

## Policy responses to the problems of youth in Algeria

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### Executive Summary

The Algerian youth presents many numerous strengths: more and more educated, benefit from good indicators regarding health and constitute an available work force for the national economy. These characteristics allow Algeria to benefit from the demographic dividend of its youth if the government sets up effective development policies. Youth is doubtless an opportunity of progress for the country. But the reality shows that the unemployment is very wide-spread among the young people, and more particularly to the most educated. This situation reflects a need for empowerment but also for hope to young people, graduates or not, in terms of jobs and living conditions with dignity.

The weakness of the higher education's attractiveness and perceived chances of finding work after the studies seem to explain much of the low enthusiasm for the future. The university degree is no more a key to a job. This situation is tangible in reality for more than two decades. There is however a significant number of young people who are unemployed for a long long-term. It provokes among them a great disappointment and a strong frustration.

This concern leads young people to plan the migratory project as a last resort. The migration project (including in illegal way) is considered when employment opportunities and perspectives of a decent life are

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not possible, especially in terms of work and housing. It's therefore important to emphasize that young people prefer to get a job in the public service.

**Key words:** Youth, Problems, Policy, Algeria.

### ملخص

#### الحلول السياسية لمشاكل الشباب في الجزائر

يتميز الشباب الجزائري بعدة ميزات: مستوى تعليمي مرتفع، مؤشرات ايجابية فيما يخص الصحة وتحسن مستوى التشغيل في العشر سنوات الماضية. إن هذه الخصائص تسمح للجزائر بالاستفادة من العائد الديموغرافي الذي ينجم عن الزيادة في القوة العاملة إذا ما اتخذت الحكومة سياسات ناجعة فيما يخص التنمية. لا شك أن الشباب يعتبر فرصة لتقدم البلاد، إلا أن الواقع يبين أن البطالة لا تزال منتشرة لدى الشباب خاصة لدى الحاملين لشهادات التعليم العالي. تعكس هذه الوضعية حاجة الشباب للاستقلالية والتطلع للمستقبل فيما يتعلق بالشغل وظروف العيش بكرامة.

إن التمثلات التي نلمسها عند الشباب في الواقع غالبا ما تكون سلبية تنتج لديهم أملا ضعيفا في تحقيق الحياة التي يطمحون إليها. إن الشهادة الجامعية لم تعد تضمن النجاح الاجتماعي منذ فترة طويلة. هذا يسبب عندهم إحباطا كبيرا وتشاؤما قويا خاصة لدى الشباب الذين عرفوا بطالة طويلة المدى. هذه الوضعية تؤدي بهم الى خيار الهجرة كآخر حل لتحسين أوضاعهم الاجتماعية والاقتصادية. إن مشروع الهجرة، بما فيها الهجرة غير الشرعية، يصبح هدفا عندما تنعدم فرص العمل والسكن وتتقلص آفاق الحياة الكريمة. إن هذه الوضعية تمس جزءا كبيرا من الشباب الجزائري الذي يبدي رغبات كبيرة تنتظر تلبية. هذا المقال يحاول إظهار الأجوبة السياسية التي تقدمها الحكومة لحل مشاكل الشباب.

#### الكلمات الدالة

الشباب؛ المشاكل؛ السياسة؛ الجزائر.

## **Résumé**

### **Les réponses politiques aux problèmes des jeunes en Algérie**

La jeunesse algérienne présente de nombreux atouts : de plus en plus éduquée, bénéficie de bons indicateurs en matière de santé et constitue une force de travail disponible pour l'économie nationale. Ces caractéristiques permettent à l'Algérie de profiter du dividende démographique de sa jeunesse si le gouvernement met en place des politiques de développement efficaces. La jeunesse est sans doute une opportunité pour le progrès du pays. Mais la réalité montre que le chômage est très répandu parmi les jeunes et plus particulièrement au sein des diplômés de l'enseignement supérieur. Cette situation traduit un besoin d'autonomisation mais aussi d'espoir pour les jeunes, diplômés ou non, en termes d'emplois et de conditions de vie dans la dignité.

Les perceptions largement négatives que l'on observe sur le terrain engendrent chez eux un faible enthousiasme pour l'avenir. Le diplôme universitaire n'est plus la clé de la réussite sociale, et cette situation est tangible dans la réalité depuis plusieurs décennies. Cela provoque chez eux une grande déception et une forte frustration, surtout parmi les jeunes chômeurs de longue durée. Cette préoccupation amène les jeunes à planifier le projet de migration en dernier recours. Le projet de migratoire (y compris de manière illégale) est envisagé lorsque les opportunités d'emploi et les perspectives d'une vie décente ne sont pas possibles, notamment en termes de travail et de logement. Ces traits concernent une partie importante de la jeunesse algérienne qui exprime de grandes attentes pour la prise en charge de leurs besoins. Ce papier tente de mettre en évidence l'action politique en direction des jeunes en Algérie.

### **Mots-clés**

Jeunesse ; problèmes ; politique ; Algérie.

## 1. Introduction

During the last years, the political events within the course of the "Arab Spring" have profoundly upset the MENA region at the political, socioeconomic and even cultural levels. One of the main consequences of this historic period is the emergence of youth as a force of change. This youth is perceived sometimes as a threat by the political powers, sometimes as a wealth and an opportunity for the development. Both perceptions are eminently political, as far as development as a target is mainly considered to be an issue of state intervention. Yet, in developing countries, the cooperation at the international level has been increasing in significance in a way to contribute to the development and more particularly for the integration of youth in the public policies, not only as a beneficiary of these policies, but also as full actors of the country's development.

This analysis is obviously valid for Algeria. The country is confronted, since many decades, to big challenges of development; yet still disposes of numerous potentialities: the demographic weight of youth is very promising (according to *Office national des statistiques-ONS-*), 26% of the Algerian population is aged 15 to 29 years); the country is rich qualitatively in terms of human resources because of several hundred thousand of young graduates every year from about a hundred of university and high schools (where the number of girls exceeds that of the boys); and, the country has considerable infrastructure in the field of education, health services and facilities, transport networks etc., as well as great natural resources.

The problem is that in spite of these potentials, the needs of young people are not satisfied. It leads us to wonder about the efficiency of government policies targeting young people. Considering the social conditions and macroeconomic indicators, which are indeed very favorable to a steady socioeconomic growth, it is striking to notice the difficulties of the government to meet youth's expectations. Apparently, Algeria hardly needs to benefit from a high-level expertise through a solid cooperation with the international partners.

Up to date, the impact of the international cooperation between Algeria and its partners is not tangible. This is due, essentially, to the fact that youth is not a great priority for the Algerian government and for its international partners.

## **2. Problem definition: Situation and problems of young people in Algeria**

### *Situation of young people*

On the demographic plan, Algerian young people from 15 to 29 years old represent the quarter of the global population in the country. This category is also more and more educated, 99% of them were schooled or are schooled. A very large number of them have a high academic level, 41% of boys and 59% of girls are in universities and in higher education institutions. The main concern of the young people is the employment, because more than 32% of them are unemployed (SAHWA Survey, 2015). This rate is, according to government sources, about 11,2% for the whole population and 29,9% among youth aged 16-24 (Office national des Statistiques, 2015). This unemployment rate is for the same level observed in the region of North Africa and the Middle East (ILO, 2013). A very high figure which reflects a difficult socioeconomic situation of young people who are to build their life at this stage. These difficulties vary according to regions. The future of youth in the isolated areas without developing infrastructures is actually uncertain. This vulnerability is partly explained by the low efficiency of school. Thus, most young people we met did not go in their studies to university. They are also poorly trained in different professions while many economic sectors in the country are experiencing a serious lack of skilled workforce. This context makes the situation of a young people in such area becomes even more difficult, because of the risk of not having the essential conditions of life.

The SAHWA survey reveals also that approximately 90% of young people live with their parents (or one of the parents). This result is

very significant as regards to the need for autonomy at an age where the demand of emancipation is growing, including from social control (Addi, 1999). Unemployment and the lack of empowerment are the main factors who lead young people to lose hope and to frustration. In spite of their frustration, the young people reflect a big energy and a lot of ambition. They are often project leaders and new ideas but are discouraged by the lack of listening, whether it is on behalf of the company or on behalf of the administration. Young people in Algeria as elsewhere in the MENA region, like having a job and a salary and have their money and afford some pleasures of life, which are not easily accessible.

Regarding young people's position about politics, the majority is staying away from the elections and refuses even the idea to vote. During interviews, young people have expressed their displeasure with Algerian politicians and criticized the practice of politics, both by political opposition parties and by the government. The SAHWA survey showed that more than 70% of young people did not vote during the last elections. More than 37% asserted that they are not interested in politics and about 10% declared that voting does not have any effect on their daily life.

### *Problems of young people*

The unemployment rate is a relevant indicator of the insertion of young people in the society from the first contacts with young people, the first problem which arises is employment. They wait for this event as the beginning of a new life. For young people, the first priority is employment. They consider it as "a door" (in their words) which allows them to build their life. For young students, finding a job is also a main objective. When they evoke employment prospects after a graduation, they show a certain apprehension and expect to undergo unemployment. The majority of young people raised the issue of the lack of transparency in the recruitment procedure. They feel that their chances of getting a job that meet their expectations and which correspond to their degree are low.

Graduated young people have another source of dissatisfaction; they would prefer to get a job in their area of expertise, which is another concern for their career. This situation is a direct result of the unbalance between the labor market and the academic trainings. There is a dysfunction in the university programmes and the requirements of the national economy. The government also admits this gap, but the problem remains.

There is however another social problem. The work in the private sector corresponds to precariousness and is badly perceived by the population and by the young people in particular, for several reasons: insecurity of the employment because of the lack of permanent contracts and easiness of redundancy, absence of social rights as compensations, vacation, welfare, health insurance, etc. Accordingly, young people have two options: create their own activity or enterprise (and then undergo the administrative obstacles) either find an employment in the public service. Hence, the operations of recruitment in the public service stimulate always a very high demand, especially in the sectors of Health, Education, Security services and the Administration who are the biggest employers in Algeria. This situation causes often a use of nepotism and corruption, regarding the secured jobs "to the State" to resume the terms of the young people. Indeed, a job in the public service allow many advantages, differing to the private sector and offering social rights and especially sustainability of the employment.

It is however necessary to mention the existence of an important category among the young people: those who are not schooled, not in training and do not work. They are sometimes without diploma, a long-term unemployed and seem to be discouraged from finding a work. These young people spend their time mainly in the street and are de facto difficult to reach. They are doubtless in a situation of vulnerability, because exposed to the deviant behaviors such as drug consumption or the attraction for violence. There is another type of vulnerability concerning the environment of residence. Indeed, in the isolated regions of the country where there are fewer opportunities of

training and employment, young people are alone in front of difficulties of the everyday life. This social exclusion is lived in a more marked way when the young people do not have a social network which can bring them support, in particular as regards the job search. For these young people, their disappointment towards the governmental administration is very big, as it represents their only chance of release in their unprivileged area. This leads us to emphasize the gender dimension of access to work. Indeed, women in such localities live a double vulnerability, one based on gender and the second on the region, where social obstacles are added to the lack of opportunities. In that case, the government intervention can give a significant support for women empowerment through work Agency<sup>1</sup>. Gender empowerment within the context of rural society needs more actions and advocacy to exploit the existing potential (Laaredj-Campbell, 2016).

Actually, the majority of young people we have met do not intend the migration as a first option for the future. But it comes as a last response after trying several attempts to get a job. The lack of job opportunities pushes young people to consider a migratory project, even by using illegal way for those who feel losing hope.

On the stakeholders side, they were unanimous on the fact that there is a huge communication fail at all levels, whether in the Algerian society as a whole, or between the authorities and society, especially youth. Indeed, there is a strong demand for communication and dialogue within Algerian youth, but this demand is not satisfied.

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<sup>1</sup> In Algeria, there are two main governmental institutions created to enhance employment. Both agencies are present in the whole country. ANEM: Agence Nationale de l'Emploi (National Agency for Employment) with a principal duty to manage recruitment procedure. ANSEJ: Agence Nationale de Soutien à l'Emploi de Jeunes (National Agency for Youth Employment's Support) with a principal duty to enhance job through enterprise creation among young people.



Based on observations on the field, it seems that the traditional tools of communication do not promote dialogue with youth. In fact, young people communicate with each other horizontally, while there is no (or a very weak) dialogue vertically between adults and young people and between the authorities and young people. They are the first, as in the MENA region, to use web-based tools and channels, which allow government to interact with citizens and to better understand the needs of young people (OECD, 2015).

### **3. Discussion: Policy responses to the problems of youth at the national level**

#### *a) Youth policy in Algeria*

The Ministry of Youth and Sports is the main governmental agency for youth issues and partner for international cooperation. Other governmental partners can be involved in the implementation of youth cooperation programmes, considering the transverse character of youth and certain actions on the field: Ministry of Health, Ministry in charge of Security and Local Administration, Ministry of Culture, etc. Considering the cross-cutting nature of the actions targeting young people, nevertheless essential, these actions lose in efficiency and the results are not always satisfactory. It shows, for Algeria as for other countries of the region, the importance of the current approach in terms of policy and management as regards youth. These gaps were indeed underlined on a regional scale (EuroMed III Report, 2010).

However, national policies targeting youth present numerous limits. For the Algerian government, the top priority regarding youth is employment. Except this objective, it is very hard to identify other significant programs intended exclusively for young people.

Indeed, since about fifteen years, the Algerian government set up a policy to promote employment of young people. Thus, colossal budgets were assigned to this strategy led on the ground by an administration created for that purpose. The principle of this system,

implemented in the 2000<sup>th</sup>, consists in encouraging young people to create their own company by facilitating the access to credit. It is however difficult to establish an evaluation of this mechanism, to measure its impact on the employability of young people and to know for example the rate of companies which really work. Therefore, numerous critics were made towards this mechanism as the lack of support of young people after the creation of their company, but also the field of activity as the majority of young people opts for the service sector. Other weaknesses are to be underlined and concern the absence of skills related to the activity, their misunderstanding of the market and their lack of capacity to manage a company, added to that the difficulties of bureaucracy.

More recently, as regards to the new budgetary orientations of the government, further to lower financial resources, which are essentially based on the export of hydrocarbons, questions are put on the sustainability of the government actions for young people employment.

On the governmental side, the Ministry in charge of the youth seems to have limited capacities in terms of human and materials resources, which results in low impact of its actions on the real life of young people. In addition, the field of intervention of the Ministry in charge of the youth is limited to the activities of leisure and sport (mainly of sport).

In Algeria, there is not a national policy of youth, and that is the same situation in other countries of the mediterranean (Rapport du Programme Euromed, 2010). In the governmental program, only certain objectives relating to the improvement of the socioeconomic insertion of young people, especially through employment are mentioned. For the last decades, such a focus of the Algerian government on the issue of employment of young people leads to overlook other dimensions such as culture, civil participation, etc. Giving the fact that government policies do not reach enough the planned goals and as needs persist, the young people lose confidence

in the government policy when they observe the lack of transparency or mismanagement. They perceive these policies as actions of exclusion (Musette, 2004). Young people are ruled out from the sphere of decision-making, nevertheless, they were often the accelerators of the political transformations in Algeria, as those of October 5th 1988 which led to the political pluralism (Rouag, 2014). The main conclusion that rises upon several interviews and meetings with young people and stakeholders is that the empowerment of young people and their integration in the society is a complex issue. This reality needs a global and comprehensive response, taking into account the need as expressed by young people themselves.

### ***b) Cooperation with international actors in the field of youth***

The international partners of Algeria regarding youth issue are mainly represented by: i) the United Nations agencies (United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), International Labor Organization (ILO) , the World Bank (WB); ii) the diplomatic representations (European Union, Embassies of certain countries such as Canada, USA, Japan, having cooperation programs; iii) International organizations of development as the GTZ (the German cooperation).

In fact, the most important partnership for the Algerian government is with the agencies of the United Nations (UN) system. These programs are regular, cooperative and based on cost-sharing by both parties. The cooperation between the Algerian government and the United Nations has begun in the 1970s and was focused on technical assistance in a certain domains as health or economic issues. During the last years, the cooperation has changed as the Algerian government is not asking for UN funds, because of availability of resources in the country. Thus, the cooperation is about high quality expertise according to the priorities of the country.

The Algerian government is more sensitive to the results-based management of these joint programs. Also, a joint evaluation is done by both parties during the cooperation cycle and a final evaluation over a five-year period. The method with which these programs are managed is interesting and deserves some attention. It consists, at first, an analysis of the socioeconomic situation of the country, the identification of priorities and fields of intervention. An action plan is elaborated. These actions are to be implemented according to the objectives predefined with determined budgets. Various activities stemming from these programs are implemented together with the UN agencies and their respective partners: Ministry as the central administration or appropriate partner at the local level, but also the partners representing the civil society (NGOs, labour unions ...).

In 2006, a first program of cooperation between the United Nations System and the Algerian government was developed with a main objective to promote the employability of young people. Unfortunately, this project was not realized further to the murderous attack which had affected the offices of the United Nations System in Algiers in 2007.

Within the context of the international cooperation initiatives, it is possible to observe that the programs of cooperation attribute a secondary place to actions for youth and accordingly the funds allocated for youth activities are very weak. An international partner whose main responsibility is young people does not exist. Multiplicity of the international partners with different objectives, different programs and different working procedures does not favor an efficient cooperation and does not facilitate the coherence of the interventions. In addition, the transverse character of the actions for young people favors the fact that efforts for youth are scattered between several sectors, which makes follow-up and evaluation of these actions difficult. Indeed, it is difficult to evaluate the small actions that are implemented for youth under the umbrella of the international cooperation.

There is a European Union youth programme, namely Euro-Med Youth Programme, in which Algeria is a partner country. However, Sahwa Youth Survey data show that the majority of young people are not aware about the EU programs in the country. Indeed, only 2.2% of them have declared having an idea about EU programs in Algeria.

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendations**

For Algeria, it is time to take care of the needs of young people and to answer their big expectations, not only in terms of employment and housing but also adaptation and improvement of the living environment in a more general way. It requires a policy towards young people which must be ambitious, coherent and adapted to the reality. It seems fundamental for the Algerian government to be inspired by experiences in other countries and to improve its own method of planning for young people. Strengthening of the international cooperation, in particular through some key actions, would be very helpful in this regard. Accordingly, it is possible to develop following recommendations.

A substantive revision of the mandate of the Ministry of Youth and Sports in a way to adapt it to the current reality of young people and in particular to widen it in all the aspects that are linked to young people (without forgetting adolescents) would be a strategic change.

It is also strategic to develop a national policy of youth, in a way to satisfy certain conditions: young people themselves have to contribute significantly to its elaboration and its implementation. It has to cover all the needs of young people; must be practicable, containing accurate objectives in the most priority aspects; and it has to benefit from the government support for all necessary means required for its implementation.

As regards youth employment, it is fundamental that the Algerian government works to change the current situation which brings young people to prefer a job in the public service. It is thus imperative to

develop the private sector and to change the negative perception of the society in order to increase its capacity to absorb unemployment. Furthermore, it's crucial to enhance policies to ensure equal access to work between citizens, including between men and women.

In order to increase participation in policy making and implementation, it is necessary to identify and involve all the actors who may make a significant contribution to actions carried out in favor of young people, including the non-governmental organizations and other organizations of the civil society who are very close to young people in the field. It is also essential to develop the ability to listening young people within the various governmental structures. It is to lead, no doubt, young people to change their attitudes towards the government and towards the political world in a more general way. Indeed, the Sahwa Youth Survey showed in particular the big distrust and the lack of confidence of the young people towards the political world. It is also fundamental to develop spaces allowing young people to express themselves, including access to internet and to heavy media (radio and television). As regards the governance dimension, it is important to improve the representativeness of young people in the institutions of decision-making;

Regarding the international cooperation, it would be more productive to harmonize the cooperation in the field of the youth and to improve the management of international cooperation to unify efforts – and funding – around common objectives.

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