

## VISA POLICY: DISCRIMINATION AND INJUSTICE

Between 2021 and March 2022, 23% of visa applications by citizens of Maghreb countries would have been refused as a retaliatory measure against local governments' refusal to repatriate their nationals in "irregular situations." Thus, under the pretext of combating undocumented migration, the Minister of the Interior\* and the French authorities do not even care about the discriminatory character of this decision, which is nothing less than a collective punishment that indiscriminately targets **all** Algerians, Moroccans or Tunisians.

As a result, Maghreb citizens, who wish to travel for tourism, study, business, health or family reasons, are merely excluded.

These measures, which in fact attack human exchanges between peoples, produce dramatic effects, pushing thousands of young and not- so- young people (men, women and even children) to cross the Mediterranean Sea, thereby risking their lives.

Such measures are an unacceptable and dishonourable form of blackmail. In fact, they infringe on an essential human right: the free movement of people, including those with family ties in France and in the Maghreb countries. Besides, this blackmailing is morally reprehensible because it is based on a discriminatory decision that violates the principle of equality in citizenship. Thus, French women and men from Maghreb countries who wish to bring their relatives to France for visits, business or for health reasons are also deprived of a fundamental right.

Claiming to fight against illegal immigration by restricting so drastically the number of visas to citizens is all the more inadmissible that this misguided political decision would solve nothing except cozying up to the most extremist and xenophobic claims in France and to those partisans of a "fortress Europe".

It is even more outrageous when we know – and to take only the case of Tunisia - that more than 39,000 engineers and 3,300 doctors have left the country since 2015 and have been welcomed with open arms in Europe. This massive flow of (technical, medical and paramedical) skills seriously affects all sectors of activity, mainly the public health sector, and aggravates the deficiencies and inequalities in the poor regions of all Maghreb countries.

Today, applying for a visa from the French or European (Schengen area) consular authorities in one of the Maghreb countries is a real obstacle course and an additional humiliation for the vast majority of those who apply. A part from the waiting time that could last several weeks, or even two months or more, to obtain an appointment, refusals are often the rule. Not to mention that the procedures are extremely costly and, obviously, with no refund for fees in case of refusal.

This is why we, Maghreb associations from both shores of the Mediterranean Sea and European and French citizens' associations cannot accept such a diktat, neither do we accept such a blatant injustice.

We call on the French and all European authorities to reconsider these discriminatory measures - we, migrant and solidarity associations, who have always combat the introduction of the visa system, and who are now witnessing an additional regression that introduces unbearable discriminatory measures.

We, also, call on all democratic forces and civil society in France, in Europe as well as in the Maghreb countries, to mobilize in order to denounce such a discriminatory policy.