

Aspects of crisis migration in Algeria

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We face a new paradigm on migration issues after the so-called Arab Spring, the political, economic and societal crisis in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. In response, security resolutions adopted by the EU to protect its borders address the countries of the northern shores of the Mediterranean, reflecting a focus on migration movements to the north, but the impacts are also felt in the countries of the southern shore, such as Algeria.

Since the Arab Spring, Algeria has become a haven for mixed migration flows from Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Syria. In these flows, there are also refugees in search of a third country. Many analysts see in these flows only a transit route to the countries of Europe. This observation is only partially correct, because there are many who find shelter in Algeria.¹ In addition to the arrival of foreigners, we have also observed a movement of Algerian migrants, long established in those countries in crisis, to return to Algeria. These returnees, fleeing insecurity in their new home countries, may have lost all social ties within Algeria. Other Algerian migrants are known to be 'trapped' in some of these countries, regardless of their status there, regular or irregular.

Historically, Algeria has been known as a host country for refugees. Following every crisis due to natural disaster in the Sahara Desert, sub-Saharan Africans regularly move into southern Algeria. Since 1975, Algeria has been hosting Sahrawi refugees on its territory, and over many years there have been movements of refugees from the crises in Ivory Coast, the Democratic Republic of Congo and, most recently, Mali. There are at least 260,000 foreigners living in Algeria (0.7% of its population in 2012), more than 75% of whom are refugees, asylum seekers and other displaced people including migrants without status.² In the one department of Tamanrasset in the south, for example, there are around forty nationalities present.

The new context exposes migrants to difficult social conditions. Algeria, having previously adopted strict regulations regarding migration, has recently been more flexible in order to meet the basic requirements of people displaced by the political crises in North Africa. Nevertheless, Algerian territory is becoming a fortress. Despite the flexible rules of admission of foreign populations, there were 2,766 people expelled from Algeria by the border security forces in 2012. The authorities need to control 1,200 km

February 2014

of Mediterranean coast – without assistance, as Frontex only assists the countries to the north – as well as 6,000 km of land borders. Having closed the land borders with Morocco in 1994, they have now been compelled to fortify the borders with Libya (December 2012), with Mali (January 2013) and Tunisia (August 2013), given the rising magnitude of cross-border trafficking and transnational crime³ induced by crisis in this sub-region.

These movements are only partially covered by international instruments and while the Algerian

authorities certainly have opportunities to protect this stream of people, no agreements (bilateral or multilateral) are in force to do so.

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1. See *Mixed Migration Flows to, through and from Algeria*, published by International Centre for Migration Policy Development,
2. Compilation of data by the author. See also <http://esa.un.org/unmigration/migrantstocks2013.htm?msdo>.
3. Algerian Ministry of Defence Criminal Investigation www.mdn.dz/site_cgn/index.php?L=an&P=dsi