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## HARRAGA: ILLEGAL MIGRATION OF ALGERIANS TO EUROPE – DESPERATION OR DREAMS OF A EUROPEAN ELDORADO?

**ABSTRACT:** The external borders of the European Union are becoming increasingly difficult to cross each year. Migrants deprived of legal entry into the EU still attempt to do so illegally. Neither the introduction of visa restrictions nor the closure of borders has reduced the phenomenon of illegal border crossings. The aim of this article is to investigate and describe the harraga phenomenon, which consists of the illegal crossing of the southern sea borders of the European Union by citizens of the Maghreb countries. The author will endeavour to explain the causes and motivations of migrants, with a primary focus on Algerians. In Algeria, the harraga phenomenon differs from other types of migration, and there are political and social reasons behind this phenomenon. Algerian harraga follows its own logic of circumventing restrictions and crossing borders illegally. Risking their lives to leave the country, Algerians view this as their last hope of reaching the 'European El Dorado'. Obtaining a visa in Algeria today has become a far more challenging undertaking than the perilous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea. For young people, often coming from large working-class families, 'burning the borders' is the only way to reach Europe and pursue a different life, often precarious but more stable. Algerians travel to Spain, Italy and Malta, crossing the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, but their primary destination remains France – where economic and social conditions significantly motivate individuals to undertake the dangerous journey to Europe. The research methods used in the article include a literature review, data analysis, synthesis, comparison and case study.

**Keywords:** *harraga*, illegal migration, France, Algeria, Spain, migration policy

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of illegal migration after the Arab Spring of 2011 has become a daily reality in Europe.<sup>1</sup> The waves of migrants that have flooded Europe since 2011 have led to a migration crisis, which threatens to result in a humanitarian catastrophe in the countries most affected by the influx of refugees and illegal migrants (Greece, Italy, Spain, the Balkans, Bulgaria). The main causes of the crisis were the Arab Spring, which caused unrest throughout the Middle East and North Africa, resulting in wars in Libya and Syria.

Current EU migration policy has been characterised by the gradual introduction of many restrictions, mainly regarding the number of visas offered. Unfortunately, visa restrictions have not produced any positive effects and, on the contrary, have contributed to an increase in the number of illegal migrants. The Mediterranean Sea has become one of many illegal migration routes and, at the same time, the most deadly migration route in the world (Map 1).<sup>2</sup> There are three main migration routes from the MENA region through the Mediterranean Sea:

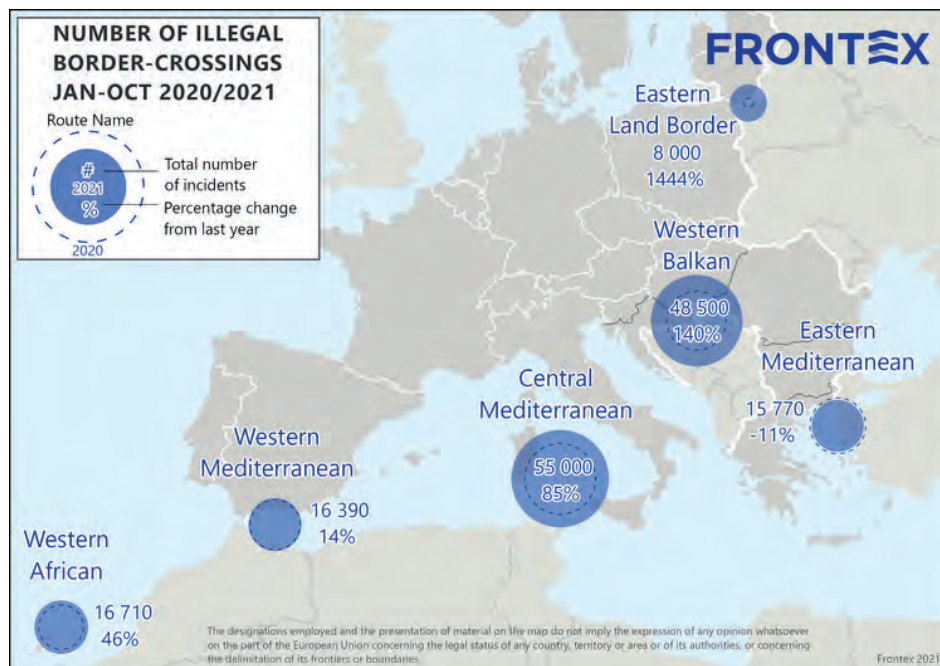
1. The western route – from Morocco and Algeria to Spain;
2. The central route – through Tunisia and Libya to Malta and Italy, to the islands of Sardinia, Sicily and Lampedusa;
3. The eastern route – from Turkey to Greece and Bulgaria.

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<sup>1</sup> In the literature on the subject, there are nuances between the terms ‘illegal migration’, ‘hidden migration’, ‘undocumented migration’ and ‘illegal migration’, and these terms are often used interchangeably, R. Perruchoud, J. Redpath-Cross (eds), *Glossary on Migration*, 2nd edition, Geneva 2011, at <https://www.corteidh.or.cr/sitios/observaciones/11/anexo5.pdf>, 7 XII 2021; it is similar with the term ‘illegal migrant’. In the literature on the subject and depending on the translation, one can also come across the terms ‘irregular migrant’, ‘clandestine migrant’, ‘insufficiently documented migrant’, ‘migrant in an irregular situation’, ‘migrant with irregular status’, ‘unauthorised migrant’, ‘undocumented migrant’. For the purposes of this article, these terms will be used interchangeably, *Migration and Home Affairs: Irregular Migrant*, at [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/pages/glossary/irregular-migrant\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/pages/glossary/irregular-migrant_en), 7 XII 2021.

<sup>2</sup> *Missing Migrants Project*, IOM 2016, at <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/>, 12 XII 2021.

Map 1. Main routes of illegal migration from North Africa



Source: Frontex, at <https://twitter.com/Frontex/status/1449016675832057868/photo/1>

The reasons for migrating to Europe vary from seeking refuge from political turmoil, wars, discrimination, catastrophes and natural disasters, to economic factors – the desire to find better employment, higher income, education and access to a better quality of life. Regardless of the reasons that push migrants to take the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean Sea, it often ends in death.<sup>3</sup> The Spaniards call the dire and often-fatal illegal migration phenomena ‘the tragedy of the (Gibraltar) Strait.’<sup>4</sup> According to International Organisation for Migration (IOM) data, 15,250 people have died in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea since 2016.<sup>5</sup>

Illegal migration is a multi-faceted problem. This article focuses on only one aspect – the illegal migration of Algerians to the European Union. The main aim of the article is to identify the reasons that compel Algerians to cross the sea border illegally

<sup>3</sup> V.K. Orlando, “Harragas, Global Subjects, and Failed Deterritorialisations: The Tragedies of Illegal Mediterranean Crossings in Maghrebi Cinema,” in C. Iheka, J. Taylo (eds), *African Migration Narratives: Politics, Race, and Space*, Rochester 2018, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> H. Abderrezak, *Ex-Centric Migrations: Europe and the Maghreb in Mediterranean Cinema, Literature, and Music*, Bloomington 2016, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> “Migration within the Mediterranean,” *Missing Migrants Project*, at <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean>, 21 XII 2021.

and the attitudes of Algerian citizens themselves towards those they refer to as *harraga*. France is the primary destination for Algerian *harraga*.

Most Algerians who try to cross the Mediterranean use one of three sea routes:

1. The first route – from the coast of Oran towards mainland Spain;
2. The second – which is quite poorly developed – connects the Dellys shore with the island of Palma de Mallorca;
3. The third route runs from the eastern coast of Algeria towards Sardinia.<sup>6</sup> The groups of people that decide to make the journey are quite diverse – from farm workers to professionals, from unaccompanied minors to pregnant women, people from wealthy families and youths.<sup>7</sup>

## THE ESSENCE OF THE *HARRAGA* CONCEPT

The illegal emigration of citizens from Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria from the Maghreb region is known as *hrig*. There are many variations of this word, such as *labrig*, *l'hrig*, *el hrig* and *h'rig*, as well as *hrague*, *harraga* or *harragua*.<sup>8</sup> Initially, the word *harraga* was not associated with Europe but with Libya. In the 1970s, Tunisian citizens illegally crossed the Libyan-Tunisian border in hopes of gaining employment in the more prosperous Libya.<sup>9</sup> *Hrig* (called by the French media *harraga*),<sup>10</sup> as a form of illegal migration to the European Union, is considered internationally as a relatively new phenomenon that appeared on a large scale at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. When looking for an explanation of why this word is used to denote illegal migrants from the Maghreb, one can cite an event that supposedly took place in AD 711 and is related to the arrival of the Berber general Tariq Ibn Ziyad in today's Spain. Although historians doubt this fact, there is a hypothesis, or rather a legend, that Tariq Ibn Ziyad decided to burn his own ships to prevent his soldiers from withdrawing, thus depriving them of choice and forcing them to fight in exchange for a promise of wealth and honour in the conquered areas.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> S. Chena, "Sidi Salem et *el harg*," *Nouveaux modèles migratoires en Méditerranée*, no. 1300 (2012), p. 53.

<sup>7</sup> H. Abderrezak, *Ex-Centric Migrations...*, p. 69.

<sup>8</sup> H. Abderrezak, "Burning the Sea: Clandestine Migration across the Strait of Gibraltar in Francophone Moroccan «Illiterature»,» *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2009), pp. 461-469.

<sup>9</sup> The discovery of oil fields in 1957 accelerated economic growth in Libya, which resulted in an increase in the demand for labor, which lasted until the collapse of Gaddafi's regime in 2011. See more: M. Chandoul, H. Boubakri, "Migrations clandestines et contrebande à la frontière tuniso-libyenne," *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales*, vol. 2, no. 7 (1991), pp. 155-162; A. M'charek, "*Harraga*: Burning Borders, Navigating Colonialism," *The Sociological Review Monographs*, vol. 68, no. 2 (2020), pp. 418-434.

<sup>10</sup> H. Abderrezak, "Burning the Sea...", pp. 461-469.

<sup>11</sup> L. Beck, "Burning Ships and Charting New Pathways in the History of Discovery and Exploration," *Terrae Incognitae: The Journal of the Society for the History of Discoveries*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2018), p. 3.

Etymologically, the word *harraga* refers to the core of *haraqa* (to burn) and is often used figuratively in the context of illegal border crossing: ‘burning the sea’, ‘burning borders’,<sup>12</sup> ‘burning kilometres’,<sup>13</sup> but also literally ‘burning/destroying documents such as passports, IDs and visas’. The phrase ‘burn visas’ can be used both literally and figuratively. The term *harraga* is increasingly translated literally and is associated with people who illegally cross the borders of the European Union through the Mediterranean Sea, burning or destroying their documents to avoid deportation. In figurative terms, *harraga* does not mean burning documents and concerns those Maghrebians who are already in the territory of the European Union (very often these individuals arrived there legally) but whose stay in the EU has exceeded the official limit (expired visa). Instead of leaving the EU, they remain in France or another EU country for longer than officially permitted.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the term *harraga* is defined as:

- a) people crossing into the EU illegally via the Mediterranean region;
- b) the process of illegally crossing sea borders by groups of people on boats;
- c) remaining in the EU after the expiration of legal documents (usually visas).<sup>15</sup>

In English, *harraga* refers to the *boat people* who leave their country on makeshift boats and face a great risk of losing their lives.<sup>16</sup> Amade M’charek<sup>17</sup> notes the five reasons *harraga* is a specific phenomenon. First of all, it is an activity – along with other forms of illegal migration – that violates the relations established by national and international law between states and individuals. The concept of *harraga* is an antonym of the concept of legal migration, which is closely related to formal respect for the state and the law. *Harraga* respects neither the law of the country of origin nor that of the country of destination, violating international law and thus ‘destroying borders’, undermining their integrity and security. Second, *harraga* is not a spontaneous process but an activity that requires time, preparation, knowledge, money and interpersonal contacts necessary to cross the border illegally. Third, *harraga* is a phenomenon that signals disturbing changes taking place beyond European borders that cannot be underestimated but should be given special attention. It is a consequence of the colonial policies of European countries and reveals the scale of dysfunction in post-colonial states. It should be noted here that these are countries not necessarily affected by conflict or wars. Fourth, the existence of *harraga* demonstrates once again that building walls and fences and introducing new visa restrictions does not solve the problem, does not increase border security, but only fosters the creation of new routes for illegal border crossing and increases the number of people attempting to cross borders illegally, and

<sup>12</sup> T.B. Jelloun, *Partir*, Paris 2006, pp. 14, 16.

<sup>13</sup> B. Sansal, *Harraga*, Paris 2005, pp. 114-115.

<sup>14</sup> A. M’charek, “*Harraga: Burning Borders...*,” pp. 418-434.

<sup>15</sup> S. Labat, “Les binationaux franco-algériens: un nouveau rapport entre nationalité et territorialité,” *Critique internationale*, vol. 3, no. 56 (2012), pp. 77-94.

<sup>16</sup> D. Hadjidj, “Le paradoxe de l’espace public dans la ville algérienne,” *Africa Development*, vol. 36, no. 2 (2011), pp. 207-218.

<sup>17</sup> A. M’charek, “*Harraga: Burning Borders...*,” pp. 418-434.

consequently, multiplies the number of deaths among illegal migrants.<sup>18</sup> Finally, *harraga* is distinguished from other forms of illegal migration because it is not fuelled by war or armed conflict, but rather by socio-economic and ideological reasons. According to Zakyai Daoud, the basic incentives for *harraga* to cross the Mediterranean Sea are: 1) the pursuit of a strict migration policy by European countries, which often results in a refusal to issue a visa and deprives individuals of the possibility of legally leaving the country; 2) the lack of appropriate documents and high costs associated with enabling legal departure; 3) the absence of educational opportunities and negligible chances to obtain a scholarship or study abroad.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, generational and ideological differences may also be added to these stimuli.

### ALGERIAN *HARRAGA*

Currently, France is home to the largest Algerian diaspora in the world. According to statistical data from 2020, there were 2.6 million French citizens of Algerian origin.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, it is difficult to estimate the number of Algerians arriving illegally in France.<sup>21</sup> According to United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) statistics, 961,850 people left Algeria in 2012, accounting for 2.6% of the country's total population. In 2019, this number drastically increased to 1,944,784 people, or 4.5% of the Algerian population. The vast majority of Algerian emigrants (91.2% or 877,398 people) mainly reside in France (75.0%).<sup>22</sup> French migration policy and the policy of the European Union as a whole, which tightened the process of issuing visas and crossing borders, are among the many reasons for the increase in illegal migration from Algeria. In the literature on the subject, the unprecedented phenomenon of irregular and illegal migration from Algeria, which is entirely different from the previous causes of Algerians' migration to France, is gaining increasing significance. According to B. Sansal, Algerian *harraga* not only cross borders, but also destroy documents confirming their belonging to the Algerian national community (identity cards / passports).<sup>23</sup> In the event of deportation, readmission or return to Algeria, *harraga*, according to Algerian law, is punishable by imprisonment for a period of two to six

<sup>18</sup> P. Cuttitta, "Preface: The Increasing Focus on Border Deaths," in P. Cuttitta, T. Last (eds), *Border Deaths Causes, Dynamics and Consequences of Migration-Related Mortality*, Amsterdam 2020, pp. 15-16.

<sup>19</sup> H. Abderrezak, *Ex-Centric Migrations...*, p. 69. See also: Z. Daoud, *Gibraltar. Improbable frontière: de Colomb aux clandestins*, Séguier 2002, p. 219.

<sup>20</sup> "L'immigration des Algériens," *Observatoire de l'immigration & de la démographie*, 6 March 2023, at <https://observatoire-immigration.fr/l'immigration-des-algeriens/>, 29 VIII 2021.

<sup>21</sup> K. Kateb, "Bilan et perspectives des migrations algériennes," *France – Algérie, le temps du renouveau*, no. 1298 (2012), pp. 6-21.

<sup>22</sup> F. Fargues et al. (eds), *Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean: Trends, Risks, Development and Governance*, Geneva 2020.

<sup>23</sup> F. Souiah, "The 'Border Burners' in the Algerian Press," *Orient XXI*, 31 January 2017, at <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/the-border-burners-in-the-algerian-press,1695>, 12 X 2021.

months and a fine ranging from 20,000 to 60,000 Algerian dinars (DZD) [EUR 125–380].<sup>24</sup> The question is, how did a nation that defied colonialism and won the War of Independence become a *harraga*? According to B. Sansal, the current Algerian phenomenon of *harraga* does not only concern the poor strata of society. Algerians do not always leave to escape poverty. *Harraga* is no longer an individual and marginal phenomenon that affects some young unemployed men on the path of illegal emigration to Europe. It has become a complex and diverse phenomenon at present that affects everyone – rich and poor, unemployed and working, young and old, both men and women.

Researchers such as Souiah, Chena and Khaled, dealing with the *harraga* phenomenon, agree that the foundations of this phenomenon in Algeria lie in the political plane.<sup>25</sup> Noureddine Khaled believes that the increase in illegal migration from Algeria to Europe is largely due to the social decline and violence that the country experienced in the 1990s, the deterioration of the quality of life and the spread of corruption – all of which resulted in a loss of public confidence in the ruling elite and a loss of hope for a better quality of life.<sup>26</sup> Initially, irregular Mediterranean crossings from Algeria to the EU occurred only in the far west of the country, namely around the city of Oran (in the provinces of Oran, Mostaganem, Ain Temouchent and Tlemcen) due to its proximity to Spain, the Ceuta and Melilla enclaves and Morocco. This trend then spread along the entire coast of Algeria, particularly to the far east (in the provinces of El Tarf, Annaba and Skikda).<sup>27</sup> Annaba is considered to be the capital of Algerian *harraga*. Since 2018, there have also been attempts to cross the border from the central Algerian provinces of Boumerdes, Tizi Ouzou and Béjaïa. From here, the route to Europe goes through the Spanish Balearic Islands and is much longer; however, because initially there were no systematic sea border controls there, this route also became popular.<sup>28</sup>

Departures from Algeria by rowboats and trawlers did not become popular until around 2005, which reveals the extent of the country's social disorder.<sup>29</sup> The first Algerian '*harraga* expedition' to Europe was 'inaugurated' on Sidi Salem Beach in 2006.<sup>30</sup> Algerian *harraga* can be divided into two groups: the first consists of those who organise the trip on their own; the second includes those who use the services of smugglers. The first group often comprises young people aged 20 to 40, mostly men (and in recent years women and children), two-thirds of whom have low-wage jobs and almost

<sup>24</sup> "Loi n° 09-01 du 29 Safar 1430 correspondant au 25 février 2009 modifiant et complétant l'ordonnance n° 66-156 du 8 juin 1966 portant code pénal," *Journal Officiel de la République Algérienne Démocratique et Populaire*, no. 15 (2009), pp. 3-7, at <https://www.joradp.dz/FTP/jo-francais/2009/F2009015.pdf>, 21 XII 2024.

<sup>25</sup> F. Souiah, "The 'Border Burners'..."

<sup>26</sup> N. Khaled, "Adolescents harragas: risquer sa vie comme seule possibilité de réalisation de soi," *Adolescence*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2013), pp. 699-709; S. Chena, "Sidi Salem...", p. 53.

<sup>27</sup> N. Khaled, "Adolescents harragas...", pp. 699-709.

<sup>28</sup> S.P. Naceura, *Algeria*, at [https://migration-control.info/en/wiki/algeria/#\\_ftn24](https://migration-control.info/en/wiki/algeria/#_ftn24), 12 X 2021.

<sup>29</sup> A. Bensââd, "Les brûleurs de frontières," *Le Matin d'Algérie*, 28 May 2008, at <https://www.lematin.dz.net/news/1520-les-bruleurs-de-frontieres-par-ali-bensaad.html>, 21 XII 2024.

<sup>30</sup> S. Labat, "Les binationaux franco-algériens...", pp. 77-94.

half of whom are students. Moreover, an increasing number of illegal young migrants come from wealthy families.<sup>31</sup> This group of Algerian *harraga* rarely uses 'luxury services' and usually relies on themselves to arrange the Mediterranean Sea crossing. They meet in small groups of 8 to 12 people (although there are groups of up to 30 people), share the costs of buying boats and motors, choose the shortest distance between Algeria and Spain and go to sea on their own.<sup>32</sup> Both girls and boys get into small motorboats on the secluded beaches of western Algeria, taking with them a compass or GPS, a life jacket, warm clothes, blankets, a supply of drinking water, food and money.<sup>33</sup> They set out at night in the hope of reaching their destination in the morning, after at least eight hours of sailing from the Oran or Mostaghanem regions to the coast of Andalusia.<sup>34</sup> Initially, Algerian *harraga* used the services of fishermen; however, in recent years, smugglers have taken control of illegal trips across the sea.<sup>35</sup> The second group of Algerian *harraga* are people who, with the right amount of money, ranging from EUR 3,000 to EUR 6,000 [471,630 DZD–943,260 DZD], and even up to EUR 10,000 [1,572,150 DZD], use the services of smugglers to reach the coast of Andalusia in southern Spain by fast boats in less than five hours.<sup>36</sup> In turn, smugglers use the services of Algerian businessmen who rent luxury yachts or fast boats to them for a fee. In this way, under the guise of tourism, Algerian *harraga* reach the EU more safely, without being caught by the Algerian Navy or the Civil Guard in Spain.<sup>37</sup> Such activity is clearly conducive to illegal departures from the country as it is a relatively safe way to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

Analysis of Algerian daily newspapers shows that the attitude towards *harraga* in Algerian society differs. Some consider them to be daredevils, while others view them as criminals. The media has a significant influence on the perception of *harraga* in Algerian society. Algeria tries to conceal the problem of illegal emigration from the country, which is why this phenomenon is seen as a taboo subject, especially in government-controlled media, and is currently discussed reluctantly.<sup>38</sup> Faced with the exceptionally high number of attempts to cross the sea by Algerian *harraga* and under pressure from the French government, which offered to patrol the coast together, the

<sup>31</sup> M. Benrabah, "Voyage en Algérie, pays des 66 milliards de dollars de réserve et de l'immense désespoir des jeunes," *Esprit*, vol. 12 (2006), pp. 61-75.

<sup>32</sup> S.P. Naceura, *Algeria*.

<sup>33</sup> M. Benrabah, "Voyage en Algérie...", pp. 61-75.

<sup>34</sup> P. Meynier, G. Meynier, "L'immigration algérienne en France: histoire et actualité," *Confluences Méditerranée*, no. 77 (2011), pp. 219-234.

<sup>35</sup> F. Souiah, "La pénalisation des « brûleurs » de frontières en Algérie," *Après-demain*, vol. 39, no. 3 (2016), pp. 19-21.

<sup>36</sup> I. Cembrero, "Sahara occidental. Chantage marocain à l'immigration pour faire plier l'Espagne," *Orient XXX*, 2 February 2021, at <https://orientxxi.info/magazine/sahara-occidental-chantage-marocain-a-l-immigration-pour-faire-plier-l-espagne/>, 21 XII 2024.

<sup>37</sup> G. Lotfi, "Algérie: Des yachts de luxe pour transporter des harragas en Espagne," *DzairDaily*, 3 March 2021, at <https://www.dzairdaily.com/algerie-yachts-luxe-transporter-harragas-espagne/>, 12 XII 2021.

<sup>38</sup> A. Bensââd, "Les brûleurs..."

Algerian authorities finally recognised the phenomenon in 2005 after years of denial.<sup>39</sup> In 2007, when this phenomenon could no longer be concealed, a nationwide campaign was launched through the media targeting the younger generation. The campaign was divided into two parts. On one hand, it targeted young Algerians, emphasising the advantages of staying in the country, offering employment opportunities and the possibility of starting their own business, while also referring to patriotism and praising the efforts of the Algerian government. On the other hand, an anti-European campaign began, which – referring to strict EU legislation – highlighted the risk of illegal migration to Europe. Government-controlled media opposing emigration regularly covered all maritime tragedies, often condemning the young people who made such a risky decision. Some private and more independent newspapers counterbalanced this government-led campaign by reporting on the number of *harraga*, analysing the phenomenon and its causes.<sup>40</sup> In one of the interviews, then-president Bouteflika spoke about *harraga* as follows: *there is no difference between suicide bombers and harraga, except that the former kill innocent people and the latter cause more harm to their close families and, above all, to themselves.*<sup>41</sup> These words were met with social dissatisfaction and during the protests of Al-Hirak, *harraga* was seen as a symbol of the fight against the regime. The illegal migrant is now portrayed as a symbolic victim of the brutality and corruption of the current regime. Protesters publicly ask for *forgiveness from harraga for not defending them earlier.*<sup>42</sup>

The government's strategy to publicly oppose illegal emigration has failed. On the contrary, this phenomenon is constantly and significantly increasing. Government propaganda against illegal emigration has been counterproductive. Young people are even more encouraged to participate in illegal emigration because it is detrimental to the regime's propaganda and, above all, because they perceive challenging the authorities as a heroic achievement. A popular Algerian saying is: *I'd rather be eaten by fish than by worms (yakulni al-ḥūt mayakulnish ad-dūd).* Death at sea is presented as more noble compared to the 'slow death' of being 'imprisoned' in Algeria, where there are few jobs, the political system is in stagnation and corruption has destroyed the material and social fabric of society.<sup>43</sup> Civil society reacts differently to government propaganda, understanding the reasons for *harraga* choosing to leave the country. The strategy of

<sup>39</sup> D. Vignati, "Media's Role and Influence on Migratory Policies in the Maghreb," in I. Ureta (ed.), *Media, Migration and Public Opinion Myths, Prejudices and the Challenge of Attaining Mutual Understanding between Europe and North Africa*, Bern 2011, p. 68.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 49-92.

<sup>41</sup> A. Mammeri, "New Penal Code Criminalises Illegal Immigration in Algeria," *Magharebia*, 4 October 2008, at [http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en\\_GB/features/awi/features/2008/09/04/feature-01](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/features/2008/09/04/feature-01), 11 XII 2021.

<sup>42</sup> J.-P. Filiu, "L'impasse politique en Algérie relance l'émigration illégale vers l'Europe," *Le Monde*, 21 February 2021, at <https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/filiu/2021/02/21/limpasse-politique-en-algerie-reliance-lemigration-illegale-vers-leurope/>, 21 XII 2024.

<sup>43</sup> S. Love, L. Wu, "Are We in the Same Boat? Ethnographic Lessons of Sheltering in Place from International Seafarers and Algerian *Harraga* in the Age of Global Pandemic," *Anthropology Now*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2020), pp. 55-65.

‘criminalising’ the *harraga* by government-controlled media has resulted in increased solidarity with the *harraga* among civil society. According to Mohamed Benhamou, MP from the Algerian National Front, the government must address the root of the problem and investigate the causes that compel broad sections of society to leave the country, risking their lives.<sup>44</sup> Overall, the Algerian *harraga* is seen as a multi-faced character, criminal, hero, victim and symbol of public protest all at the same time.<sup>45</sup>

## THE PUSH AND PULL FACTORS OF ALGERIAN *HARRAGA*

The choice of the place of migration is determined by various factors, including political, economic, social, ecological and ideological. The push factors are the reasons why Algerian *harraga* leave the country, while the pull factors are the reasons they choose EU countries. In Algeria, *harraga* is believed to be primarily an urban phenomenon (68.5%). However, it is spreading to rural youth (29%). Most Algerian cities, both in the east and the west, experience internal migration from the countryside to the outskirts of the cities. Life is often marked by poverty, violence, crime, social exclusion and marginalisation, leading many young people to rebel openly or secretly (*push factors*). One of the forms of this rebellion is illegal emigration.<sup>46</sup> Since the beginning of 2000, legal avenues for leaving the country have decreased drastically. Economic migration now applies only to highly qualified individuals. Systems such as the ‘European Blue Card’ make it easier for those with higher education to enter Europe, and the phenomenon of ‘brain drain’ is increasing. Individuals eligible to leave the country for family reunification, students, highly skilled workers, artists and athletes have the opportunity to depart legally. These are the individuals who can expect to receive a visa. It often occurs that athletes and students who travel for competitions or studies do not return to the country. They often remain abroad illegally, without a valid visa or official residence permit. Others face only two options: to stay in Algeria or to emigrate illegally, despite the restrictive migration policy.<sup>47</sup> Since 2009, a particularly drastic increase in illegal migration by Algerians has been recorded. The main push factors driving legal and illegal emigration from the country are as follows:

1. Continuous political anxiety in the country. According to the *Fragile State Index*, Algeria was ranked 74<sup>th</sup> out of 120 countries in the world in 2021;<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> B. Anderson, “‘Illegal immigrant’: Victim or Villain?,” *Centre on Migration, Policy and Society*, no. 64 (2008), at [https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/WP-2008-064-Anderson\\_Illegal\\_Immigrant\\_Victim\\_Villain.pdf](https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/WP-2008-064-Anderson_Illegal_Immigrant_Victim_Villain.pdf), 12 X 2021.

<sup>45</sup> F. Souiah, “The ‘Border Burners’...,”

<sup>46</sup> N. Khaled, “Adolescents harragas...,” pp. 699-709.

<sup>47</sup> F. Souiah, “Les politiques migratoires restrictives: une fabrique de *harraga*,” *Frontières*, no. 1304 (2013), pp. 95-101.

<sup>48</sup> *Fragile State Index: Algeria*, at <https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>, 12 X 2021.

2. The declaration by the then-president of the country, A. Bouteflika, regarding his intention to seek re-election for a fifth term was driven by the need to end the 'development process', an integral part of the economic plan that Bouteflika initiated in April 1999 after assuming presidency;
3. Various restrictions on freedom of speech. According to the *World Media Freedom Ranking 2021*, Algeria was ranked 146 out of 180 countries;<sup>49</sup>
4. Violation of human rights. According to the *Human Freedom Index 2017*, Algeria was ranked 155 out of 162 countries. The ranking included personal freedom (146 out of 162) and economic freedom (159 out of 162);<sup>50</sup>
5. The extremely difficult economic situation, caused by the erosion of the country's foreign exchange reserves, which – in 2014-2019 – decreased by half from \$180 billion to less than \$90 billion;
6. A high degree of poverty. According to statistical data (2021), 1.9 million Algerians live below the poverty line,<sup>51</sup> which means that compared to 2018, the number of poor people has increased by 600,000 in the last three years. One of the reasons for the increase in the poverty rate was the COVID-19 pandemic;
7. The exchange rate of the local currency to foreign currency reached unprecedented minimums. This led to an increase in inflation from an average of 2.92% in 2014 to 5.59% in 2017. In 2020, inflation was 2.42%. However, according to forecasts, it may reach 6.99% in 2026;<sup>52</sup>
8. Extreme erosion of purchasing power as a result of rising prices;
9. Corruption. According to the *Corruption Perception Index 2020*, Algeria was ranked 104 out of 180 countries in this ranking;<sup>53</sup>
10. Monopolisation of wealth in the hands of 10% of the population;
11. High youth unemployment rate – 12.83% in 2020;<sup>54</sup>
12. An education system that does not fulfil its social mission. It does not offer young people tools for social integration nor models of success. Almost 20% of Algerians drop out of primary school and 53% drop out of universities. Only 24% of Algerian

<sup>49</sup> *World Press Freedom Index, 2021*, at <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2021#>, 24 X 2021.

<sup>50</sup> I. Vásquez, T. Porčnik (eds), *The Human Freedom Index 2019: A Global Measurement of Personal, Civil, and Economic Freedom*, Washington–Vancouver–Berlin 2019, at <https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/human-freedom-index-files/2019-human-freedom-index-update-2.pdf>, 12 X 2021.

<sup>51</sup> "Population under Poverty Line in Algeria 2018-2021," *Statista Research Department*, 2 May 2024, at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1218877/population-under-the-poverty-line-in-algeria/>, 25 X 2024.

<sup>52</sup> A. O'Neill, "Algeria: Inflation rate from 1989 to 2029," *Statista Research Department*, 8 November 2021, at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/439788/inflation-rate-in-algeria/>, 20 V 2024.

<sup>53</sup> "Corruption Perceptions Index: Algeria," *Transparency International*, at <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/table/dza#>, 20 V 2021.

<sup>54</sup> A. Marwane, "Illegal Migration of Algerian Youths: A Haunting Problem," *Fikra Forum*, 14 March 2019, at <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/illegal-migration-algerian-youths-haunting-problem>, 12 X 2021.

citizens graduate from high school, and only 30% have received vocational training. Many Algerians find it difficult to find employment;<sup>55</sup>

13. Poor quality of the healthcare system;

14. The COVID-19 pandemic;

15. Worldview differences between generations;

16. Social networks that distort reality and create wrong impressions of the EU and the lives of migrants there.

The Al-Hirak people's protest, which began in February 2019, contributed to a decline in the number of illegal migrants during its initial months, reviving hope for change in the minds of Algerian youth.<sup>56</sup> Al-Hirak was an unusual phenomenon. For the first time since the 1990s Civil War, Algerians of all ages and political orientations gathered publicly to express their dissatisfaction with the existing political regime.<sup>57</sup> Algerian society, and especially the youth, had great hopes for change. However, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the collapse of the Al-Hirak movement. From 2019 to 2021, the economic crisis worsened, widespread social dissatisfaction grew and the closure of the borders contributed to a renewed increase in the illegal migration of Algerian youth to Europe. For the past two years, this phenomenon has no longer been confined to desperate young men. More often, there are women, children and even older people among Algerian *harraga*. The mass migration out of the country has been termed 'The Great Exile'. It began in 2020, and the first months of 2021 indicate that it is still occurring. According to UNHCR data, between January 2020 and February 2021, Algerian citizens were the second largest group of Mediterranean immigrants to Europe, after Tunisians, in terms of nationality. Spain is often a transit point for Algerian *harraga*, as their destination is France.

Frontex statistics show that after 2019, the number of illegal migrants from Algeria to Europe increased drastically, mainly in Spain and Italy along the Western and Central Mediterranean route (Table 1). The Eastern Mediterranean, Black Sea and West African countries are less popular destinations. The numbers on the Eastern Mediterranean route dropped significantly in 2020. Frontex data indicates that until 2017, many Algerians travelled to Europe via Turkey, where entry restrictions for Algerians were less stringent compared to other countries, and from there via the Balkan route to Europe instead of through Libya. However, as of 1 October 2019, visa regulations for Algerians aged between 18 and 35 have been tightened in Turkey, which has resulted in an increased influx of migrants to the EU by sea.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> N. Khaled, "Adolescents harragas...", pp. 699-709.

<sup>56</sup> S. Bliidi, "Algerian Political Elites Join Illegal Migration Boats to Europe," *The Arab Weekly*, 14 July 2021, at <https://the arabweekly.com/algerian-political-elites-join-illegal-migration-boats-europe>, 21 XII 2024; الأمل في غد أفضل. تراجع في أعداد الحراك بسبب الشغب. الشروق أونلاين, at <https://www.echoroukonline.com>, 21 XII 2024.

<sup>57</sup> S. Love, L. Wu, "Are We in the Same Boat?..."

<sup>58</sup> K. Zeidane, *Algérie-Turquie. Visa: voici les nouvelles conditions imposées aux Algériens*, 3 September 2019, at <https://afrique.le360.ma/autres-pays/politique/2019/09/03/27731-algerie-turquie-visa-voici-les-nouvelles-conditions-imposees-aux-algeriens-27731>, 14 XII 2021.

Table 1. Number of illegal border crossings by Algerian harraga in 2009-2021 (in thousands)

Route	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 (Aug.)
Central Mediterranean Route (sea)	555	295	327	43	161	178	343	1,240	2,020	1,216	1,039	1,465	888
Western Mediterranean Route (sea)	3,190	1,242	1,037	1,048	536	675	1,059	1,693	4,287	4,339	4,007	11,455	6,276
Eastern Mediterranean Route (sea)	63	264	122	307	102	22	1,402	1,641	878	384	43	12	0
Black Sea Route (sea)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Western African Route (sea)	3	1	0	0	0	12	1	1	8	4	0	47	0
Western Mediterranean Route (land)	464	459	735	967	900	18	134	5	6	10	7	2	0
Eastern Borders Route (land)	0	0	17	20	1	5	1	0	9	7	10	18	19
Eastern Mediterranean Route (land)	211	6,335	3,393	2,316	493	23	14	12	15	92	23	16	5
Circular Route from Albania to Greece (land)	1	86	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	12	4	0	0
Western Balkan Route (land)	0	81	526	778	1,106	40	377	548	203	37	181	232	177
Total:	4,487	8,763	6,157	5,479	3,299	973	3,331	5,140	7,443	6,101	5,314	13,247	7,365

Source: own research based on Frontex statistics

In 2019, 4,007 Algerians illegally left the country by sea, heading for Europe via the Western Mediterranean. In 2020, a record number of Algerian *harraga* reached Spain – 11,455 people.<sup>59</sup> There may be more who were not intercepted by the Spanish Civil Guard.<sup>60</sup> By August 2021, 6,276 people had entered Spain illegally. Currently, Oran and Mostaganem are the main points of illegal exit from the country. Algerians departing from there head to the coasts of Almeria, Alicante, Murcia or, more recently, the Balearic Islands. Illegal migrants also use the Central Mediterranean route to Italy.

<sup>59</sup> Z. Haddadi, "Sans-papiers: les Algériens en tête des arrivées en Espagne en 2021," *Visas & Voyages Algérie*, 6 March 2021, at <https://www.visa-algerie.com/sans-papiers-les-algeriens-en-tete-des-arrivees-en-espagne-en-2021/>, 14 XII 2021.

<sup>60</sup> M.-F. Gaïdi, "Arrivée de plus de 600 harraga algériens en Espagne," *El Watan*, 15 September 2021, at <https://www.elwatan.com/edition/actualite/arrivee-de-plus-de-600-harraga-algeriens-en-espagne-15-09-2021>, 14 XII 2021.

According to the annual report of the Italian Ministry of the Interior, 1,458 Algerians reached Italy by sea between January 1 and December 24, 2020.<sup>61</sup> According to Frontex, it was 1,465 people.<sup>62</sup> During the first eight months of 2021, 888 Algerian *harraga* reached Italy.

It can be stated, in light of the analysis carried out so far, that the combination of economic misery, social unrest and the unstable political situation is the main reason for illegal emigration from Algeria. Statistical trends support this statement. Among the main reasons for illegal emigration mentioned by young people themselves, the first six include: no future perspectives (50%); insufficient family income (73%); no freedom (73%); unemployment (76%); desire to join friends or family (76%); a lack of free time (77%).<sup>63</sup> Combining all these causes, three main dimensions of the issue can be stated: a) economic, which includes the willingness to find a job, improve the living conditions of oneself and one's family, seek new perspectives and reach new horizons; b) psycho-social, reflecting the need to improve the quality of life by demanding more free time and freedom and to be reunited with family; c) political, ensuring a sense of stability and security.<sup>64</sup> *Harraga* justify their decision to emigrate illegally because of the lack of opportunities and freedom, difficulties in finding a job, getting married and owning their own homes.

## HOW CAN HARRAGA BE STOPPED?

In order to stop this phenomenon, there are three spheres of actions required: at the state level (Algeria), at the EU level and through common Algerian-EU actions in the Mediterranean region.

Departures from Algerian or Moroccan waters to the EU are not always successful, and many attempts to illegally cross the European Union's maritime border end tragically. To counter this phenomenon, the Algerian government has taken several steps, some of which are undemocratic in nature. One such action was classifying illegal departure from the country as a crime (Criminal Code of 2009),<sup>65</sup> which is not in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that states in Article 13 as follows: *Everyone has the right to leave any country, including their own, and to return to their country.*<sup>66</sup> Currently, any Algerian who wishes to emigrate to another country without

<sup>61</sup> "Between Moving and Mourning – the Struggle Along the Routes to Spain Continues," *Alarmphone*, 30 April 2021, at <https://alarmphone.org/en/2021/04/30/between-moving-and-mourning-the-struggle-along-the-routes-to-spain-continues/>, 14 XII 2021.

<sup>62</sup> "Monitoring and Risk Analysis: Migratory Map," *Frontex*, at <https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-map/>, 14 XII 2021.

<sup>63</sup> N. Khaled, "Adolescents harragas...", p. 707.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 699-709.

<sup>65</sup> "Republique Algerienne Democratique Et Populaire Presidence De La Republique. Secrétariat Général du Gouvernement, Code Penal," at <https://www.joradp.dz/trv/fpenal.pdf>, 14 XII 2021.

<sup>66</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), United Nations 2015, art. 13, p. 28.

the required documents can be sentenced to up to six months in prison, while participation in trafficking networks is punishable by up to five years' imprisonment.<sup>67</sup>

In 2009, the Algerian authorities strengthened their border security policy and enhanced coastal surveillance measures. Special brigades were established to combat 'illegal migration'. Their main task was to 'locate and eliminate channels for illegal migration'.<sup>68</sup> In order to combat the problem of illegal migration, four security agencies were involved. The common ministerial decision defines the mode of coordination between the National Coast Guard, the National Gendarmerie, the General Directorate of National Security and the Customs Service in the field of inland coastal surveillance. Mobile coastal protection and monitoring points were established.<sup>69</sup> Despite the fact that 998 km of Algeria's coast are patrolled by a large number of military boats and helicopters, the statistical data mentioned above show that these measures have proven ineffective.

Reports from 2019-2021 note that Algerian *harraga* are a dominant group that cross the EU's sea borders illegally, while an increasing number of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa treat Algeria as a destination country and do not attempt to travel further to Europe.<sup>70</sup> According to Algerian authorities, in 2018, Algeria recorded 3,690 unsuccessful illegal migration attempts to Europe, and in 2019, there were 3,384 such attempts. It should be noted that the vast majority of migrants leaving the country illegally are Algerian citizens (around 90%). Sub-Saharan African migrants, if they wish to leave Africa illegally, prefer the route through Morocco. According to information from Frontex, in 2019, around 50% of Sub-Saharan African irregular migrants who arrived in Spain via Morocco passed through Algeria.<sup>71</sup>

Due to the intensification of the *harraga* phenomenon, the Algerian authorities are conducting operations aimed at intercepting illegal migrants. In 2020, 8,184 people were intercepted by the Coast Guard. The Algerian Coast Guard and *gendarmes* regularly break up smuggling networks in the regions of Oran and Tipaza.<sup>72</sup> The law applies to the seized Algerian *harraga*, but not consistently. If only Algerians are on

<sup>67</sup> A. Marwane, "Illegal Migration of Algerian Youths..."

<sup>68</sup> H. Labdelaoui, "*Harga* ou la forme actuelle de l'émigration irrégulière des Algériens," in M. Khachani (ed.), *CARIM Notes d'analyses et de synthèse – module démographique et économique*, no. 18, Florence 2009, p. 21.

<sup>69</sup> او سلا بلع قيمار جبالا تاطاشنلاو "تقارحلا" قيراحمل قينما قز هجا 4. تامولعملل ينأ لادبتو فكر تشم تايرود at <https://www.echoroukonline.com>, 14 XII 2021.

<sup>70</sup> Ch. Teevan, "Algeria: Reforming Migration and Asylum Systems in a Time of Crisis," *ecdpm*, November 2020, at <https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/Algeria-Reforming-Migration-Asylum-Systems-Time-Crisis-ECDPM-Country-Report-November-2020.pdf>, 12 XII 2021.

<sup>71</sup> *Document de travail conjoint des services. Partenariat renouvelé avec le voisinage méridional Plan économique et d'investissement en faveur du voisinage méridional accompagnant le document: Communication conjointe au Parlement européen, au Conseil, au Comité économique et social européen et au Comité des régions. Un partenariat renouvelé avec le voisinage méridional. Un nouveau programme pour la Méditerranée*, Publications Office of the European Union, at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/fbd1f764-6b96-11eb-aeb5-01aa75ed71a1/language-fr>, 21 I 2025.

<sup>72</sup> J.-P. Filiu, "L'impasse politique en Algérie..."

the intercepted boat, the judge often abstains from harsh sentences and only imposes fines. Even if someone has been arrested many times for illegally leaving the country, they are usually sentenced to a two-month suspended sentence. On the other hand, in the case of the capture of human traffickers and smugglers, the penalties are much stricter; such individuals may be imprisoned for up to 20 years, which is why Algerian smugglers avoid smuggling foreign migrants due to the more severe penalties.<sup>73</sup> Meanwhile, smugglers who organise illegal departures from Algeria, known as *harraga*, occasionally cooperate with Algerian security forces. This is attributed to the high level of corruption, with reports suggesting that officials are accepting bribes and allowing boats to leave in return. The phenomenon of *harraga* is increasingly tolerated by society due to the political situation within the country.<sup>74</sup> The increased protection and control of Algerian coastlines cannot stop the emigration from the country, which has been increasing as a result of the collapse of the Al-Hirak protest. The waves of popular protests by the Al-Hirak movement led in 2019 to a significant decrease in the illegal migration of Algerians to Europe, so much so that the youth – who had no prospects until then – believed they could find their place in a country free from Bouteflika's presidency.<sup>75</sup>

The General Directorate of Internal Security, in order to reduce illegal emigration in Algeria, focuses its efforts on the following activities:

- tightening control over the workshops producing wooden boats, as well as the suppliers of boat engines and fuel;
- coordination of security activities between different stakeholders (National Gendarmerie, Navy) through immediate information exchange, mobilisation of all forces and use of all means to stop illegal migration operations before they start (as travel preparations begin from land and through smugglers);
- establishment of the Central Agency for Combating Illegal Migration. Eleven specialised teams for the elimination of secret migration support networks were created within this Agency. They operate in the following provinces: Algiers, Oran, Bechar, Tlemcen, Tamanrasset, Adrar, Ghardaia, Ouargla, Constantine and Souk Ahras. The activities of the Agency are of a nationwide preventive and dissuasive character, focusing on the development of effective methods for combating migration and their practical application. Its regional teams collect information, conduct research, identify illegal migration networks and bring them to justice.<sup>76</sup>

In 2019, as the illegal migration phenomenon from Algeria took on an astonishing scale, 33 professors and researchers met in Algiers, Oran, Constantine and Ouargla to devise strategies to tackle the *harraga* phenomenon. The parties concluded that

<sup>73</sup> “Loi n° 09-01 du 29 Safar 1430 correspondant au 25 février 2009...”.

<sup>74</sup> *Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community Joint Report 2016*, at [https://data.europa.eu/euodp/data/storage/f/2017-08-03T130749/AFIC\\_2016.pdf](https://data.europa.eu/euodp/data/storage/f/2017-08-03T130749/AFIC_2016.pdf), 12 X 2021.

<sup>75</sup> J.-P. Filiu, “L’impasse politique en Algérie...”.

<sup>76</sup> (البحر اراقرة)دراسة استكشاف افيية (مدينتي عنابة والجزائر العاصمة) at <https://dspace.univ-ouargla.dz/jspui/bitstream/123456789/21143/1/busbai3-houda.pdf>, 12 X 2021.

it is very important to reduce the level of unemployment among young people and to prepare educational programmes to strengthen patriotism. One of the most significant demands made by the researchers was to encourage Algerian youth to engage in politics by granting them a 30% 'quota' to participate in the electoral lists, as is the case with women.<sup>77</sup>

The increased influx of migrants has compelled EU countries to reconsider their immigration policies and take effective measures to address the crisis. One such action is strengthening the protection and security of the European Union's external borders.<sup>78</sup> Combating the smuggling of people by reviving or strengthening cooperation with the countries of origin and transit of migrants has become the main activity of the EU to stop illegal migration. The borders between North Africa and the EU have become difficult to cross due to the implementation of a restrictive migration policy.<sup>79</sup>

Faced with increasing labour shortages, the EU Council and Parliament adopted the directive on seasonal workers in 2014.<sup>80</sup> The directive sets out the conditions under which non-EU citizens can enter and stay in the EU as seasonal workers. The regulations harmonise and simplify the admission rules for seasonal workers in the Member States, protect seasonal workers from outside the EU against exploitation and poor working conditions and address the issue of non-EU seasonal workers residing in the EU without regular status.<sup>81</sup>

In 2014, the EU Council and Parliament adopted a directive on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in the framework of an intra-corporate transfer.<sup>82</sup> Thanks to these rules, non-EU citizens can apply to stay in the EU as managers, specialists or trainee workers in an intra-corporate transfer.<sup>83</sup>

Leaders from the EU countries and Africa agreed to support the mobility of students, researchers and entrepreneurs between the two continents at the Valletta

<sup>77</sup> الكاديميون وباحثون يناقشون الظاهرة ويقترحون هذه حلول مواجهة ظاهرة "الحرقاء" وقوارب الموت at <https://www.echoroukonline.com>, 12 XII 2021.

<sup>78</sup> J. Szymańska, "Strategia Unii Europejskiej wobec kryzysu migracyjnego: priorytety, bariery, efekty," *Studia BAS*, vol. 3, no. 51 (2017), pp. 159-186.

<sup>79</sup> F. Souiah, M. Salzbrunn, S. Mastrangelo, "Hope and Disillusion: The Representations of Europe in Algerian and Tunisian Cultural Productions about Undocumented Migration," in M.H. Davis, T. Serres (eds), *North Africa and the Making of Europe: Governance, Institutions and Culture*, Bloomsbury 2018, pp. 197-228.

<sup>80</sup> *Directive 2014/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on the Conditions of Entry and Stay of Third-country Nationals for the Purpose of Employment as Seasonal Workers*, Official Journal of the European Union, L 94/375, 28 III 2014.

<sup>81</sup> "How the EU Manages Migration Flows," *Council of the EU*, at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/policies/eu-migration-policy/managing-migration-flows/>, 30 X 2021.

<sup>82</sup> *Directive 2014/66/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the Conditions of Entry and Residence of Third-country Nationals in the Framework of an Intracorporate Transfer*, Official Journal of the European Union, L 157/1, 27.05.2014.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

Summit in November 2015.<sup>84</sup> They agreed to double the number of scholarships for students and researchers under the Erasmus+ programme in 2016.<sup>85</sup> In the same year, the EU Council and Parliament adopted a directive laying down the conditions of entry and residence for third-country nationals who intend to carry out research, study, participate in training, volunteering, youth exchange programmes, educational projects or work as an *au pair*.<sup>86</sup> In addition, the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa was launched. Its aim is to stimulate development and create jobs, ensure better access to basic social services and eliminate the root causes of migration.<sup>87</sup>

In 2015, the European Commission issued a document entitled “The European Agenda on Migration”.<sup>88</sup> It stated that no Member State would be able to deal effectively with migration on its own and, in order to cope with this growing phenomenon, a consistent and unambiguous common policy in the field of migration is essential.<sup>89</sup> All units should be involved in this process: Member States, EU institutions, international organisations, civil society, local authorities and third countries. This requires an optimal combination of internal and external policies.<sup>90</sup>

In order to counteract illegal migration from Algeria, within the framework of the available instruments, the European Union should take the following actions:

- eliminate the root causes of illegal and forced migration and the factors that force people to leave their place of residence;
- step up efforts in order to promote peace and security;
- take effective measures to reduce poverty and combat climate change;<sup>91</sup>
- combat smugglers and trafficker networks together with Algeria;<sup>92</sup>
- support Algeria in the framework of EU policies and the policies of the United Nations for sustainable development;

<sup>84</sup> Valletta Summit, 11-12 November 2015, Action Plan, at [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21839/action\\_plan\\_en.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21839/action_plan_en.pdf), 12 X 2021.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> *Directive (EU) 2016/801 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2016 on the Conditions of Entry and Residence of Third-country Nationals for the Purposes of Research, Studies Training, Volunteering, Youth Exchange Programs or Educational Projects and au Pairing*, Official Journal of the European Union, L 132/21, 21.5.2016.

<sup>87</sup> *European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa: Flexible but Lacking Focus 2018*, at <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eca/special-reports/eutf-for-africa-32-2018/pl/>, 21 XII 2024.

<sup>88</sup> *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Delivery of the European Agenda on Migration*, Brussels, 27.9.2017, COM(2017) 558 final.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee Of The Regions: The European Green Deal*, Brussels, 11.12.2019, COM(2019) 640 final.

<sup>92</sup> *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions the EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings 2012–2016*, Brussels, 19.6.2012, COM(2012) 286 final.

- improve the EU system for the return of irregular migrants and strengthen cooperation on the return, readmission and reintegration of migrants;<sup>93</sup>
- introduce changes to the management of legal migration, visa policy and mobility;
- use modern information technologies to manage the EU's external borders.<sup>94</sup>

The EU-Algeria migration and mobility dialogue continued through meetings that took place in February 2018 in Brussels and in February the following year in Algiers. Algeria's Minister of the Interior expressed his willingness to cooperate in the fight against migrant smuggling during a meeting on July 13, 2020 with his counterparts from France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Malta, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, as well as with European commissioners responsible for home affairs, neighbourhood policy and EU enlargement. Algeria has joined the 'Global Compact' on refugees, but not the 'Global Compact' on migration.<sup>95</sup>

In 2020, a series of visits by foreign or internal ministers to the region, including Algeria, took place due to the difficult situation at the southern borders of the European Union and the intensity of migration from the Maghreb countries. The aim of the high-ranking officials from Italy, Spain and France was to develop common mechanisms to combat illegal migration and the readmission of Algerian nationals.

Algeria is eligible for the EU's Regional Development and Protection Programme for North Africa (RDPP). Two programmes by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) have been implemented so far to support migrants' voluntary return to Algeria. Algeria is also eligible for the regional EUROMED Migration IV programme, which was replaced by EUROMED Migration V (2020-2023) from 15 September 2020.<sup>96</sup> Although Algeria participates in the meetings of this programme, no action specifically aimed at Algeria has been taken so far. Under this programme, a EUR 10 million initiative called 'COVID-19 Rapid Emergency Response' was launched, targeting vulnerable North African societies and treating Algeria as a priority country with an indicative budget of EUR 3.6 million.

The cornerstone of the EU's removal policy is called the 'Return Directive'. It contains clear, transparent and fair rules for the return of illegal third-country citizens. It also stresses the need to conclude readmission agreements with third countries. These agreements are essential for the implementation of the EU's removal policy as they set out the rules for returning people illegally residing in the EU to their country of origin. The EU negotiates and concludes readmission agreements with third countries, with the EU Council authorising the Commission to negotiate such agreements. So far, the EU has concluded eighteen readmission agreements. In addition, the EU has signed readmission arrangements with certain third countries for the same purpose. In

<sup>93</sup> *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Enhancing Cooperation on Return and Readmission as Part of a Fair, Effective and Comprehensive EU Migration Policy*, Brussels, 10.2.2021, COM(2021) 56 final.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> *Document De Travail Conjoint Des Services...*

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

September 2018, the Commission proposed a reform of the EU's common readmission rules, and thanks to the proposed changes, these provisions are set to become more effective. On June 7, 2019, the Council agreed its position on these changes.<sup>97</sup> The new rules are expected to speed up return procedures, help prevent absconding/secondary movements and increase return rates. To achieve these goals, the following solutions are envisaged:

- clearer and faster procedures for issuing return decisions and lodging appeals, including the obligation to issue a return decision at the same time as issuing (or immediately after) the decision ending legal stay;
- obliging people subject to the return procedure to cooperate and the possibility of taking action in the event of non-cooperation;
- more effective rules on voluntary returns, including the obligation for Member States to set up programmes to support such returns;
- a common, non-exhaustive list of objective criteria to determine whether there is a risk of absconding;
- the possibility of placing a third-country citizen in a detention facility if the person constitutes a threat to public order, public security or national security;
- as a last resort and subject to a number of guarantees, the possibility of sending the third-country citizen to a safe third country.<sup>98</sup>

On October 7, 2021, the Council of the European Union adopted a directive establishing the conditions of entry and residence for highly qualified third-country citizens who wish to live and work in the EU, particularly in those EU sectors facing a shortage of highly skilled workers (Blue Card Directive).<sup>99</sup> The new rules will further harmonise the conditions of entry and stay for highly qualified workers. In particular, the directive establishes more inclusive employment criteria, facilitates intra-EU mobility and family reunification, simplifies procedures for state-approved employers, guarantees broad access to the labour market and also covers non-EU family members, EU citizens and beneficiaries of international protection.<sup>100</sup>

The process of counteracting illegal immigration will not be effective without a comprehensive vision, an in-depth analysis of its causes and the possibility of confronting

<sup>97</sup> *Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on Common Standards and Procedures in Member States for Returning Illegally Staying Third-country Nationals (Recast): A Contribution from the European Commission to the Leaders' Meeting in Salzburg on 19-20 September 2018*, Brussels, 12.9.2018, COM(2018) 634 final, 2018/0329(COD).

<sup>98</sup> „Migration Policy: Council Agrees Partial Negotiating Position on Return Directive,” *Council of the EU*, 7 June 2019, at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/press/press-releases/2019/06/07/migration-policy-council-agrees-partial-negotiating-position-on-return-directive/>, 11 II 2022.

<sup>99</sup> *Directive (EU) 2021/1883 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2021 on the Conditions of Entry and Residence of Third-country Nationals for the Purpose of Highly Qualified Employment, and Repealing Council Directive 2009/50/EC*, Official Journal of the European Union, L 382/1, 28.10.2021.

<sup>100</sup> “Legal Migration: Council Adopts Blue Card Directive to Attract Highly-qualified Workers,” *Council of the EU*, 7 October 2021, at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/press/press-releases/2021/10/07/legal-migration-council-adopts-blue-card-directive-to-attract-highly-qualified-workers/>, 12 II 2022.

it. Therefore, it is necessary to coordinate with all countries interested in this phenomenon, as it is considered a political problem for many developed countries – especially those in Europe.

## CONCLUSIONS

The reasons for illegal migration to the European Union are not only the factors pushing people out of their own countries, but also the unsuccessful and recently very strict EU migration policy. This is especially noticeable concerning Algerian *harraga*. According to the sociologist Karim Khaled, it is impossible to study this phenomenon without analysing the nature of the political system and all the frustration it generates at the heart of society.<sup>101</sup> Each decision on illegal migration is a separate story. *Harraga*, as well as other types of migration, is a complex phenomenon. As can be seen from the above analysis, the main causes of illegal migration from Algeria are socio-economic factors, stemming from political crises, transitions of power, corruption, a lack of reforms, deepening social and ideological differences, restrictions on civil liberties, high unemployment among young people, a lack of opportunities for individual self-fulfilment, cultural activity and even family pressure (such as escape from forced marriage, acceptance of an unwanted extra-marital pregnancy, etc.) or social and religious pressures.<sup>102</sup> The phenomenon of *harraga* flourishes due to the gap between religious and traditional life and everyday life, between young people seeking alternative life plans and a conservative society. The profile of the Algerian *harraga* has changed drastically, especially since 2019 – previously, there were mostly young men, but now there are also women and children, as well as older people.

According to Mustafa Bouchachi, Chairman of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (Laddh), *if hundreds of young people prefer to die at sea rather than to live in Algeria, it is not escaping hunger or unemployment, but escaping from a lack of democracy and freedom. A young man who has been told that he could grow up to be president will not risk dying at sea.*<sup>103</sup>

Many young people see Europe as a 'promised land' that will allow them to make their dreams come true.<sup>104</sup> This is undoubtedly influenced by social networks. Many young people imagine Europe as an 'El Dorado' for which *harraga* are willing to risk their lives on death boats to get there, hoping to find a better job, ensure safety and improve their quality of life. The degree of dissatisfaction with the living conditions in their own country is so high among young Algerians that many of them think it is

<sup>101</sup> F. Souiah, "The 'Border Burners'..."

<sup>102</sup> S. Chena, "Burning the Borders so you don't Burn your Life: Irregular Migration in Algeria," *Assafir Al-Arabi*, 1 April 2020, at <https://assafirarabi.com/en/30135/>, 21 X 2021.

<sup>103</sup> F. Souiah, "The 'Border Burners'..."

<sup>104</sup> غير الشرعيين الجزائريين (الحرقة) دراسة استكشافية (مدينتي عنابة والجزائر العاصمة) بتقدير الذات والمرونة النفسية لدى المهاجرين، at <https://dspace.univ-ouargla.dz/jspui/bitstream/123456789/21143/1/busbai3-houda.pdf>, 12 XII 2021.

better *to be eaten by fish than by worms*.<sup>105</sup> However, the European reality is different, especially after the transformation that European immigration policy underwent following the attacks on 11 September 2001. Secret migration networks operating in Algeria earn thousands of dollars from this activity. The price that each migrant pays is no less than two thousand dollars. Algerian citizens accuse the government of not limiting the growing outflow of migrants from Algeria, blaming it for *failure in the sphere of social, economic and political policy, the spread of corruption with a monopoly of wealth in the hands of a group that does not exceed 50 per cent of the population, while the rate of youth unemployment exceeds 50 per cent*.<sup>106</sup> There is no doubt that in order to combat this phenomenon, it is necessary to introduce strict rules against smugglers who collectively earn nearly USD 7 billion a year. For those smugglers who charge between USD 1,000 and USD 10,000 per person, trafficking human beings is just as profitable as trafficking drugs.<sup>107</sup> Due to the high degree of corruption, the internal policy of the Algerian authorities to combat the *harraga* phenomenon is ineffective. Both fines and suspended sentences do not deter Algerians; on the contrary, some of them attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea repeatedly. Algerian *harraga* are rarely sentenced to severe prison terms, except in some cases of recidivism, although smuggling networks are sometimes sentenced to many years in prison.

To discourage those who 'burn borders', the Algerian authorities have sometimes relied on religious institutions, such as the Islamic High Council, to condemn illegal border crossing. These institutions have issued fatwas comparing illegal migration to suicide.<sup>108</sup> The government is trying to use mosques across Algeria to raise awareness among the youth of the dangers of illegal migration and encourages these institutions to observe young people during Friday sermons lest they fall into this sinful temptation.<sup>109</sup>

Algeria initially refused to act as 'Europe's policeman', following in Turkey's footsteps. Algeria uses the problem of illegal migration as a bargaining chip in its relations with the EU. The reason for this is ineffective policies on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea.

Inappropriate EU migration policy, the introduction of the visa regime and visa restrictions are the causes of illegal migration. The European Union should review the procedure for issuing work visas that are important to Algerians and should increase the number of grants and educational programmes available. IOM is working on various projects, which include strengthening health services to enable them to work with victims of human trafficking, pilot projects on border management, projects focusing on social cohesion and projects concentrating on the reintegration of young Algerians

<sup>105</sup> S. Chena, "Burning the Borders...".

<sup>106</sup> (البحرانية) دراسة استقصائية (مدينتي عنابة والجزائر العاصمة) at <https://dspace.univ-ouargla.dz/jspui/bitstream/123456789/21143/1/busbai3-houda.pdf>, 12 X 2021.

<sup>107</sup> A. Marwane, "Illegal Migration of Algerian Youths...".

<sup>108</sup> S. Chena, "Burning the Borders...".

<sup>109</sup> A. Marwane, "Illegal Migration of Algerian Youths...".

returning from Europe.<sup>110</sup> The political will of both Algeria and the European Union is necessary to improve the situation and reduce illegal migration.

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<sup>110</sup> Ch. Teevan, "Algeria: Reforming Migration and Asylum Systems..."

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