

7 Questions Explained: Why Is France Moving to Revoke Algerians' Migration Privileges?



Amid mounting domestic pressures over rising immigration, intensifying demands from the far right, and looming electoral calculations, France is moving to revisit the historic 1968 Franco-Algerian migration agreement.

The initiatives, whose precise details are expected to be unveiled in the “coming weeks,” go beyond mere technical amendments. They aim to fundamentally overturn the philosophy underpinning the agreement. The following report answers the key questions surrounding this contentious file.

What Is the 1968 Agreement?

The accord was signed on December 27, 1968, to regulate the movement of people and labor between Paris and Algiers following Algeria's independence. It was designed to secure manpower for France's recovering economy while granting Algerians a facilitated pathway to residency.

The agreement stipulates the following:

Algerian workers are granted a five-year renewable “residence certificate,” provided they secure employment within nine months.

Workers or residents who have spent three years in France may obtain a ten-year residence certificate.

An Algerian national may receive a ten-year residence certificate after just one year of marriage to a French citizen.

It provides broad freedom of movement without the need for a long-stay visa.

It facilitates family reunification after one year of residence.

It simplifies the process of opening a business without requiring proof of economic viability.

The agreement constitutes a “special pathway” outside the framework of French immigration law, allowing Algerians to obtain residence permits under more lenient conditions than those applied to other nationalities.

How Has the Agreement Evolved Over the Years?

The accord has undergone several amendments:

In 1985, it introduced provisions closer to general immigration rules, limiting residence permits to either one year or ten years, while preserving the freedom to establish businesses and move freely.

In 1986, a visa regime was introduced for the first time, curtailing the previous “freedom of movement” and making travel subject to visa policy.

The 1994 amendment imposed additional conditions, such as proof of housing and financial resources, as well as a return ticket for family visits. It also revoked the clause allowing Algerians to remain outside France for more than three years without losing residency status.

The final amendment in 2001 incorporated broader legal provisions more favorable to foreigners in general, while effectively freezing the Algerians’ special status.

These revisions gradually eroded the agreement’s original advantages. Today, Algerians are subject in many respects to bureaucratic requirements similar to those imposed on other nationalities.

Nevertheless, they still retain the right to obtain a ten-year residence certificate after one year of marriage and to establish a commercial enterprise without a mandatory minimum capital requirement.

What Is France’s New Direction?

February 2026 marked a decisive turning point in official French rhetoric toward

the agreement, following years of hesitation and attempts at “quiet diplomacy.”

In a series of statements:

Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu said that President Emmanuel Macron had decided to launch several initiatives in the coming weeks to achieve tangible results regarding the accord.

The French prime minister described the agreement as “belonging to another era” and no longer aligned with France’s interests, calling for urgent action.

Interior Minister Laurent Nuñez argued that the current text grants greater advantages to family migration while offering fewer incentives for economic migration, adding, “We want to restore balance.”

The new direction signals a shift away from “family migration” toward selective, economically driven migration. The prime minister also stressed the need to fully restore the principle of reciprocity, so that Algeria would offer French citizens comparable facilitation. He announced that the Interior and Foreign Ministries would be tasked with initiating talks with Algiers.

The Stimson Center notes that proposals under discussion include shortening the duration of long-term residence permits, tying them to stricter salary and qualification criteria, tightening family reunification rules, and replacing them with economic migration programs similar to “talent passport” schemes applied to other nationalities.

This would mean that companies seeking to hire Algerians would need to rely on alternative visa categories, such as the “Talent Passport” for qualified employees.

How Would the Changes Affect Algerians?

Algerians constitute the largest foreign community in France. According to the National Institute of Demographic Studies (INED), 866,600 Algerian migrants resided in France in 2021, a figure that rose to 891,700 in 2023.

In 2025, the number of undocumented Algerian migrants detected increased by 51.5 percent compared to 2024, surpassing 51,000 cases.

A Stimson report indicates that the agreement contributed to the consolidation of a “large and enduring Algerian community.” Beyond first-generation residents, hundreds of thousands of their descendants hold French citizenship and live between two cultures.

In the labor market, many Algerians work in construction, services, and transportation, while others hold university degrees and are active in advanced professional sectors. Remittances from the diaspora are also significant,

accounting for roughly 0.7 percent of Algeria's GDP.

Experts therefore warn that any revocation of privileges would have “immediate and tangible” consequences. According to the analysis, ten-year residence certificates would be replaced with short-term permits subject to frequent renewals, while family reunification would face more complex administrative hurdles.

Access to certain residence-linked social benefits could also be narrowed, placing many residents in a state of uncertainty. The report estimates that roughly 900,000 people could face unclear legal status, with some required to transition to other immigration regimes or leave the country.

Why Is France Seeking to Amend the Agreement?

The move cannot be separated from France's electoral calendar. With municipal elections scheduled between March 15 and 22, 2026, the presidential alliance finds itself under pressure.

Polling suggests that “security and immigration” top the concerns of between 50 and 76 percent of French voters a proportion that rises sharply among right-wing and far-right constituencies.

As the National Rally and traditional conservatives have made the “abolition of the 1968 agreement” a centerpiece of their campaigns, Macron appears intent on undercutting his rivals by adopting a strategy of “strict revision” rather than unilateral cancellation positioning himself as a pragmatic leader capable of defending France's borders.

Domestic political pressure has intensified in recent months. In February 2025, the Senate adopted a report recommending renegotiation of the agreement and a “rebalancing” of the special residency regime for Algerians.

On October 30, 2025, the National Assembly passed a non-binding resolution—by a single vote calling for the agreement's termination. The vote was led by the far-right National Rally, with support from segments of the center-right.

What Is Algeria's Position?

Algeria has responded cautiously. The Algerian Foreign Ministry warned against “any tampering” with the agreement, arguing that any infringement would be met with reciprocal measures affecting other accords.

Notably, however, the French interior minister stated that Macron had announced that Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune was “open to renegotiation.”

Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf described the French National Assembly's recent resolution as a domestic matter that does not concern Algeria unless formally communicated, stressing that any change would require negotiations between the two governments.

For Algiers, the agreement though diminished in privileges remains a long-term legal framework grounded in sovereign equality, safeguarding the rights of a large community and ensuring the flow of remittances.

The accord also carries powerful historical symbolism tied to the end of colonial rule. Algeria fears that revisiting it could reopen unresolved memory disputes and affect cooperation in security, energy, and irregular migration.

Why Have Previous Attempts Failed?

Despite repeated criticism, the agreement has not been abolished over the past five decades for several reasons:

1. The Memory Dividend and Historical Legitimacy

For Algeria, the 1968 agreement is not merely a legal text but a “war dividend” and an extension of the 1962 Evian Accords, which granted broad freedom of movement to Algerians.

Abandoning it would, in Algeria's political doctrine, amount to a surrender of sovereignty to the former colonial power. This symbolic weight has led Algerian negotiators to resist any substantive dilution of the accord.

2. Gas and Security Leverage

During the global energy crisis (2022–2024), Algeria skillfully leveraged its gas exports to bolster its position. Although France's dependence on Algerian gas is lower than Italy's, Paris could ill afford an energy rupture.

Moreover, security and intelligence cooperation in the Sahel has acted as a de facto veto. French security agencies have consistently opposed political escalation that could jeopardize vital coordination channels.

3. The Legal and Migration Trap

Some voices on the French right have called for unilateral cancellation. Legal experts, however, have long warned that such a move could revert relations to the 1962 Evian framework—granting even broader freedom of movement or generate sweeping legal chaos. Current residents hold “acquired rights” that cannot be retroactively stripped, rendering cancellation of limited immediate effect.

Successive governments have also feared that scrapping the agreement could trigger domestic social tensions or uncontrolled reverse migration flows.

France's current push to amend or potentially end the 1968 agreement is driven primarily by domestic political pressures, notably the rise of right-wing rhetoric and the approach of key elections.

Yet the accord remains embedded in a complex historical relationship. Previous amendments have already curtailed many of its privileges, and it cannot be easily annulled without mutual consent or without incurring significant legal and diplomatic risks.

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