

# Coronavirus pandemic and migration crisis: State of play, immediate challenges and recommendations

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## Guidance note – Algeria

### Executive summary

The coronavirus pandemic has put the world under great strain. With its aspects of lockdown, travel bans, and social distancing, this crisis will have long, deep and pervasive effects on economic activity. Migration, with everything this involved, may be affected in the same way as other sectors.

Algeria, now an emigration, transit and host country, has tried to address the new challenges of coronavirus. Health, safety, economic and social measures have been taken to protect against the effects of the pandemic, mitigate the spread of the virus and reduce its negative impacts.

The pandemic situation considered stable and controllable prompted the government to consider releasing lockdown partially.

The consequences of this crisis are experienced differently depending on the category of migrant. Those most affected are people whose status is illegal and who are unable to access the official labour market. Coronavirus-related measures have exacerbated the precarious situation of irregular migrants and asylum seekers.

Fortunately, Algeria's health-care system, based on free health care, has mitigated the adverse outcomes of the health crisis. Action has been taken to repatriate Algerians stranded abroad. During the sacred month of Ramadan, despite the reduced momentum of solidarity due to lockdown measures, actions to support the needy, including migrants, have been observed by civil society.

The lack of statistics about the migration policy has been felt acutely. The challenges that Algeria faces in managing this issue are myriad. Coronavirus-related lockdown measures have added more. However, other opportunities may be seized if the post-coronavirus issue is managed in a reasonable way.

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## 1. Context and justification

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### 1.1. General overview of the pandemic and the national context

Algeria is considered to be an emigration, transit and host country. The country receives a significant flow of irregular migrants on a daily basis. According to statistics from the Algerian government, an average of 500 people cross the borders illegally every day. This means that the country receives more migrants on a daily basis than the whole of Europe.<sup>1</sup> Knowledge of foreign populations<sup>2</sup> in Algeria is a matter for approximation in a context marked by flawed statistics, which typifies the entire field of international migration (Musette and Khaled, 2012). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reports a figure of around 100 000 to 150 000 people for regular migrants. It mentions that the number of irregular migrants, at any given time, fluctuates between 50 000 and 75 000, representing a rate of 0.47% of the total population. In 2008, the rate was around 0.27%.

The number of migrants has almost doubled within 10 years. Several factors have contributed to this figure. Algeria is ranked in the upper category of middle-income countries, in comparison with its neighbours, making it an attractive country for migrants. Evidently, many migrants dream of reaching Europe but remain in Algeria for several years. They find living conditions attractive, compared to conditions in their countries of origin.

The current health crisis has only exacerbated the already difficult conditions of illegal migrants and asylum seekers. The coronavirus outbreak has coincided with the crisis involving the sharp decline in oil prices that has plagued it since 2014. This crisis has seriously affected Algeria's economy and more specifically the tax revenues from oil exports. When this situation became unsustainable the government was forced to reduce public recurrent expenditure by 50%.<sup>3</sup> This budgetary approach has been more necessary than ever because of the pandemic and its hefty economic and social repercussions. The most disadvantaged and vulnerable social categories will be the first affected. Daily workers, those working in the informal sector, SMEs and even large enterprises will have to bear the brunt of the consequences of the crisis. Migrants, especially those in irregular situations, will be the most affected. Working mainly in the informal sector due to their legal status, illegal migrants see their social precariousness returning as their incomes vanish due to the lockdown of over two months.

The coronavirus crisis has dealt a sledgehammer blow to global oil demand, at a time when the market was already unstable due to a price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia, which opened the oil valves in what was already a surplus market. Global demand for crude has plunged by at least 30% since the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis. Consequences of this instability: global oil storage capacities are now close to saturation, posing a problem for traders, producers, and refiners.

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<sup>1</sup> Statement by Paolo Giuseppe, IOM Head of Mission in Algiers in the *Le Soir d'Algérie* newspaper on 18/11/2019.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of "foreigner" is broader than that of "migrant". The first is a legal concept (favoured by Algerian law), while the second refers to demographic movements.

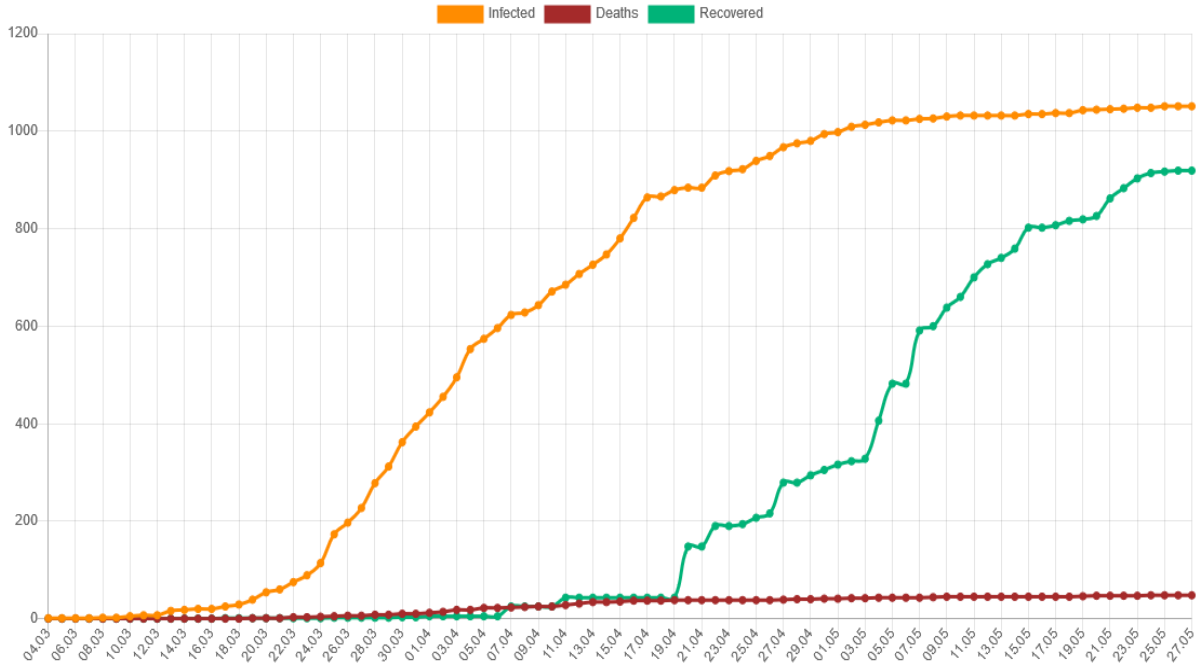
<sup>3</sup>This is the second reduction, after the one adopted by the Council on 22 March 2020, when the decision was taken to reduce current expenditure by 30%. Decision of the Council of Ministers held on May 3, 2020.

Not only is the virus killing and continuing to kill people, but its spread will produce a negative supply and demand shock in countries in the North Africa and Middle East region (Baldwin and Weder di Mauro, 2020). Algeria will not escape the effects of the oil crisis. The decline in the world oil market is expected to reduce Algeria’s exports for the current year by 7.5%. This will lead to a fall in tax revenues and a reduction in public spending.

The latest statistics available on the spread of the virus (27 May 2020) in Algeria show that the situation is fairly well controlled but still worrying. Indeed, the number of positive cases reported has reached 8 697 and the number of deaths 617. On average, Algeria has 890 confirmed cases and 7 deaths per day.

As the situation is considered “stable”<sup>4</sup> the authorities have asked hospitals to gradually resume work after an absolute freeze due to the coronavirus<sup>5</sup>. Further easing of lockdown restrictions could take place if citizens comply with social distancing guidelines and mandatory wearing of masks.

**Figure 1. Number of people tested positive, deceased and recovered in Algeria as of 27 May 2020.**

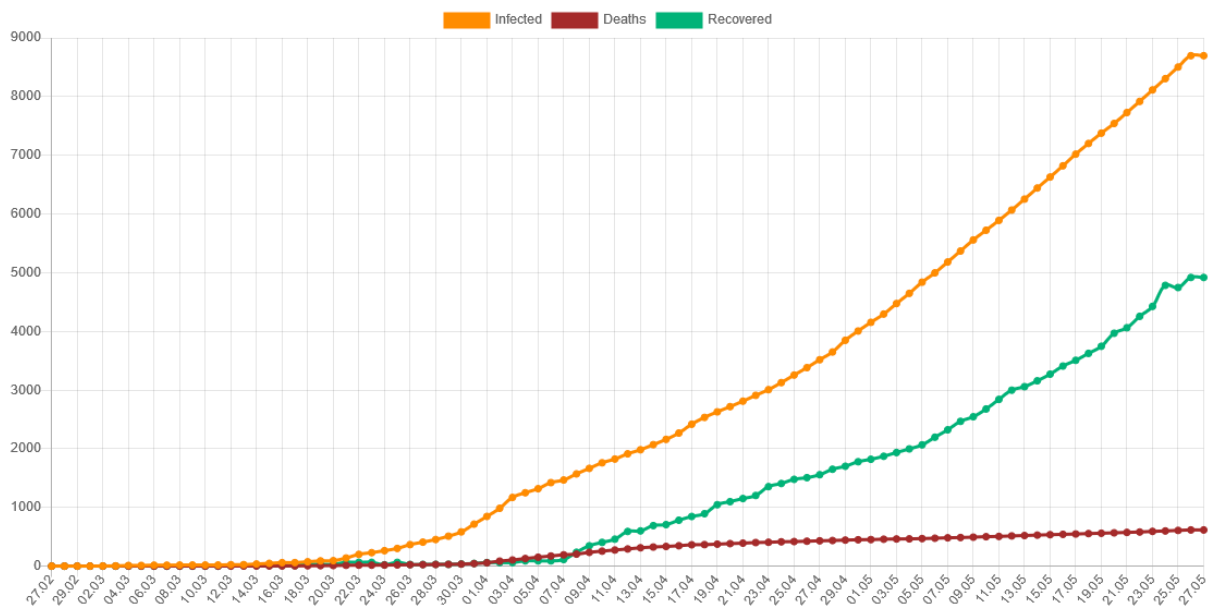


Less affected than the rest of the world, the African continent is also confronting the spread of the coronavirus. On 26 May 2020, the continent has 3 471 confirmed deaths and 46 426 recoveries for 115 346 registered cases, according to the African Union Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. However, there is a growing number of indications that this assessment is significantly under-estimated.

As of 27 May 2020, Tunisia registered a total of 1 051 confirmed cases, including 48 deaths. The curfew was lifted and the country was released from lockdown on 4 May 2020.

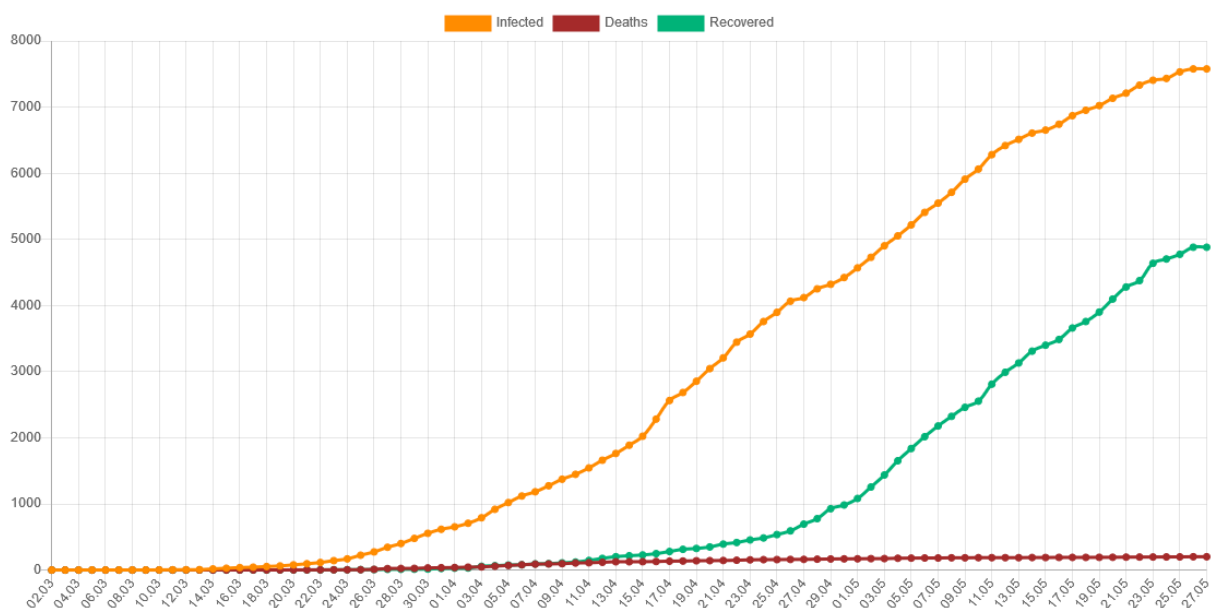
**Figure 2. Number of people tested positive, deceased and recovered in Tunisia as of 27 May 2020.**

<sup>4</sup>Statement by the Algerian Minister of Health Abderrahmane Benbouzid on 8 May 2020.  
<sup>5</sup> Several patients whose urgent cases have been affected because of work stoppage in some medical services.



In Morocco, a total of 7 556 cases of coronavirus have been recorded as of 27 May 2020, including 202 deaths. The Moroccan authorities have imposed restrictions on sporting and cultural events, which has included closing stadiums to the public, as well as lockdown. In mid-March, the authorities declared a state of emergency.

**Figure 3. Number of people tested positive, deceased and recovered in Morocco as of 27 May 2020.**



## 1.2. Main challenges and responses of the Algerian government

The magnitude of the pandemic has put unprecedented pressure on Algeria's ability to cope. Involving all the relevant parties has helped to limit the adverse consequences. This involvement has extended to using air force resources to transport medicines and medical equipment from China.

Since the first confirmed case of coronavirus was reported on February 25, 2020, the situation has rapidly developed. The Minister of Health's statement on national radio on 22 March 2020 confirmed that Algeria had moved on to stage three of the virus's spread. The measures taken to control or stabilize the situation were timid at first before accelerating to maximum speed. On March 23, 2020, partial lockdown was imposed in Algiers and nine other cities. A nearby town (Blida) was placed in complete lockdown. The principal measures taken by the government have focused on the following areas:

#### **a. Health strategy and measures**

The health system's response strategy to coronavirus involves various levels of alert, corresponding to the presence or absence of the virus in the country and its methods of transmission. The strategy is defined according to the kinetics of the epidemic. There are two phases and four levels.

**Level 1** is characterized by the absence of cases of coronavirus infection in the country. The three key areas of this level involve strengthening entry points, providing information and raising awareness.

**Level 2**, lockdown, is characterized by the occurrence of cases brought into the country. This may involve isolated cases or delimited sources. The aim is to detect cases early to stop the virus being transmitted to other people and to contain the infection within the identified outbreak areas in order to delay the spread of the coronavirus.

**Level 3** involves strengthening measures to prevent and control coronavirus infection.

**Level 4** of the epidemic alert corresponds to the return to normal. The objective is to evaluate the action taken and the lessons learned and to readjust the strategy if necessary.

#### **b. Flight cancellation and border control**

The first steps that were taken concerned international flights. The first cancellations have affected flights to China since February 3, 2020. This suspension has been extended to flights to Milan (9 March 2020) and the whole of Italy (11 March 2020). On 12 March 2020 Algeria and Morocco suspended their air connections. Cancellations continued to include Spain (13 March 2020), France (15 March 2020), the rest of Europe (16 March 2020) and also involved five Arab and six African countries. Air and sea links with Europe have been suspended.

"Rigorous and systematic" control at Algerian airports was introduced from 17 February 2020 to counter the possible spread of the coronavirus epidemic to the country. On 22 March 2020, health controls were reinforced in centres controlling the land, sea and air borders.

All activities relating to the transport of persons, from domestic flights to public taxi services, road, rail or guided transport, have suspended their connections; excluding the activity for transporting workers for which employers are responsible (22 March 2020).

#### **c. Measures relating to work and operations within public authorities and business**

Public authorities at central level as well as regional authorities have been called upon to introduce furlough for at least 50% of their staff whose presence in the workplace is not considered essential for continuity of service, in particular structures of public utility, excluding personnel in the sectors of health, national security, civil protection, customs, prison administration, national

communications, quality control and fraud enforcement, the veterinary and phytosanitary authorities, hygiene and cleaning services and those performing surveillance and caretaking tasks. However, the competent authorities these staff come under may authorize exceptional furlough for administrative staff and of any staff whose presence is not deemed essential.<sup>6</sup>

Public institutions and administrations have been called upon to do their utmost to encourage remote working. Personnel in the economic and financial sector, both public and private, are not affected by these stipulations. However, managers of companies and organizations in this sector have been asked to take the measures they deem appropriate to reduce, as far as possible, staff mobility, taking into account the requirements related to the nature of their activities, but without this affecting the production and services needed to meet the basic needs of citizens and to supply the national economy.<sup>7</sup>

#### **d. Tax and financial measures**

To reduce the costs associated with the pandemic and lockdown, the government decided to defer tax returns, to renew the deferral of payment of the first instalment of income and corporation taxes, easing payment schedules for taxpayers in a difficult financial situation, and suspending the taxation of retained earnings.

For its part, the Bank of Algeria has ruled that banks and financial institutions can now postpone payment of maturing loan tranches, or reschedule customer receivables that have been impacted by coronavirus-induced circumstances and extend new credits to customers who have benefited from the deferral or rescheduling measures.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, it was decided to lower the key rate applicable to main refinancing operations by 25 basis points (0.25%) to 3% instead of 3.25%; to reduce the reserve requirement ratio from 8% to 6%; to raise the Bank of Algeria's refinancing threshold for marketable government securities.<sup>9</sup>

Banks and financial institutions are expected to fully adhere to these decisions. Consequently, they must take every initiative and deploy every measure to make available a supply of credit at a reasonable cost, thereby enabling the domestic economy to move toward new prospects.<sup>10</sup>

### **1.3. Focus and objective of the guidance note**

The pandemic has put unprecedented pressure on the ability of States to cope with the effects of a health crisis of this nature. The first sector to be put under severe strain is undoubtedly the health sector. As the days have gone by, entire categories of population have been found to be suffering from the devastating effects of the pandemic. Day labourers, traders, those working in the tourism and catering sector have suffered the most. But one category is likely to suffer even more: migrants.

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<sup>6</sup> [Algeria Eco, coronavirus control: Details of the measures decided, 21 March 2020.](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Algérie Eco, coronavirus control: Details of the measures decided, 21 March 2020.](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Algeria Eco, coronavirus: The Bank of Algeria announces new measures to protect the national economy, 7 April 2020.](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Transaction by Algeria, Bank of Algeria: New measures to strengthen banking resources.](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Algerian transaction. To revive the economy: the Bank of Algeria lowers the key rate and the reserve requirement ratio.](#)



The need to pay more attention to this category is justified in more than one respect. Although regular migrants are eligible for the various social and health services offered by the State to the entire population, irregular migrants are doubly at risk. Firstly, they will lose their income, and then they risk having access to basic services (health care, education, and social services) restricted. A policy to take care of the specific needs of this population is essential.

The purpose of this note is to highlight the measures taken by the Algerian government to address aspects related to pandemic management. Aspects related to the direct and indirect impacts of coronavirus on migration will be explained.

## 2. Direct and indirect impact of coronavirus on migration

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Although the coronavirus pandemic is not a migration problem, it is perceived and managed as such (OECD, 2020). According to the World Bank's latest report on the pandemic and migration<sup>11</sup>, the coronavirus-induced economic crisis has been deeper and more widespread than any other pandemic and health crisis since 1900. Most pandemics have affected a few countries and a small part of the world's population. With the exception of the Spanish flu from 1918 to 1920, of world-wide extent. It infected almost 500 million people (one-third of the world's population at the time) and caused 17 to 50 million deaths between March 1918 and March 1920, in three phases.

The most disadvantaged and vulnerable social groups will be the first affected by the consequences of the crisis. Day labourers, those working in the informal sector, SMEs and even large enterprises will suffer. In Algeria, with an estimated working population of 11,048 million workers, the private sector employs 6.95 million workers, or 63% of total employment, according to the National Statistical Office (NSO). The public sector absorbs almost 4.09 million workers, or 37% of the working population. A previous NSO survey shows that over 35% of the working population has an insecure status. Precarious workers are concentrated mainly in the BTPH (building, public works and hydraulics), services, agriculture, fisheries and hotel sectors, to name but a few.<sup>12</sup>

Migrants, especially those in irregular situations, will be the most affected. Irregular migrants, often working in the informal sector because of their status, not only suffer from their precarious status, but will lose their income because of the lockdown conditions applied for over two months.

"It seems increasingly clear that the coronavirus will cause a global recession, and that most economies will contract. Similarly, the consequences on unemployment, income, and equality are likely to disproportionately affect migrant workers."<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting to present the likely direct and indirect impacts of coronavirus on migration according to the migration profile of each migrant category. Consequently the impact on migrants according to their situation in the host or home country will be described below. Other aspects relating to these impacts will be developed later.

### 2.1. Impacts of coronavirus on migrants in Algeria

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<sup>11</sup>World Bank (2020). COVID-19 CRISIS THROUGH A MIGRATION LENS *Migration and Development Brief 32*

<sup>12</sup> [Algeria Eco, the private sector employment 6.95 million workers, 29 July 2018.](#)

<sup>13</sup> [World Economic Forum, Shahidul Haque, COVID-19 could cause a migration crisis. Here is how we can avoid it, April 17, 2020.](#)

The impact of the coronavirus on migrants in Algeria is felt differently depending on their status. While regular migrants are more likely to ask to be repatriated, other categories of migrants hope to receive assistance in all its forms.

#### **a. Regular migrants**

Several thousand foreign or binational nationals are still stranded in Algeria, pending their repatriation by their country of origin. To facilitate their exit from the country, the General Directorate of Algerian Customs announced that it had taken steps to facilitate customs procedures for non-residents not accompanied by their vehicle. Franco-Algerians stuck in Algeria are asking for help. Several thousand are still stranded in Algeria waiting to be repatriated to France. They criticise the lack of solutions.

#### **b. Irregular migrants**

Irregular migrants will be most affected by the consequences of the pandemic. Irregular migrants, often working in the informal sector because of their irregular status, not only suffer from their precarious status, but will lose their income because of the lockdown conditions applied for over two months. ILO estimates<sup>14</sup> show that, assuming a situation without any other source of income, the loss of earned income will result in an increase in relative poverty for informal workers and their families of more than 21 percentage points in upper middle-income countries, nearly 52 points in high-income countries, and 56 points in low-income countries.

#### **c. Circular Migration**

In recent years, circular migration has constituted a significant part of the migrant population in Algeria. It consists mainly of people residing in the border towns (Mali and Niger) and Moroccans, who, despite the closure of the borders, work and return to Morocco when their visa expires.

Many Moroccans found themselves stranded in Algeria after the cancellation of flights and the closure of land borders<sup>15</sup>. Humanitarian action for these migrants has been observed. The issue remains unresolved, as the Moroccan authorities have not yet decided on a date for their repatriation, or how this will take place.

On the other hand, Algerians living intermittently between Algeria and their host country were stranded in these countries throughout the lockdown period. Calls for help or repatriation have been relayed through social networks.

#### **d. Refugees and asylum seekers**

There are no data on the total number of refugees and/or political asylum seekers published by the Algerian authorities. On the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR), a change can be seen in these populations and their country of origin. In 2018, the overall volume is estimated at 94 336 people from 15 countries. Asylum seekers are estimated at 8 926 people. A total of 103 276 were taken care of by UNHCR in Algeria, which works with several national and international NGOs as well as other UN agencies. The largest proportion concerns the 90 000

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<sup>14</sup>ILO (2020). COVID-19 crisis and the informal economy: immediate responses and policy challenges

<sup>15</sup> A gathering of Moroccans, requesting repatriation, in front of the Moroccan consulate in Oran (400 km west of Algiers), reported in the Algerian local press.

refugees from the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic<sup>16</sup> (95.4%), followed by Palestine (4.3%), with 4 013. The remaining volume 323 (0.3%) is shared among 13 other countries.

The pandemic showed the limitations of the Algerian statistical system for this category of migrant. The statistics available do not allow us to fairly assess the effects of the pandemic on this category of migrant. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that refugees and asylum seekers are particularly affected by the lockdown measures and socio-economic impacts of the coronavirus. To enable the United Nations humanitarian agencies to continue their work, a \$15 million call for funds for Sahrawi refugees was launched<sup>17</sup>.

Humanitarian aid was channelled through the Algerian Red Crescent at the end of April 2020. Health assistance was provided by the Algerian army in the form of a field hospital. This hospital is equipped with all necessary medical equipment, starting with a disinfection area, an initial consultation wing, a resuscitation unit, a maternity ward, an operating room, radiology equipment, a laboratory, an ENT and ophthalmology department, supervised by specialist physicians and practitioners.

## **2.2. Impacts of coronavirus on the Algerian diaspora**

Algeria is the world's 15<sup>th</sup> country in terms of diaspora, estimated at over 2 million people, a proportion of 6.8% of the country's population. Concentrated largely on the European continent, the health crisis has revealed the existence of vulnerable and struggling people due to the cessation of economic activities. For the time being, the only action carried out by the Algerian authorities is to send humanitarian aid to Algerian migrants in France.

### **a. Regular Algerian migrants living abroad**

The only action taken by the Algerian authorities toward Algerian migrants based in France is the sending of 11 tons of food as part of the solidarity caravans and the "breaking fast table" action. These donations, offered by Algerian businessmen, were distributed to Algerian nationals living in cities in the south (Marseille, Nice, Montpellier).

It should be noted that in the absence of a declared and sustained policy toward Algerian migrants based abroad it is difficult to assess spontaneous actions responding to a humanitarian emergency. The disappearance of the Amicale des Algériens in Europe<sup>18</sup>, despite everything this organization can be blamed for, has deprived Algeria of an organizational structure capable of handling such a crisis situation.

### **b. Irregular Algerian migrants living in Europe (Harragas)**

Europe's declared health emergency status has exposed the vulnerability of "undocumented" immigrants. Irregular migrants must be added to the numbers of "homeless" and "squatters" who are not registered and do not have access to the usual hygiene measures (water or toilets). There are also those who survive out in the fields and who do not have access to the essentials to be able to apply the hygiene and health measures recommended by the authorities.

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<sup>16</sup> This volume of 90 000 has not changed since 2007 according to HCR data.

<sup>17</sup> Press release of United Nations agencies distributed on 23/04/2020.

<sup>18</sup> An organization created in 1957 by the FLN, which subsequently became an instrument for controlling Algerian immigrants in Europe. Disappeared in 1988.

## **2.3. Other aspects related to the impact of coronavirus on migration**

### **a. Protection of the rights of migrants**

With Algeria subject to high migration pressure, it is normal for the authorities to take steps to manage these flows. Unfortunately, one of the methods of managing this is forced return. Another option consists of achieving the same result providing many benefits to migrants and the member countries. This involves providing assistance for voluntary return and reintegration.

“The Algerian Constitution already prohibits the forced return of political refugees (article 69) but does not mention the right to seek asylum. Nor does it recognize the need to escape persecution and other forms of serious injury, in accordance with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees”. Algeria<sup>19</sup> has just re-adjusted the legal framework (which dates from 1966) for the conditions of entry and residence of foreigners, with the enactment of a new law in 2008.

Algeria has not yet adopted a refugee law. For several years displaced persons have enjoyed a few rights which were previously unauthorized.

*“In 2012, for example, UNHCR and its partners’ discussions with the Algerian government led to the provision of access to state schools for all children of refugees and asylum-seekers. The Algerian government grants free access to health care and education for refugees and asylum-seekers throughout the country as well as all Algerians. In addition to the above-mentioned cooperation, within the urban context, the UNHCR works closely with the Office for Refugees and Stateless Persons (ORSF) and the Algerian Red Crescent, which is responsible for managing camps set up to accommodate Syrians and Malians”<sup>20</sup>.*

### **b. Informal economy and irregular migrants**

The presence of a large number of irregular migrants is a major challenge. It is a population that is not registered, not supervised and often speaks another language. However, this population may also provide opportunities to a country because it contributes to the national economy. Their integration into the labour market often takes place through informal channels. These migrants can be found in the fields, on construction sites, or they have small shops on the street.

The overwhelming majority of workers in the informal economy are more exposed to health and safety risks. They do not have adequate social protection and are more likely to suffer from illness, accidents or death. Coronavirus adds a major risk of contamination in unprotected places to these risks. If they fall ill, most workers, including migrants<sup>21</sup>, do not have guaranteed access to medical care and no income security through sickness or accident benefits. If they are unable to access health care, the virus will spread more widely, with fatal consequences. If they can access health care, many will have to pay fees that force them to take on debt or sell their productive assets, plunging them into deeper poverty. Before the crisis, 100 million people fell into poverty each year due to

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<sup>19</sup> [Amnesty International, protecting refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, the situation of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers in Algeria.](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Algeria-watch, Refugee and asylum-seekers, 3 June 2018.](#)

<sup>21</sup> [ILO \(2020\), Protecting migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic: Recommendations for Policy-makers and Constituents.](#)

catastrophic health expenditure, and health services are not available for many of them, especially in rural areas.<sup>22</sup>

### **c. Migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings**

The pandemic is likely to increase migrant smuggling and trafficking of human beings. Algeria has a legal arsenal to deal with this phenomenon.<sup>23</sup> Several measures have been taken to combat migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, including the draft order submitted to the Prime Minister for approval, aimed at giving an official character to the care of victims of trafficking. Algeria has ratified international conventions to combat trafficking in human beings and has developed its programme of cooperation with the United Nations.

### **d. Decrease in remittances**

“World Bank (WB) statistics on remittances from migrants to their countries of origin indicate that the Algerian diaspora transferred only \$1.8 billion in 2019. Consequently, Algeria has a “deficit” of over \$300 million compared to 2018, where it received more than \$2,157 billion.”<sup>24</sup> The remittances are used for various purposes. On average, an estimated 75% of remittances go to essential needs such as daily spending, health care, and education, the rest contribute to a diversity of longer-term goals such as setting up businesses, purchase-renovation, meeting unexpected needs or repaying debts.<sup>25</sup> Coronavirus will further accentuate the decline in remittances. It should be recognized that a large majority of funds are transferred through informal channels, making their accounting complex.

The World Bank estimates that remittances to the Middle East and North Africa region “are set to fall by 19.6% to \$47 billion in 2020, following the 2.6% growth observed in 2019. In 2021, remittances to the region are expected to recover, but at a slow rate of around 1.6%, owing to anticipated moderate growth in the eurozone and low capital outflows from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)”<sup>26</sup>.

“This decline is due to the various restrictions, such as lockdown and suspension of air and sea links, related to the fight against the new coronavirus pandemic. In Algeria, it is the opposite direction of flow that is functioning most successfully. Illicit money transfers have caused havoc for the Algerian economy. According to a report by Global Financial Integrity, a Washington-based non-governmental organization (NGO), at least \$1.5 billion of capital is leaving Algeria illegally every year”<sup>27</sup>.

### **e. Support and services to improve the stability and resilience of at-risk migrant and host communities/Access to care (including health care, safe spaces, quarantine areas)**

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<sup>22</sup>[ILO Brief \(2020\), COVID-19 crisis and the informal economy: immediate responses and policy challenges.](#)

<sup>23</sup>Articles 303 bis 4 to 303 bis 15 of the Penal Code, in accordance with Law 09-01 of 25 February 2009, by adding section 5 bis, entitled trafficking of persons.

<sup>24</sup>[L'Expression, Brahim Takherubt, Money transfer from emigrants to Africa, Algeria “loses” \\$300 million, 02-05-2020.](#)

<sup>25</sup>[www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/remittances-matter.html](http://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/remittances-matter.html)

<sup>26</sup> [World Bank, Press Release, according to the World Bank, migration remittances are expected to experience a fall unprecedented in recent history, 22 April 2020.](#)

<sup>27</sup> [L'Expression, Brahim Takherubt, Money transfer from emigrants to Africa, Algeria “loses” \\$300 million, 02-05-2020.](#)

The health sector in Algeria has been developed with a focus on ensuring free access to health care. This implies that even migrants, including those in an irregular situation, benefit from health services.

In the case of this pandemic, the authorities did not distinguish between nationals, residents, and asylum seekers. An envelope of 70 billion Algerian Dinar was allocated to the health sector to cover the costs of the pandemic.

All irregular migrants in Algeria will benefit from access to care and education. The Algerian Red Crescent has therefore opened reception centres for Syrians in the north and in the south for Malians. The NADA Association will also take care of educating refugee children. The World Medical Association is working to promote access to care for women and children.

This mechanism has been replicated for cases reported positive for coronavirus. To date, reported statistics do not distinguish between resident, non-resident, regular or irregular migrant. Hospitalisation costs are borne by the government.

“The issue of border security in Algeria predates the Libyan and Malian crises. It began in the early 1990s following the Tuareg rebellion in Mali and Niger. But it was over the next decade that it was confirmed with the establishment, through political discourse, particularly that of the Ministry of the Interior, of a discursive connection between terrorism, organized crime and irregular immigration.”<sup>28</sup>

### **3. Responses and diagnosis: The instruments enlisted, the actions and initiatives taken at national level and at the level of international cooperation vis-à-vis the country: assessment of their coherence and short and medium-term relevance**

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The current health crisis has put the Algerian health care under severe strain. This crisis has affected the health sector and practitioners, as well as other sectors and actors, who have been called upon to counter the adverse effects of the pandemic. These measures vary from the repatriation of Algerians stranded abroad, to assistance provided to refugees and migrants in Algeria.

#### **a. Repatriation of Algerians stranded abroad**

Due to the closure of borders, many Algerians have found themselves stranded in several countries. The purpose of their visit differs: tourism, business, work, studies and treatment. The first repatriation operation was launched on March 2, 2020 for the benefit of 130 Algerian students. The number of Algerian repatriated has been estimated at 7500 worldwide. Other Algerians remain stranded in Malaysia and Turkey.

Since the beginning of the repatriation operation for Algerian nationals, a total of 9745 people have been taken care of, under conditions deemed good, in 63 hotel establishments (private and public) spread over 18 wilayas in the country. As part of the preventive measures taken recently, some 352 establishments, with a total capacity of 31 000 beds, were made available to the public authorities for lockdown.

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<sup>28</sup> [Abdenour Benantar, Border Security: Proposals and limitations of Algerian strategy, L'Année du Maghreb, 14 |2016, 147 – 163.](#)

## **b. Facilities for exiting Algeria after border closures**

Several thousand foreign or binational nationals are still stranded in Algeria, pending their repatriation by their country of origin. To facilitate their exit from the country, the Directorate General of Customs - Algeria announced that it had taken steps to facilitate customs procedures for non-residents not accompanied by their vehicle. Franco-Algerians are still stranded in Algeria and are asking for help. Several thousand are stranded in Algeria waiting to be repatriated to France. They criticise the lack of solutions.

## **c. Border management**

The closure of land borders with neighbouring countries (Tunisia, Libya, Niger, Mali) has de facto suspended deportation operations at the borders of sub-Saharan migrants at the borders. In 2019, people were deported every month. This operation is qualified by the Algerian Red Crescent as humanitarian repatriation. According to data from the International Organization for Migration, which registers migrants who wish to do so upon arrival in northern Niger, almost 11 000 people were deported from January to November, 358 of whom were non-Nigerien. Prior to the health crisis, Algeria took a series of measures involving the army, gendarmerie, border guards, intelligence services, police and customs. They consisted of the dispatch of military reinforcements and equipment to border areas, the creation of new advanced posts, the strengthening of border surveillance and control, the construction of new infrastructure and the installation of electronic surveillance equipment.

## **d. Humanitarian aid for the Sahrawi refugees in the Tindouf camps**

Refugees and asylum seekers are most affected by the lockdown provisions and socio-economic impacts of the coronavirus. To enable the United Nations humanitarian agencies to continue their work, a \$15 million call for funds for Sahrawi refugees was launched, in view of the global health emergency<sup>29</sup>.

Humanitarian aid was channelled through the Algerian Red Crescent at the end of April 2020. Health assistance was provided by the Algerian army in the form of a field hospital. This hospital is equipped with all necessary medical equipment, starting with a disinfection area, an initial consultation wing, a resuscitation unit, a maternity ward, an operating room, radiology equipment, a laboratory, an ENT and ophthalmology department, supervised by specialist physicians and practitioners.

The measures taken by the Algerian government have focused on the health aspect crucial to the fight against the pandemic. The other aspects have been taken care of by other State structures. It must be acknowledged that the issue of migration has not been put forward explicitly, but rather implicitly. Algeria's position, characterised by the absence of a distinct migration policy, makes it difficult to assess operations conducted within the framework of coronavirus. The effort made by the State, virtually unassisted, to counteract the effects of the global pandemic leaves hope that other actors, such as civil society, will become involved in the near future.

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<sup>29</sup>Press release of United Nations agencies distributed on 23/04/2020.

## **4. Short- and medium-term challenges, opportunities and recommendations**

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There will surely be a “before” and “after” coronavirus. This crisis has revealed how much international cooperation is needed to deal with the pandemic. National solutions cannot be effective if they are not combined with the support of the international community.

### **4.1.Challenges and opportunities for the country in the short and medium term**

#### **a. Challenges**

Lockdown measures and border closures often lead to an increase in extreme nationalism, leading to a xenophobic sentiment among administrations and their citizens. The decision to close borders is a natural response to the coronavirus pandemic, and governments rely on strong legal foundations when making this choice. But the virus will never stop at national borders, and lockdown policies pose another threat: another migration crisis.

Beyond the security challenges that must be the subject of intense and realistic discussions among the countries in the region, food and health challenges must also be addressed.

The protection of women and children should be one of the pillars of migration policy. These vulnerable people, often exploited by human trafficking networks, can be spared from this fate through regional cooperation and national policies prohibiting and criminalising these practices.

An early warning system is required for future crises with a comprehensive scheme integrating all categories of the population, including migrants.

The challenge of establishing a reliable communication system and a high-speed internet will mitigate the consequences of similar crises.

#### **b. Opportunities**

The new view of migration must take into account the protection of the fundamental rights of refugees and migrants. Migration should be viewed as an opportunity and source of wealth, not just as a source of destabilisation, threat and risk.

The health crisis has shown the need for regional cooperation to enable cooperation between the countries in the region and those of the South. The region is often devastated by acute drought crises, causing significant movements of people seeking to cross borders for a better life.

The current crisis has shown how vulnerable nations and governments are. The sense of isolation and loneliness should not outstrip the reality that, beyond national aspects, openness to others could be a real opportunity to integrate migrants into host societies through an inclusive process that includes fundamental, economic and social rights.

### **4.2.Recommendations**

#### **a. In the short term**



- Adopt a proactive policy of caring for refugees in difficult situations, especially women and children in the event of a crisis;
- Effectively involve civil society in the care of migrants;
- Grant work permits to migrants in labour-intensive sectors to enable them to earn a decent income;
- Intensify health action for irregular migrants, especially women and children;
- Raise awareness of the need for positive behaviours toward irregular migrants (especially sub-Saharan migrants);
- Adapt the current border conduct policy to include the essential need to protect migrants in times of crisis.

**b. In the medium term**

- The need for an inclusive migration policy that takes into account new developments on the world stage;
- The need for detailed and reliable statistics in order to eliminate the lack of migration information. A specialist observatory could address this need;
- The integration of irregular migrants into the formal labour market by granting them social protection and fundamental rights;
- Encourage research on issues related to the management, care, experience and situation of migrants in Algeria. During this crisis, there was a need to address aspects related to the management of migration in Algeria;
- Facilitate access of migrants to education for children and vocational training for unskilled migrants;
- Establish refugee status in accordance with international law;
- Modernise the electronic payment system that facilitates the sending and receiving of funds. This modernisation must be accompanied by a reduction in transfer fees;
- Consider maintaining a lasting relationship with the civil society of Algerians living abroad by creating a forum to take charge of this;
- Intensify international cooperation on migration to combine security fears with development imperatives;
- Organise the migration of Algerian skills so that the public authorities and companies can benefit from them;
- Facilitate the integration of migrants into host societies through inclusive processes guaranteeing the preservation of their fundamental rights; open international cooperation through the proliferation of bilateral and multilateral agreements between countries and organisations in charge of the issue;
- Discuss the security challenges of migration in a transparent manner;
- Make border areas more attractive by strengthening local development plans for indigenous people;
- Preserve existing age-old traditions in border areas, especially trade and agriculture customs.