address this issue, it is essential to multiply initiatives aimed at deconstructing prejudices and promoting a shift in public attitudes. Civil society has a key role to play in this effort – through public awareness campaigns, by advocating for migrants' experiences and by creating spaces for exchange and socialising.

5. End deportation practices and forced displacements

Algerian authorities should put an end to the practice of collective expulsions of migrants, which affect thousands of individuals each year and contribute to the rise of racism and xenophobia against Sub-Saharan Africans. These expulsions are carried out without any individual assessment or legal procedure and are accompanied by violence, arrests, and arbitrary detention. They are in violation of Algeria's obligations under international human rights law.



This booklet, which features portraits and testimonies of migrants settled in Algeria, was developed as part of a MADAR project focused on their integration into the informal economy.

Statistical annex:

Data related to foreigners residing in Algeria

According to Saïb Musette, an expert on migration issues in Algeria, whom we interviewed, “there is a wide range of narratives about irregular foreigners in the country, as well as accounts from migrants who have been subjected to expulsion.” Algerian authorities do not release data on interceptions or on the number of individuals pushed back by security forces. In its 2023 report, the National Gendarmerie states that “its services have arrested, in the context of combating international clandestine migration networks, thousands of individuals from 60 different nationalities, most of them from Niger (3,070), Sudan (1,269), Mali (2,441), Nigeria (1,677), Guinea (1,426), and Morocco (707).” The National Gendarmerie also reports 29,587 interceptions of so-called “clandestine” migrants, who were pushed back to the borders in 2024.

As for the number of refugees and other asylum seekers in the country (a figure included in the data presented above), UNHCR¹ estimates it at 91,940 individuals. Among them, 140 are classified as “urban refugees,” and more than 1,800 are asylum seekers originating from Sub-Saharan African countries or from Syria. Additionally, approximately 90,000 are Sahrawi refugees (an unverified figure that has remained constant for decades), whom Moroccan sources believe are being detained in camps in Tindouf, in southwestern Algeria. The Algerian authorities estimate their number at 165,000, but do not permit UNHCR to count them.

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org>