

Slavery Report: Algeria

Latest Numbers

Like Libya, Algeria in North Africa serves as an escape route for Africans fleeing war, famine, and, especially in Nigeria, Muslim violence. According to human rights reports, tens of thousands of these non-Muslim refugees are captured and enslaved by Algerians. Today, according to the Global Slavery Index, around [106,000](#) black Africans are estimated to be enslaved.

History and Background

Black slavery in Algeria dates back to the Arab conquest (c. 700 C.E.). Western travelers' in-depth [accounts](#) date back to the seventeenth century. Part of the French empire for generations, colonial authorities outlawed chattel slavery in 1848, but, as in Mauritania in the early twentieth century, legislation was worthless in a desert territory inhabited largely by nomads.

Even before the 2009 Boko Haram insurrection in Nigeria (see Nigeria [report](#)), in which Christians are murdered and their daughters kidnapped *en masse* in slave raids, blacks migrated northward seeking better chances for employment. Many of these faced racist oppression, including enslavement as domestics and sex-trafficking.

Experiences of the Slaves

A 2005 U.S. State Department human rights [report](#) chronicles that

According to media reports and a local NGO, forced prostitution and domestic servitude of illegal immigrants from West Africa occurred as immigrants transited through the country seeking economic opportunity in Europe. Official statistical estimates of the severity of trafficking do not exist. No government assistance programs existed for victims, nor did any information campaigns about trafficking. However, several NGOs promoted anti-trafficking campaigns.

Non-Muslim “outcasts,” women, and unprotected children are similarly abused. During the 1990s, human rights organizations [documented](#) swaths of rapes and instances of sex slavery committed against (non-black) Algerian women who refused to cover themselves, were caught in the crossfire during political riots, or seeking to be trafficked to Europe.

According to a 2005 U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child [report](#),

...[P]rostitution is increasing and ...not only girls, but also boys who work as vendors, couriers or domestic servants, are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. The Committee also notes with concern reports of trafficking in children and that Algeria is becoming a place of transit for trafficking between

Africa and Western Europe. It deeply regrets the absence of a specific legal framework protecting children from trafficking and the insufficient measures to prevent and eliminate this phenomenon. The lack of statistical data on trafficking and the absence of adequate recovery and reintegration services for child victims are cause for serious concern.

More recently, Algeria has become a transit country for African men and women who are trafficked from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe for sexual exploitation and forced labor (slavery). The U.S. State Department's 2009 "Trafficking in Persons" [report](#) details that

These men and women enter Algeria, voluntarily but illegally, often with the assistance of smugglers. Some of them become victims of trafficking; men are forced into unskilled labor and women into prostitution to pay smuggling debts. ... Among an estimated population of 5,000 to 9,000 illegal migrants, some 4,000 to 6,000 are believed to be victims of trafficking, of whom approximately 1,000 are women.

Muslim racism against black, non-Muslim foreigners is rife in the country and, while not applying exclusively to slavery, cruelly marginalizes destitute black African migrants desperate for charity. Algerian author Kamel Daoud [writes](#) in *The New York Times*,

For a few years now, families of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa have been gathering at major street crossings in the large cities of northern Algeria. They come to beg for alms, wearing grotesque outfits: oversize veils for the women, even little girls; cotton djellabas for the men; prayer beads ostentatiously displayed. They say "Allah" too readily and misquote verses from the Koran.

Many black migrants, including those who are not Muslim, are deploying symbols of Islam to appeal to Algerians' sense of charity. Why? Because poverty helps decode culture better than reflection does, and migrants, lacking shelter and food, are quick to realize that in Algeria there often is no empathy between human beings, only empathy between people of the same religion.

Another example: In October [2015] a Cameroonian woman was gang-raped in Oran by a group of men that threatened her with a dog. When she tried to file a complaint with the authorities, she was rejected on two main grounds: She had no papers, and she wasn't a Muslim.

Developments

Precious little news coverage exists of Algerian slavery. Still, a May 30, 2018 Reuters [report](#) — the most recent to date, and for several years — details that the U.N. Migration Agency believes that the enslavement and torture of largely Nigerian migrants in Algeria "could rival [that in] Libya." Libya is today the best-known instance in Africa of an [active](#) slave trade (see Libya [report](#)).