

Algeria: Reforming Migration and Asylum systems in a time of Crisis

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This case study is part of a [larger study on asylum, reception and migrant protection systems](#) which seeks to understand some of the dynamics driving or preventing reform of these systems and proposes some initial entry points for international cooperation. Other case studies include Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia. This research received the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

The four countries covered by this study are to differing extents countries of origin, transit and destination, and each is characterised by complex displacement and migration dynamics. They have shown very differing levels of interest to reform reception, asylum and migrant protection systems, and to cooperate closely with the EU on migration issues. COVID-19 has exacerbated many of the existing political and economic issues faced by these countries, including high youth employment and a deterioration of public services, posing renewed challenges for local populations and migrant populations alike. This means that any cooperation will need to include a strong understanding of underlying political interests, local contexts and capacities. We map out some of the factors influencing prospects for reforming reception and asylum systems in these four countries, and indicate some initial ideas for how international partners can offer support and help strengthen migration governance and protection systems in the region.

The case study is based on desk research as well as a number of interviews with international organisations, NGOs, researchers and scholars in the first half of 2020.

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1. Introduction

Algeria is fiercely protective of its sovereignty and is largely unwilling to work directly with the EU and EU member states on migration governance. At the same time, it has a strong desire to control its territory and borders, and it thus actively polices its borders, including preventing a great many departures to Europe. The intense challenges faced by Algeria, now intensified by COVID-19, mean that asylum reform and improvements in the treatment of sub-Saharan African migrants and refugees are unlikely in the immediate future. Indeed, COVID-19 appears to have at once increased migratory pressures amongst young Algerians, while also leading to an intensification of government controls on those seeking to enter Algeria from sub-Saharan Africa (Blidi 2020).¹

According to the IOM Migrant Data Portal, which includes the UN DESA estimate, Algeria is estimated to host approximately 250,000 migrants, but other estimates suggest that the figure is much more than that. UNHCR estimates include a number of approximately 100,000 refugees, including 90,000 vulnerable Sahraoui refugees from Western Sahara, who live in refugee camps in Tindouf in South-Western Algeria, but again other estimates put the number considerably higher. For example, many estimates suggest there are about 40 - 50,000 Syrian refugees in Algeria, but just under 7,000 are registered with UNHCR (Migrant Data Portal, UNHCR Global Focus).²

Algeria has come to the attention of international human rights groups and the UN Human Rights Committee in recent years due to the regular practice of dropping migrants, asylum seekers and refugees over the border in Niger, some of whom may be entitled to international protection. The conditions around these expulsions and the practice of deporting non-Nigeriens in Niger are highly contested (UN Human Rights Committee 2018, Amnesty International 2018, HRW 2018). In 2018 alone, IOM estimated that 25,000 people were expelled to Niger, including 14,000 Nigeriens, but also 11,238 other sub-Saharan Africans (Pascual 2019). Even against the backdrop of political upheaval in Algeria in 2019, Radio France Internationale (RFI) reported a figure of 11,000 expelled to the North of Niger in 2019, of which IOM recorded 358 cases where non-Nigeriens expelled to Niger (RFI 2020). This practice has also continued during COVID-19. According to Human Rights Watch, 3,400 people were expelled between 1 September and 9 October 2020 (HRW 2020).

The new Algerian President, Abdelmadjid Tebboune, took office in December following contested elections and months of popular protests calling for regime change, known as the Hirak. The President and the government led by Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad face multiple intersecting challenges that will command their attention for the foreseeable future, making it difficult to envisage migration and asylum reform being top priorities in the near-term. These include the immediate challenges posed by the onset of COVID-19 and the low price of hydrocarbons. Longer term challenges include convincing members of the Hirak that political reforms will indeed be deep-seated, and addressing Algeria's underlying economic problems, notably its overdependence on hydrocarbon production.

However, changes in Algeria's domestic and international politics may provide openings for changes in the management and integration of refugees and migrants in Algeria over the coming years. Following the Hirak, the Algerian authorities face concerted pressure to build a state based on human rights and the rule of law, providing a potential opening to UN agencies and to activists in Algeria who hope to push Algeria to

¹ By late September 2020, UNHCR had registered over 8,700 Algerians amongst those who arrived in Europe by sea or land through the Mediterranean (UNHCR 2020 N.d.). Algerians were the second most common nationality arriving in Europe through the Mediterranean, followed by Bangladeshis, Syrians, Afghans, and Moroccans, while sub-Saharan African migrants transiting through North Africa were much less common. Overall, Frontex data shows that Afghan nationals have been amongst those nationalities with most detected irregular border crossings (including all routes) from January 2020 to August 2020 followed by Tunisia and Algeria (Frontex 2019).

² Interviews, March & June 2020.

live up to its international commitments and to take a more humane approach to managing migration. The desire to rebuild Algeria's diplomatic relations with the rest of Africa may also provide an impetus for Algeria to improve the way it deals with Sub-Saharan African migrants and refugees.

European policymakers will need to continue to be very careful in how they approach Algerian policymakers on this topic. Algerian policymakers refuse to engage in any cooperation with the EU that might be perceived as in any way curtailing Algeria's sovereignty. European proposals regarding migrant disembarkation centres in North Africa were rejected outright by the Algerian government, and indeed increased tensions around the topic. Future political dialogue with Algeria on the topic of migration should be addressed as one element of wider efforts by European governments and the EU to improve overall relations with Algeria.

2. Current migration dynamics between the Sahel and Algeria

When considering migration dynamics between the Sahel and Algeria, it is worth keeping in mind that the Algeria–Libya border is 989 km long, the Algeria–Mali border is 1,359 km, the Algeria–Niger border is 951 km, and while migration from Morocco is not an issue, the 1,427 km long border has been closed since 1994 and is thus also heavily securitised. Traditionally, people moved back and forth across the borders between Mali, Niger, Libya and Algeria without issue. The Touareg in particular were present in all four countries and moved across borders with ease, including for commercial exchanges, family reasons, and even to visit hospitals in Southern Algeria.

But migration dynamics changed a lot in recent years due to the outbreak of war, first in Libya and then in Mali. Before 2011, Libya was a destination country for many migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa rather than the transit country it became thereafter, particularly after the Civil War of 2014. The outbreak of conflict in Mali and the growing terrorist threat across the Sahel, combined with the already extreme human development issues in the region, to create additional push factors (Musette and Khaled, 2012).

In response to the growing number of crises in the region, Algeria increasingly began to secure its borders, notably in the aftermath of the In Amenas terrorist attack in January 2013, which had demonstrated the country's vulnerability to cross-border attacks.³ This securing of the country's borders primarily targeted the terrorist threat, but also resulted in the growing securitisation of the migration question as the Algerian government increasingly worried about terrorists crossing the borders amidst groups of migrants. Algerian officials often argue that the southern borders have become a hub for transnational crime, including people trafficking, prostitution, arms and drug trafficking, and that terrorists have taken advantage of the migrant flows across borders (Committee on Rights of Migrant Workers 2018, APS 2018C). Indeed large zones in Algeria's Southern desert are military zones accessible only to the Algerian army and if migrants are intercepted in these zones, the army automatically sends them back over the border.⁴

Despite the deployment of thousands of soldiers along Algeria's frontiers with its neighbours, many migrants still manage to cross the thousands of kilometres of borders in the desert that Algeria shares with its neighbours. In one interview, Paolo Giuseppe Caputo, Head of Mission of IOM in Algeria, noted that an average of 500 people cross the border into Algeria in an irregular way every day, which he stated means that Algeria alone receives more irregular migrants each day than all of Europe (Hafid 2019). There is no

³ In January 2013, terrorists raided the In Amenas gas plant, which is jointly operated by Statoil, BP and Algeria's Sonatrach, and killed 40 people by the time the army regained control of the plant 3 days after the beginning of the crisis.

⁴ Interviews, March 2020.

data available on the breakdown of populations amongst the approximately 250,000 migrants in Algeria, although it is clear that Malians and particularly Nigeriens are amongst the main nationalities represented. Reports of expulsions from Algeria also mention a large number of Guineans, as well as smaller numbers of Beninese, Ivoirians and other West Africans (Olivier 2016).

Algeria has experienced a sharp increase in what are locally termed *haragas*, young Algerians trying to make the journey to Europe by sea, but reports rarely refer to sub-Saharan Africans amongst their numbers (TSA 2020, Barti 2019). The majority of Sub-Saharan Africans who cross into Algeria and are not returned to their countries of origin thus remain in Algeria rather than trying to make the onward journey to Europe.⁵

3. Overview of reception and asylum systems.

a. Existing systems

Algeria's international commitments take precedence over national law. The 2020 constitution, like the 2016 constitution, states that: "The treaties ratified by the President of the Republic under the conditions foreseen by the constitution shall prevail over the law" (Secrétariat Général du Gouvernement 2016, Journal Officiel 2020). Yet, despite some efforts to meet its international commitments, Algeria is still struggling to meet many of these commitments and its constitution either fails to integrate them or even contradicts them.

Algeria ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention in 1963 and the 1967 Protocol, which obliges it to enact measures on asylum, but no asylum law has been adopted to date. Algeria also voted in favour of the Global Compact on Refugees in 2018 (UN 2018A). Algeria is also a signatory to both the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (UNTC 1969) and the 1994 Arab Convention on Regulating Status of Refugees in the Arab Countries. The Algerian government did produce a draft asylum law in 2012, but that law was not passed and the momentum around the law died down after 2012 as the government focused on reforming the constitution, which it eventually did in 2016. The 2016 constitution and the 2020 constitution include the same article on the principle of non-refoulement (Art 83 in 2016, Art. 50 in 2020), but do not explicitly guarantee the right to asylum (Secrétariat Général du Gouvernement 2016, Journal Officiel 2020).

The Algerian government has not put in place national procedures to register asylum seekers and conduct refugee status determination in Algeria and it is UNHCR that registers asylum seekers and issues refugee ID cards. However, for a mixture of reasons, including the security situation in the South of Algeria, it has a presence only in Algiers and does not have access to the borders and various parts of the country where there is a wide concentration of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants. This means that those who never make it to Algiers do not get the opportunity to apply for asylum, even when in need of international protection.

Amongst other treaties relevant to international migration, Algeria ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in 2002 and the International Convention on the protection of migrant workers in 2005 (UN Treaty Collection, UN 2005). However, the Committee on Rights of Migrant Workers noted in 2018 that the Algerian constitution is not in line with the latter because it only protects migrants who reside legally in the country, and thus recommended a revision or amendment to the constitution (Committee on Rights of Migrant Workers 2018).

⁵ Interviews, March 2020.

Algeria abstained from voting on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (Rush 2018). At the Marrakech Conference in December 2018, then Algerian Minister for Interior Noureddine Bedoui, stated that his delegation approved of the Global Compact's approach regarding international solidarity, shared responsibility, a human-centred approach, national sovereignty and the non-legally-binding nature of the agreement, but did not believe the distinction between regular and irregular migration was clear enough. He stated that while Algeria believes in supporting migrants, this is based on the principle of solidarity, and not on the basis of an official obligation (Ministère de l'Intérieur 2018, UN 2018B).

Law 08-11 from June 2008 mentions that foreigners who reside in Algeria and wish to work can only obtain residence permits in certain precise circumstances, such as if they have work permits or temporary work authorisations. There is no way for those who have entered the country irregularly to regularise their status, and the law criminalises clandestine immigration (and emigration too) (Journal Officiel 2008). Migrants who have found employment and whose employer is willing to sponsor them are still not able to regularise their status. Many migrants have faced harassment and even expulsion regardless of their juridical status. Migrants with work permits and refugees have on occasion been amongst those expelled from the country (Jeune Afrique 2018).

International conventions ratified by Algeria guarantee immigrant children the right to education and health, and Algerian officials often mention that health and education are universal in Algeria, and thus available to migrants and refugees. However, the constitution and laws are not entirely clear on this. The constitution does indeed state: "The right to education is guaranteed," but states that "All citizens have the right to the protection of their health." (Secrétariat Général du Gouvernement 2016). The 2018 law relative to health includes allusions to the universality of healthcare in articles 12 and 21,⁶ but also contains language making it unclear if healthcare is guaranteed to all or only to citizens. Article 13 mentions only that the state: "ensures free healthcare and guarantees access to all citizens throughout the national territory." (Journal Officiel 2018). The 2015 law relative to the protection of children states that every child - without discrimination - benefits from the rights guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international treaties, including amongst others the right to education and to healthcare (Journal Officiel 2015).

Enforcement of these rights is not always easy due to lack of information amongst migrants or because of administrative obstacles. According to a 2016 survey carried out by Médecins du Monde and UNICEF in cooperation with the Ministry of National Solidarity, Family and the Condition of Women, only a third of children of school age were in school (El Watan 2016). The report also identified the registration of children at birth, regardless of their parents' legal status, as a priority area, as well as clarifying the regulations for foreign children to access Algerian schools and health facilities. The report also noted concerns about the lack of data about both regular and irregular migrants, which makes it difficult for government institutions to plan and provide adequate health structures and access to education. The Ministry proceeded to ask that the recommendations of the study should be used to prepare an action plan. (UNICEF 2017).

Algeria has signed bilateral agreements with multiple countries of origin, including with Niger and Mali. For example, the Algerian-Nigerian Bilateral Border Committee was created following a memorandum of agreement signed in Algiers in October 1997. It sought to strengthen cooperation between border towns

⁶ Art. 12. — L'Etat œuvre, à tous les niveaux, à la concrétisation du droit à la santé comme **droit fondamental de l'être humain** à travers l'extension du secteur public pour **une couverture sur l'ensemble du territoire national**.
Art. 21. — **Toute personne a droit** à la protection, à la prévention, aux soins et à l'accompagnement qu'exige son état de santé, en tous lieux et à toutes les étapes de sa vie. Elle ne peut faire l'objet de discrimination dans l'accès à la prévention ou aux soins en raison, notamment de son origine, de sa religion, de son âge, de son sexe, de sa situation sociale et familiale, de son état de santé ou de son handicap. Aucun motif, de quelque nature que ce soit, ne peut faire obstacle à **l'accès du citoyen** aux soins dans les structures et les établissements de santé, notamment en cas d'urgence. Elle ne peut faire l'objet d'aucune atteinte à son intégrité physique qu'en cas de nécessité médicale dûment prouvée et selon les dispositions prévues par la présente loi.

through the promotion of exchanges, particularly in the areas of cooperation on border security, mobility of people, illegal immigration, and all dimensions of economic cooperation. The fifth session of the Bilateral border committee, held in July 2015 in Niamey, led to a ramping up of such measures, and the establishment of mechanisms for implementing the recommendations from the different sessions. Measures adopted included strengthening joint actions to curb irregular migration, inspection and maintenance of border regions, strengthening the means of combating smuggling, the organization of simultaneous patrols, and the exchange of information (APS 2018A).

In August 2018, the UN Human Rights Committee noted its concerns about allegations of the collective arrest of migrants, including asylum seekers and holders of UNHCR refugee cards, administrative detention and collective expulsions without any legal procedures. It noted particular concerns regarding the allegations that 13,000 people had been collectively abandoned in the desert in Niger, including pregnant women and children. The Committee called on Algeria to end these practices and to adopt a law on asylum as quickly as possible (UN Human Rights Committee 2018). Similar concerns were raised by the UN Committee on the Rights of Migrant Workers (UN Committee on Rights of Migrant Workers 2018).

These expulsions began in 2014, when Niger and Algeria came to an agreement allowing for the forcible return of Nigeriens, particularly women who were begging in Algeria. Algeria proceeded to also expel other Nigerien migrants and further discussions took place between the two countries. Following a visit to Niger in October 2018, the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Felipe González Morales, noted in his report that these agreements are not public and may not even be written down, raising issues regarding transparency and accountability.

Morales further highlights that due to the lack of individual assessments of legal due process, these forced returns amount to collective expulsions that do not conform with international law, including the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. He notes that the collective expulsion of non-Nigeriens to Niger began in 2017, and proceeds to describe the conditions under which migrants were expelled.

The migrants were rounded up by the Algerian police in their workplaces or homes, including in the middle of the night, beaten up, arrested and brought to police stations, detained, identified, deprived of their personal belongings and savings, loaded in buses and transported to Tamanrasset, the last Algerian city before the border with the Niger. Once in Tamanrasset, the non-Nigerien migrants were put in trucks in unsafe and inhuman conditions and dropped on the so-called point zero, 15 km from the border with the Niger [sic]. From there, migrant women, children and men were forced to walk in the desert for approximately 25 km to Assamaka (UN General Assembly 2019).

In responding to international criticism, Algerian officials use a variety of arguments to dispel criticism and justify Algeria's continued use of collective expulsions. Algerian officials are careful to distinguish between legal and irregular migration, and to emphasise the rights enjoyed by those who reside in Algeria legally. Algerian officials also emphasise that terrorist groups and criminal elements take advantage of migrant flows and that these migrant flows are thus a security risk. Algerian officials also regularly state that the international community is responsible for the insecurity and poverty on Algeria's frontiers, and thus that the international community must invest much more significantly in managing the causes of migration flows, rather than expecting Algeria to deal with them. Furthermore, Algeria insists that it does not have detention centres and that the locations where those awaiting expulsion are held are "administrative centres," where migrants can receive legal support and consular services (UN Committee on Rights of Migrant Workers 2018, APS 2018C).

As elsewhere in North Africa, many sub-Saharan African migrants and refugees, as well as black Algerians from the South of Algeria, face racist insults and occasionally even violent attacks. Article 298 bis. of the Penal Code, adopted in 2001, punishes any injury committed towards someone from a different ethnic, philosophic or religious group, punishing this with imprisonment of 5 days to 6 months and/or a fine of 5.000 DA to 50.000 DA. Another amendment to the Penal Code, Article 295 bis., adopted in 2014, punishes discrimination or public incitement of hatred, including on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, punishing it with 6 months to 12 years of prison and a fine of 50.000 DA to 150.000 DA (République Algérienne Democratique et Populaire 2015).

However, testimonies by sub-Saharan African migrants, refugees and students living in Algeria note regular harassment in the street, including insults and even threatening physical behaviour on occasion (Goethe 2018A&B). High-level Algerian officials and politicians have on occasion made racist or discriminatory comments, as when former Prime-Minister Ahmed Ouyahia, then Chief of President Bouteflika's cabinet, said that irregular migrants "bring crime, drugs and many other scourges" (Forson 2017). Writing in 2017, Faten Hayed noted that Algerian media were slow to report on migrant and refugee issues, gave these issues low priority when it did report them and often resorted to racist stereotypes. She does indicate that there was some improvement in coverage in 2015 and 2016, when there was a spike in Algerian media reporting following a series of violent racist incidents, but indicated that migration was not yet an integral part of media reporting and public debate. (Hayed 2017).

b. Efforts to improve migrant and refugee reception, protection and integration

Algeria's new government has a vast political and economic reform agenda to achieve in the coming years, and now also faces the additional challenge of plummeting hydrocarbons prices, combined with one of the worst outbreaks of COVID-19 in Africa. Even before the twin oil and COVID-19 crises, Algeria already faced a major challenge to reform its hydrocarbon dependent economy. President Tebboune had also promised major constitutional reforms, and proposals were announced in May, but many Algerians remain unconvinced by the limited reforms that have been proposed. Weekly protests as part of the Hirak, the political protest movement that began in February 2019 demanding substantial political change, stopped at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, but as the lockdown has begun to ease, a number of protests have again begun to spring up across the country. Activists and intellectuals have also used other means to continue to express opposition to the regime, including op-eds, petitions and online activism (Meddi 2020A, Le Monde 2020).

Together these economic and political challenges that the government is sure to face for years to come are likely to leave limited space for the government to truly focus on developing an asylum law or on improving the framework for guaranteeing safe, orderly and legal migration. Since President Tebboune took office, there has been very little sign that his government plans to change course with regard to the expulsions taking place across Algeria's southern borders; on 12 January 2020 the Minister of Foreign Affairs Sabri Boukadoum signed a new deportation order, and 667 migrants were expelled on 19 of March 2020 even after COVID-19 was already spreading in Algeria (Alarme Phone Sahara 2020A&B). Having increased the pace of expulsions in October, Minister for the Interior Kamel Beldjoud announced an intensification of the fight against irregular migration on 1 October 2020, including the intensification of controls and the dismantling of reception networks (Bledi 2020).

However, there have been some openings. IOM and the Government of Algeria increased their level of collaboration in the past year and there appears to be a growing level of trust between them. This allowed IOM to organise a number of flights enabling voluntary returns and reintegration of sub-Saharan African migrants to their countries of origin since Autumn 2019. These flights enable migrants to return in a safe and orderly manner, and are likely to be increased once COVID-19 has settled down. One flight even took place between Algeria and Mali in July 2020, returning 82 migrants at the peak of the COVID-19 outbreak

in Algeria. The Algerian government facilitated this process, putting accommodation at IOM's disposal to host those who have signed up for the programme, dedicating a wing of the airport to IOM for these flights, and arranging the judicial investigation for each passenger. IOM also has an agreement with the state airline, Air Algérie, which carries the passengers back to their home countries (IOM 2019A, Hafid 2019, IOM 2020b).

The Government of Algeria also agreed to a ten day suspension of expulsions over the New Year holiday period, and another temporary suspension of expulsions after the COVID-19 crisis began. All migrants showing COVID-19 symptoms were entitled to be treated in Algeria regardless of status (Interview, 18 March). More recently, at the request of the government of Algeria IOM established a pilot cash grant facility aimed at migrants who have no income due to the lockdown in response to COVID-19 (IOM 2020).

Although the new government's action plan for implementing President Tebboune's political and economic programme does not explicitly mention the rights of migrants and refugees, the new government included a State Secretary in charge of the diaspora under the Minister of Foreign Affairs, although after the resignation of Samir Chaabna in June, it does not appear this position has been filled. Many of the priorities that the Government's plan highlights, including the prioritization of public health as a major arena for reforms and improvements in the coming years, should benefit migrants alongside citizens (Plan d'Action 2020). A law on preventing and combating discrimination, regionalism and hate speech was passed by the National Popular Assembly in April (Lyes 2020). This bill could certainly improve the official response to racism and race-based discrimination, which continues to be a major problem in Algeria, but many activists and independent media raised concerns that a too loose definition of hate speech was being adopted that would allow the authorities to crack-down on freedom of speech more generally (Mehenni 2020, Meddi 2020B).

c. Political interests and tensions

Algerian elites and the general public alike are very sensitive to any action by a third country that might be seen as undermining Algerian sovereignty. This means that European proposals to create regional disembarkation platforms or to return third-country nationals to North Africa were met with a clear refusal by the Algerian government (APS 2018B). In recent years, Algeria has shown a willingness to engage in limited cooperation where this does not interfere with its sovereignty, such as increasing cooperation with Germany around the return of rejected Algerian asylum seekers (DW 2018). Unlike Tunisia and Morocco, Algeria is not engaged in a Mobility Dialogue with the European Union.

Following what is known as the "Black Decade" in the 1990s, when Algeria faced a terrorist insurgency, security and counterterrorism featured as the top political priority for Algeria. Further, the terrorists who carried out the attack at In Amena in 2013 crossed from Libya, driving Algeria to refocus on cross-border terrorism and thus on protecting its external frontiers. The Algerian National Popular Army (ANP) has been a core political actor in Algeria since independence, and its influence was reinforced by the Black Decade and its aftermath. The Ministry of the Interior, which is the primary ministry responsible for migrants, shares the ANP's strong preoccupation with security, which has guided its very securitised response to growing migrant flows. Refugees fall under the Bureau Algérien pour les Réfugiés et les Apatrides (BAPRA) at the foreign ministry, but in practice it is UNHCR that handles asylum seekers and refugees. The security forces do not tend to differentiate when rounding up migrants for collective expulsions.

Despite growing socio-economic problems since the sharp fall in the oil price in 2015, the Algerian political elite was slow and inefficient in responding, and now faces an economic crisis following the collapse in the oil price and the COVID-19 lockdown. Even before that, Algerians faced falling standards of public services, particularly in peripheral regions. According to International Labour Organisation data in June 2020 total unemployment was 11.5%, and youth unemployment was 29.7% (WB 2020). The country faces a 20%

deficit on its current account in 2020. Economic growth is predicted to fall by over 5% and unemployment to rise to 15%. The Algerian government was already forced to take a first set of austerity measures in March, but is likely to be in economic crisis mode for months to come (Makedhi 2021, Karam & Abu Omar 2020). Socio-economic anger may fuel further protests in the country.

Algeria has a proud history of diplomacy, including notably with African partners, but Algerian diplomacy suffered greatly during the last years of Bouteflika. Rebuilding Algeria's international standing is a clear priority for Tebboune, and an essential element of this will be rebuilding Algeria's position with regard to African partners (Farrah 2018, Ben Yahmed 2020, Benchérif 2020). This was evident in Tebboune's speech to the African Union Summit in February 2020, in which he spoke of Algeria's deep attachment to the African Union (APS 2020).⁷ However, Algeria's actions on the continent may be compared with those of its neighbour and rival, Morocco, which has built an important diplomatic toolbox vis-a-vis Africa in recent years, including economic, cultural, and security tools, but also an important element of migration diplomacy. Algeria may begin to face pressure from African partners to develop a more transparent migration and asylum policy, leading it to eventually develop its own National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum.

Since the beginning of the Hirak in February 2019, human rights groups in Algeria have been consumed by debates about the future form of the state, as well as drawing attention to the detention of peaceful protestors, attacks on freedom of the press, the lack of transparency around the December 2019 Presidential elections, and multiple other questions linked to the Hirak. This has meant that the attention that organisations such as the Ligue algérienne pour la défense des droits de l'homme (LADDH) previously gave to the question of the collective migrant expulsions has been lessened in recent months. Similarly, the issue received very little press coverage after the beginning of the Hirak.

4. Existing interventions to support migrants and refugees

As mentioned before, Algeria is largely unwilling to work directly with European governments, and thus unlike Tunisia and Morocco, there are few migration and asylum related projects directly funded by European governments in Algeria. The EU and its member states do, however, offer indirect funding via UN agencies such as UNHCR and IOM and through some smaller projects with NGOs. However, it is worth noting that IOM has a small budget in Algeria when compared to Morocco and Tunisia. In 2018 IOM's operational budget in Tunisia was 2.5 times that in Algeria although Tunisia has just over one quarter of Algeria's population and much smaller frontiers, while in Morocco, with roughly the same population, IOM's operational budget was 7.5 times larger (IOM 2019B).

⁷ For example: "Algeria cannot ignore brother and neighboring countries, much less the African continent of which it is an integral part and a natural extension. This Africaness, we have somewhat obscured in recent years, because of a focus on our internal affairs, but we are today resolved to return to it, quickly and strongly, within the renewed framework of the African Union and at the level of bilateral relations." (My translation from the French) ([full speech](#)).

Algerian Government officials and officials of the Algerian Red Crescent regularly point out that the Algerian government spends considerable sums of money to manage migration flows. Speaking before a UN Committee, the Director of Human Rights of Algeria's Ministry for Foreign Affairs highlighted that the state provides free education and healthcare to all, regardless of whether they are Algerian. He stated that the government had spent around \$20 million to provide care for sub-Saharan migrants, and pointed to the vaccination of Malians and the fact hospitals in Southern Algeria were open to all without discrimination (Committee on Rights of Migrant Workers 2018). Saïda Benhabilès, President of the Algerian Red Crescent, in defending Algeria's record regarding "repatriations," stated that the Algerian state had spent 20 million euros for repatriation operations for 78,000 irregular African migrants, without counting food, clothes and care (APS 2018D).

It is difficult however to find any real data on Algerian government expenditure in these areas or any clarity on what projects are carried out by the Algerian government or the Algerian Red Cross in the areas of protection, reception and integration of migrants and refugees in Algeria. Meanwhile, the expenditure on education and healthcare for non-Algerians is not disaggregated from the overall budget. While education and healthcare are technically free and available to all, navigating these systems is not necessarily simple, particularly for those who are not Arabophone, and even more so for those who come from Anglophone African countries. IOM and UNHCR work with a variety of local NGOs to support the reception and integration of migrants and refugees in Algeria.

UNHCR has a programme of cash assistance to refugees and it also provides recognised refugees with assistance to cover accommodation. It also works with local NGOs in order to facilitate access to health services. This includes supporting projects focused on facilitating access to education and vocational training for refugee children and youth with the *Réseau Nada*, a national network that works for the empowerment of children and youth. IOM similarly works on a variety of projects that include working to reinforce the health services to enable them to work with victims of trafficking, pilot projects on the management of frontiers, projects focused on social cohesion, and projects focused on reintegrating young Algerians who return from Europe.

The *Plateforme Migration Algérie*, which is supported by the EU, brings together a number of associations working on migration in Algeria. Thus far, it has not been very high profile, but aims to create a space to bring the efforts of associations and individuals together to create and implement a national platform to work to improve the living conditions of migrants in Algeria. It also aims to create a framework for actions with and for migrants on issues such as promoting migrants' access to rights and their protection, and to be a tool that draws on the energy of migrants, their skills, their ability to take a critical look at the environment and participate in civic life (Plateforme Migration Algérie).

The EU Mission to Algeria and the Embassy of the Netherlands are currently funding a project run by Médecins du Monde's Algeria office entitled "Strengthening the protection and resilience of people most vulnerable on the migration route," which aims to support actions carried out by Algerian associations in the field of migration. The project plans to strengthen the capacities of the organisation that are part of the Plateforme Migration Algérie. In order to optimize the intervention of the PMA members, the project plans a series of trainings aimed at strengthening the activities of the member associations to improve the care of vulnerable migrants in Algeria (Plateforme Migration Algérie 2020).

As well as supporting the PMA, Médecins du Monde is working with Caritas Algiers to support migrants' access to health in Algiers and is managing projects in Oran to support both migrant and Algerian women (Médecins du Monde). There are very few national organisations with strong capabilities on migration, but Algeria has a large number of local civil society organisations, which emerged as one of the most positive and resilient actors in Algeria over the course of Bouteflika's presidency despite minimal resources and

restrictive legislation regulating NGOs. Small civil society organisations emerged at the local level across the country (Northey 2018). Some of these, whose principal focus is not migration, but healthcare, child protection or other thematic issues, nevertheless carry out activities focused on the protection, reception and integration of migrants including refugees. Yet it can be difficult to find information on these NGOs and their activities.

There is a lack of quality research and data on migration between Sub-Saharan Africa and Algeria. At present, there is one research centre in Algeria that has consistently produced quality analysis of migration dynamics and policy developments in Algeria, the Centre de Recherche en Economie Appliquée pour le Développement (CREAD) under the direction of Saib Musette, but even this centre has produced a lot more work on Algerian emigration than on immigration into Algeria. Similarly there are a limited number of Algerian journalists with a strong understanding or interest in Sub-Saharan African migration into Algeria. As a result of this lack of solid data, varied policy analysis and a rich media interest, the topic of migration and asylum reform is unlikely to become a core topic of public debate or to rise on the policy agenda.

5. Recommendations and entry points for international cooperation

As already discussed, there are few opportunities for the international community to work with the Algerian government on protection, reception and integration systems directly, but under the new government, there may at least be some space for policy to begin to change.

Algeria will need to begin to build new mutually beneficial partnerships with external partners in the coming months as it seeks to address its economic issues and increase investment. This opens the opportunity for wider political and economic dialogue, which might include migration as one topic amongst others. Within the context of the EU-Algeria Association agreement, the EU hopes to reopen its bilateral dialogue on migration with the Algerian authorities in the coming months as part of wider political and economic consultations. Several EU member states also have their own broad bilateral political consultation mechanisms with Algeria, in which regular and irregular migration might be included as one amongst a range of topics for discussion.

While it is difficult to directly finance Algerian civil society, it would be worth investing in developing a mapping of local CSOs that are working on migration on the ground in cities and regions across Algeria. This would mean going beyond the traditional Algiers-based NGOs and reaching out to local-level organisations across the country, including those that are not necessarily focused only on migration, but that work on sectoral activities such as health or children's rights, and have begun to work with migrants and refugees due to local needs.

Even if it is difficult to provide these organisations with direct funding or support, it is possible to support their work in other ways, including through knowledge sharing activities or by inviting selected employees or members of the organisation to European capitals for research and training opportunities, as well as to exchange with European NGOs at roundtables or debates.

One way to support a vibrant research and policy environment in the case of Algeria would be to invest in more opportunities for Algerian researchers and journalists to conduct in-depth field research on migration dynamics between the Sahel and Algeria, and about the state of protection, reception and integration systems in Algeria. This could include funding scholarship opportunities for Algerian researchers and journalists to carry out Masters or PhD research in Europe, or for Algerian researchers to carry out secondments at European policy institutes. This would allow researchers to develop essential academic research skills and then proceed to carry out field research in Algeria, feeding a more informed policy discussion.

Finally, the main outlet for working in Algeria on protection, reception and integration systems is to work with the UN system. International organisations in Algeria emphasise that the challenges facing Algeria are immense given its vast size, extensive frontiers and economic, political and security challenges. Support to international organisations in North Africa has tended to favour Morocco and Tunisia, which is perhaps understandable given the higher level of transparency and knowledge about migration and asylum policy in these two countries. However, given the large challenges facing Algeria at a time of growing economic crisis, such unequal division of funds between the three countries should be reconsidered.

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