

Migration Intentions: Changes in the Aspirations of Algerian and Tunisian Academics

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Abstract:

This article examines the evolution and determinants of migration intentions among university graduates in Algeria and Tunisia between 2006 and 2023, using harmonized international survey data. The findings reveal persistently high migration intentions in both countries, shaped by distinct national trajectories and differentiated perceptions of economic and institutional opportunities. The analysis highlights the central role of aspirations, gender, and life-course dynamics in shaping migration projects. The study underscores the importance of subjective and contextual factors in understanding skilled migration in the Maghreb.

Keywords: Skilled migration; Migration intentions; University graduates; Algeria; Tunisia; Gender

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a context marked by profound political, economic, and cultural changes, the migration intentions of young graduates from Maghreb countries are attracting growing scientific, political, and social interest. Far from being a simple indicator of potential mobility, the desire to migrate reflects structural tensions linked to the mismatch between the expansion of higher education, opportunities for professional integration, and the institutional capacity of states to absorb their locally trained elites. Recent studies show that migration intentions in North Africa are closely linked to graduate unemployment, the deterioration of public services, and a persistent crisis of confidence in political institutions, particularly in the wake of the Arab uprisings of 2011 (OECD, 2020; Arab Barometer, 2023).

Among the various social categories concerned, academics appear to be one of the groups expressing the highest levels of migration intentions, particularly in Algeria and Tunisia. Arab Barometer data indicate that these intentions are mainly directed towards countries in the North, particularly Western Europe (France, Germany) and North America (Canada, United States). This dynamic is no longer limited to the male profiles traditionally associated with Maghreb migration, but reveals a profound transformation in the gender and generational profiles of those wishing to leave. The most recent data from the Arab Barometer (2023; Abufalgha, 2023) indicate that nearly 50% of young graduates in the Maghreb are considering leaving their country of origin.



In Tunisia, female university graduates aged 18 to 34 express higher migration intentions than their male counterparts, while this trend tends to reverse after the age of 35 (Arab Barometer, 2023). In Algeria, migration intentions remain dominated by young male graduates, in line with more traditional patterns of male mobility, although recent changes can be observed. These contrasting configurations directly challenge the dominant explanatory models, as they appear in two countries with relatively similar educational, institutional, and historical trajectories.

Previous research has largely shown that graduate migration cannot be explained solely by poverty or immediate economic factors. Approaches based on the link between aspirations and capabilities (Carling, 2002; De Haas, 2010) emphasise that migration becomes likely when individual aspirations – reinforced by education – exceed the opportunities for fulfilment offered by local structures. In the case of Maghreb societies, the massification of higher education has contributed to raising social and professional expectations, without the labour markets and public institutions being able to keep pace (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012; Nour, 2019).

However, few studies have analysed the evolution of the migration intentions of academics in Algeria and Tunisia comparatively and longitudinally, simultaneously integrating the dimensions of gender, age, and institutional perceptions over an extended period. This gap is all the more notable given that recent political and economic transformations have profoundly reconfigured the trajectories of young graduates in both countries.

This article aims to fill this gap by offering a comparative analysis of the migration intentions of Algerian and Tunisian academics between 2006 and 2023, based on data from the Arab Barometer, supplemented by the SAHWA surveys (2015) and the MED-HIMS report (2021). It has three main objectives: i) to analyse the evolution over time of migration intentions among academics in both countries; ii) to identify gender and generational differences in the expression of the desire to migrate; iii) to assess the relevance of the aspirations-capabilities framework in explaining the differences observed between Algeria and Tunisia.

2. Global context of elite migration in the Arab world

The migration of academics – understood here as the international mobility of higher education graduates and researchers – is one of the most critical development issues in the Arab world. Since the 1990s, the region has seen an intensification of migratory flows of its executives and academics to OECD countries, often due to the political and security crisis that has characterised North Africa, fuelling the widely documented phenomenon of brain drain (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012; Nour, 2019). This phenomenon particularly affects certain sectors, such as healthcare, where the exodus of Algerian doctors is reaching alarming proportions (Zehnati, 2024).

Several structural factors are fuelling this dynamic. On the one hand, Arab societies are producing an increasing number of higher education graduates in a context of mass education and rising educational aspirations. On the other hand, these graduates face a saturated labour market dominated by informal employment, precarious contracts, and professional integration schemes that are considered ineffective (ILO, 2020; World Bank, 2021). Regional statistics confirm this trend, with a high proportion of young graduates

expressing intentions of international mobility (MEDSTAT IV, 2022).

The most recent data from the Arab Barometer (2023) show that nearly 50% of young graduates in the Maghreb are considering leaving their country of origin. This figure rises to 73% among Tunisian graduates and 56% among Algerians, reflecting a deep unease about their professional and personal future in their national environment. This trend is all the more significant as a shift in the migratory profile accompanies it: emigration is no longer the preserve of disadvantaged groups, but now affects the educated middle classes and even teaching and research staff (El-Ouahi et al., 2020; Bensaâd, 2023).

However, the migration of elites in the Arab world cannot be reduced to a simple quest for economic opportunities. It is also part of a broader dynamic of seeking social recognition, academic freedom, intellectual mobility, and even post-materialist aspirations (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). In this sense, it reflects deep tensions between the educational openness of Arab societies and the political and institutional withdrawal in which they seem to have become entrenched since the Arab Spring.

This asymmetry is also fueled by broader migration dynamics in the region, including the increase in trans-Saharan migratory flows through the Maghreb, which complicate the regional migration landscape (Abderrahim, 2024)

The work of De Haas (2010) and Carling (2002) reminds us that migration does not depend solely on poverty or underdevelopment, but rather on a growing gap between capabilities and aspirations. In Arab countries, this gap is often fuelled by a disconnect between an education system that produces educated elites but fails to integrate them into decision-making, production, or innovation spheres, generating frustration, disillusionment, and flight.

Finally, this migration of elites is also fuelled and legitimised by

talent attraction policies implemented by host countries. Measures such as "talent" visas, international research grants, and North-South university partnerships contribute to institutionalising asymmetrical academic mobility, in which Southern countries train human resources that benefit Northern countries (Sassen, 2006; Fargues, 2011).

In response to this brain drain, some researchers advocate for a reconceptualization of academic mobility in terms of skills circulation, which could benefit both origin and destination countries (Musette, 2016).

In this context, the comparative study of the migration intentions of Algerian and Tunisian academics provides strategic insight into the evolution of mobility desires in a region where human capital has become both a local development issue and a globally coveted resource.

2.1 Research question

While the Maghreb countries have invested heavily in higher education since the 1990s to build human capital capable of supporting economic and social development, a structural paradox has gradually emerged: university graduates are now among the social categories expressing the highest levels of migration intentions (Arab Barometer, 2023; OECD, 2020). This paradox directly calls into question the social function of university degrees, as well as their ability to guarantee professional integration and upward social mobility in the countries of origin.

In Algeria and Tunisia, this tension is particularly pronounced. On the one hand, the massification of higher education has contributed to higher professional and social aspirations; on the other hand, the saturation of the skilled labour market, the precarious nature of employment, and the low institutional value placed on skills fuel a sense of downgrading among young graduates (Guemide, 2021;



Belkacem, 2022). This situation calls for a reconsideration of the role of university degrees in social and professional integration trajectories, as well as their ability to produce social and symbolic returns in fragile institutional contexts.

Longitudinal data from the Arab Barometer (2006–2023), the SAHWA survey (2015), and MED-HIMS (2021) highlight growing divergences in the migration intentions of Algerian and Tunisian university graduates, particularly according to gender and age. In Tunisia, female graduates aged 18 to 34 express higher migration intentions than men, while in Algeria, intentions remain predominantly among young male academics. These trends partially reverse after the age of 35, revealing a dual gender and generational divide that has been little explored in comparative literature.

This contrast raises a central analytical question: how can we explain that two countries with relatively similar educational, historical, and institutional trajectories now produce different patterns of migration desire among their university elites?

Strictly economic or cyclical explanations appear insufficient to account for these developments. The transformations observed also seem to be linked to institutional factors, differing perceptions of the future, and a reconfiguration of norms of individual achievement, particularly among female graduates (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). As a result, traditional models of migration (push-pull, neoclassical) struggle to fully grasp the contemporary complexity of migration intentions in Southern societies.

From this perspective, the theoretical framework of aspirations and capabilities (Carling, 2002; De Haas, 2010) offers a particularly relevant analytical grid. It helps us understand how higher levels of education simultaneously increase aspirations for mobility and the objective capacity to migrate, while highlighting situations of frustration when local structures do not allow these aspirations to be

realized. This framework is particularly relevant in the case of North Africa, where academic investment in university education is no longer systematically correlated with an improvement in living conditions or social status.

To address these issues, this article focuses on the following research questions:

- How have the migration intentions of academics evolved in Algeria and Tunisia between 2006 and 2023?
- To what extent do these intentions vary according to gender and age in each of the two countries?
- Can the differences observed be interpreted through the framework of aspirations and capabilities, beyond traditional economic factors?

Research hypotheses

Based on the existing literature and the data used, the study formulates the following hypotheses:

- University students with a negative perception of their economic and professional future express a higher intention to migrate.
- At equivalent levels of education, female academics in Tunisia are more likely to express an intention to migrate than their male counterparts, contrary to the situation in Algeria.
- Individuals aged 25 to 39 have the highest levels of migration intention, due to a maximum gap between professional aspirations and local opportunities.
- The country of origin moderates the effect of socio-demographic variables on migration intentions, reflecting different institutional configurations.

3. Literature review



The scientific literature on graduate migration has evolved

considerably, moving from a primarily economic approach (brain drain/gain) to more nuanced analyses that integrate social, transnational, and intentional dimensions. We summarise this work as follows:

3.1 Graduate migration and human capital transformations

For several decades, the international migration of higher education graduates has been a central focus of studies on human capital mobility and global inequalities. Early work on brain drain focused mainly on the economic and scientific losses suffered by countries of origin (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012). However, these approaches have gradually evolved towards a more nuanced analysis, incorporating the dynamics of skills circulation and individual mobility trajectories.

Recent research highlights that graduate migration is the result of a combination of structural and subjective factors, including professional opportunities, social recognition, and institutional conditions for skills development (De Haas, 2010; Fargues, 2011).

In Southern countries, particularly in the MENA region, the massification of higher education has not been accompanied by an equivalent transformation of labour markets, creating a paradoxical situation where rising levels of education simultaneously increase individual aspirations and the likelihood of frustration (ILO, 2020; World Bank, 2021).

3.2 Aspirations, capabilities, and frustration: a central explanatory framework

The theoretical framework of aspirations and capabilities, proposed by Carling (2002) and further developed by De Haas (2010), is now one of the most widely used models for analysing migration intentions. It posits that migration is conditioned by the interaction between the desire to migrate and the actual ability to do so. Thus, an

increase in human capital not only increases the objective ability to migrate but also raises expectations in terms of recognition and social mobility.

Unlike neoclassical or push-pull models (Sjaastad, 1962; Lee, 1966), this framework helps to explain why migration intentions can be particularly high in contexts of intermediate development, where aspirations are growing faster than local opportunities. This approach is particularly relevant for analysing the situation of Maghreb academics, whose trajectories are marked by high educational investment and low institutional absorption.

Empirical studies conducted in the region confirm this dynamic. The SAHWA survey (2016) shows that young graduates in Algeria and Tunisia express some of the highest levels of migration intentions in the Arab world, often motivated by the mismatch between training and employment, but also by symbolic aspirations related to recognition and autonomy.

3.3 Gender, values, and the reshaping of migration intentions

The gender dimension of migration intentions has long been underestimated in studies on the Maghreb, where migration was mainly analysed as a male phenomenon. Recent research challenges this view, showing a significant increase in migration intentions among female graduates, particularly in Tunisia (Benstead, 2018; Belkacem, 2022).

Among female graduates, the intention to migrate is increasingly associated with a quest for economic autonomy, professional recognition, and individual freedom, in contexts where social norms and labour markets limit their integration (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). This feminization of migration intentions is part of a broader transformation of gender roles and women's mobility strategies in the Maghreb (Lahmar, 2018).

This development is part of a broader transformation of values, marked by the emergence of post-materialist and individualistic aspirations among educated younger generations (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). These changes are helping to redefine traditional migration patterns, producing different configurations according to gender, age, and national context.

3.4 Algerian and Tunisian specificities in the literature

Comparative studies on the migration profiles of Mediterranean youth highlight continuities and changes in departure motives, influenced by the regional context (Bardak, 2018). Studies on Algeria and Tunisia highlight distinct migratory trajectories, despite historical and educational similarities. In Algeria, several studies emphasise the role of professional downgrading, the loss of symbolic value of degrees, and career stagnation in intensifying the desire to migrate among graduates (Guemide, 2021; Bouzidi, 2020). In Tunisia, the migration of academics is analysed more as a reaction to a persistent structural crisis, which has been exacerbated since 2011 (Belhedi, 2016; Hammami, 2022).

However, most of this research remains sectoral, limited in time, or focused on a single country, which limits our understanding of the differences observed at the regional level. Few studies take a comparative and longitudinal approach that simultaneously integrates gender, age, and institutional perceptions, particularly over a period covering the pre- and post-Arab Spring.

4. Theories explaining migration intentions

The analysis of migration intentions in Maghreb societies, particularly among higher education graduates, draws on a variety of theoretical approaches. These interpretative frameworks make it possible to move beyond a strictly economic reading of the migration phenomenon to incorporate psychological, social, cultural, and structural dimensions.

4.1 Migration intentions according to neoclassical theory (Todaro, 1969)

According to this approach, international migration is the result of a rational trade-off between the expected economic gains in the destination country and the living conditions in the country of origin. It posits that individuals act to maximise their expected income. This model applies partially in the cases studied here: Algerian and Tunisian academics, faced with a saturated and unfulfilling labour market, may consider migration as an optimisation strategy. Although this model considers migrants as agents who calculate gains, it neglects the subjective, social, and political dimensions of the motivations to migrate, which are particularly significant among elites.

4.2 Migration intention according to the push-pull factors model (Lee, 1966)

This classic model distinguishes between push factors—unemployment, corruption, social dissatisfaction, lack of prospects—and pull factors – better working conditions, stability, academic recognition – in the destination country. In the case of Maghreb graduates, push factors are omnipresent (precariousness, lack of merit, clientelism), while pull factors are linked to professional recognition and the prospect of a freer future (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012). This model remains limited and overly mechanistic and descriptive, without taking into account the subjective dynamics or structural constraints that drive mobility.

4.3 Migration intention according to the theory of relative deprivation (Gurr, 1970)

This theory posits that the desire to migrate arises from a gap between individual expectations (aspirations) and the actual opportunities available. This gap generates frustration, which fuels



plans to leave. This perspective sheds particular light on the situation of academics: educated, qualified, and full of ideas, they find themselves marginalised in their home country's society, with their human capital going unrecognised. This model is more realistic and applicable to the Maghreb context: Algerian and Tunisian graduates express a high level of dissatisfaction not because of a lack of qualifications, but because of a lack of institutional recognition, which increases the gap between aspirations and real opportunities.

4.4 Migration intention according to the aspirations/capabilities model (Carling, 2002)

Carling proposes to distinguish between aspirations to migrate (the desire) and the capabilities to migrate (the concrete means: visa, network, resources). Certain populations, particularly young university students, may have a strong desire to migrate without necessarily having the immediate capacity to do so. This model explains why the intention to migrate is high, even in the absence of actual migration. It also sheds light on the growing preference for "undocumented" migration, due to a lack of institutional alternatives.

4.5 Migration intention according to the values approach (Inglehart & Norris, 2017)

The evolution of migration intentions can also be interpreted in the light of a transition in societal values, with young graduates becoming increasingly sensitive to post-materialist values such as autonomy, freedom, and self-fulfilment. In Maghreb societies, this transition is generating intergenerational conflict and a feeling of social suffocation among young people, pushing them to seek fulfilment elsewhere. Tunisian academics, who have been more exposed to post-2011 democratic debates, seem to be experiencing a greater cultural rupture than their Algerian counterparts.

4.6 Migration intentions according to the intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1989)

Taking into account gender, age, cultural capital, and social context together allows us to nuance migration profiles. Female graduates, although better educated than in the past, may face specific social or family constraints. Similarly, young male graduates may internalise social pressure linked to their role as breadwinners, hence their stronger desire to leave.

5. Study methodology

This study adopts a comparative quantitative approach based on the secondary use of data from several representative international surveys. It aims to analyse the evolution and determinants of the migration intentions of university graduates in Algeria and Tunisia over an extended period, from 2006 to 2023.

The data used comes mainly from the Arab Barometer (2006–2023 waves), supplemented by the SAHWA Youth Survey (2016) and the MED-HIMS report (2021). The use of these sources makes it possible to cover different time periods and to integrate sociodemographic, economic, and perceptual dimensions, while ensuring a minimum level of comparability between the two countries studied.

The analysis is based on an explanatory framework linking socio-demographic variables (age, gender), contextual variables (country of origin), and subjective perceptions (economic situation, government performance), in line with contemporary approaches to migration intentions (Carling, 2002; De Haas, 2010).

5.1 Study population and definition of migration intention

The study population consists of individuals who have attained at least a university level of education, whether they are currently studying or have already graduated. This definition is consistent with the classifications used in the Arab Barometer and complementary surveys.



Migration intention is assessed using the Arab Barometer's standardised question on the desire to leave the country of origin to settle abroad, regardless of whether the planned migration is regular or irregular. It is important to note that these variable measures stated intention rather than actual migration behaviour, which is a major analytical distinction in the literature (Carling & Schewel, 2018).

5.2 Data harmonisation and comparability

The use of several survey waves requires prior harmonisation work. Only variables that are strictly comparable across countries and periods were included in the analysis to limit biases related to variations in question wording or changes in sampling plans.

Intertemporal and international comparisons are interpreted with caution, as the surveys are based on independent samples and not on longitudinal tracking of the same individuals.

5.3 Explanatory variables

The variables included in the multivariate analysis were selected based on existing literature and the hypotheses formulated:

- Gender (male/female);
- Age, grouped into categories relevant to academic trajectories;
- Country of origin (Algeria/Tunisia).

The choice of a limited number of variables is explained by the desire to prioritise statistical robustness and inter-country comparability, as certain key variables (detailed income, social capital, migration networks) are not available in a consistent manner across all waves.

5.4 Statistical model

In order to identify the determinants of migration intention, a binary logistic regression was estimated. This method is particularly suitable when the dependent variable is dichotomous, as is the case here (intention to migrate: yes/no).

The regression results are presented in the form of odds ratios (OR), allowing the relative effects of the explanatory variables on the probability of expressing an intention to migrate to be interpreted.

The estimates were made using data from the Arab Barometer (2022), as this wave offers the best simultaneous availability of the variables needed for multivariate analysis.

5.5 Methodological limitations

Several limitations should be highlighted. First, the intention to migrate does not necessarily mean that migration will actually take place, as this depends on unobserved structural, legal, and financial constraints. Second, the analysis is based on repeated cross-sectional data, which limits causal inference and prevents individual trajectories from being tracked over time. Thirdly, certain important dimensions of academic migration – such as migration networks, linguistic capital, or previous mobility experiences – are not systematically available in the surveys used. These limitations suggest that the results should be interpreted as probabilistic trends rather than strict causal relationships.

6. Preferred destinations for academics before the pandemic

Before the COVID-19 health crisis, European countries were the main destinations considered by Algerian and Tunisian academics, with France being particularly popular. France accounted for 27.6% of Algerian academics' migration intentions and 31% of Tunisian academics' intentions, confirming its central role in skilled mobility in the Maghreb.

The top five destinations accounted for more than half of the choices expressed, i.e., 56.7% for Algerians and 71.3% for Tunisians, indicating a strong geographical concentration of migration plans. This concentration suggests that migration intentions are structured by linguistic, institutional, and migratory proximity, which has already

been well documented in the literature (Fargues, 2011). The preference for France is also explained by the existence of established diaspora networks, particularly among Algerian higher education graduates (Smail, 2018; Smail et al., 2017).

Table 1. Main destinations for university graduates before the pandemic

Top five destinations for Algerians			Top five destinations for Tunisians		
Rank	Country	%	Rank	Country	%
1	France	27.6	1	France	31
2	United Kingdom	13.4	2	Germany	15.5
3	Germany	8.2	3	Canada	11.8
4	United States	8.2	4	United States	8.9
5	Canada	7.5	5	United Kingdom	4.1

Source: based on data from the SAHWA survey (2015)

7. Changes in migration intentions before and after the COVID-19 crisis

The intention to migrate among North African academics, particularly Tunisians and Algerians, is significantly marked. Before the COVID-19 health crisis, 61.2% of Algerian academics in higher education expressed a desire to leave their country. This can be explained by the despair of graduates at having to remain in their country, which was characterised by an undesirable socio-political environment until 2019. In contrast, 38.8% of Tunisians saw migration as a prospect in the face of the constraints they experience in their country of origin. After the pandemic, this gap narrowed, with a 5.5% decrease in migration intentions among Algerians, while those of Tunisians increased by the same proportion. These rates can also be

explained by the high concentration of Algerian Master's and Doctorate graduates, which could reflect frustration or a mismatch between the level of education and local prospects and opportunities. This view is in line with the phenomenon of brain drain, where the best-educated academics aspire to settle in contexts they consider more favourable to the recognition of their skills. The low rate of Tunisian academics in postgraduate studies can be explained either by resilience, reflecting strong socio-economic integration in their country, or by the reflection of a constraint – financial, social, linguistic, etc. – that limits their ability to attempt migration. We summarise these rates by period, country, and intention as follows:

Table 2. Migration intentions among university graduates and postgraduate students

Group	Before Covid DZA	After Covid DZA	Variation	Before Covid TUN	After Covid TUN	Variation
Licence	51	56.3	+5.3%	49	43.7	−5.3%
Master's and Doctorate	85.4	54.3	−31.1	14.6	45.7	+31.1%

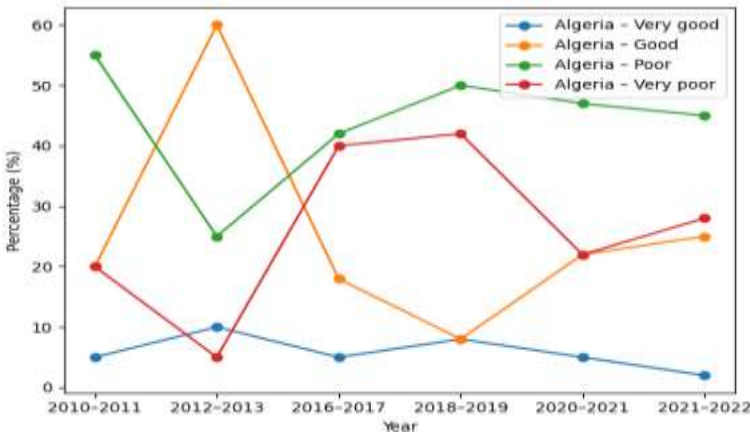
Source: results of the Arab Barometer (2018–2019; 2021–2022)

8. Changes in the economic situation of academics

The economic situation of Algerian and Tunisian academics has deteriorated overall, with some variation from year to year. According to data from the Arab Barometer (2006-2023), the worse the situation of academics is perceived to be, the greater their intention to migrate. In Algeria, trends in the economic situation of academics are unstable in terms of the desire to migrate, with a peak of pessimism between 2012 and 2014. Those who lived comfortably were less likely to want to migrate, with a rate not exceeding 10% between 2010 and 2022. For the category that lives in a more or less good economic situation and whose intention to migrate varies from one year to another

depending on the situation in the country, a peak is recorded on the curve between 2012 and 2014, followed by a continuous slowdown until the health crisis. During the Covid-19 crisis, the intention of Algerian academics increased to 25%. Those living in vulnerable situations are the most likely to intend to emigrate, except for the period from 2012 to 2014, as shown in the figure below:

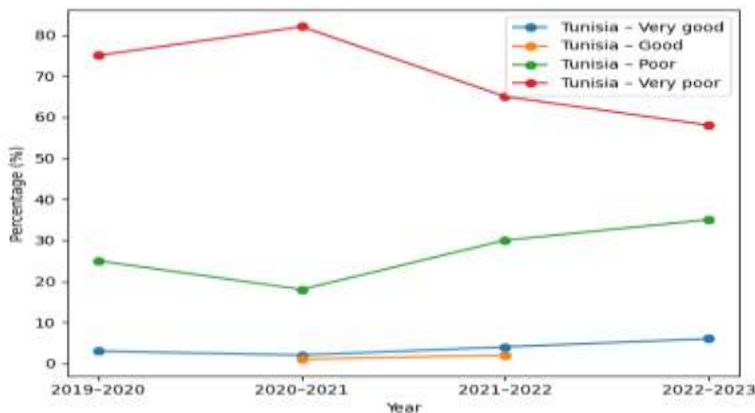
Fig.1. The economic situation of Algerian academics intending to migrate (2010-2022)



Source: based on data from Arab Barometer (2010-2022)

In the case of Tunisian academics, broadly speaking, those who intended to leave their country of origin were living in a very vulnerable economic situation and in a state of continuous. Data from Arab Barometer (2006-2024) does not record any cases of academics intending to migrate before 2018. Not all respondents to the survey had reached university level. Conversely, from 2018 onwards, the majority of academics who wished to migrate were in a very poor economic situation, with a rate of 72.5%. This trend became more pronounced during the COVID-19 period, reaching 80.5%. A decline in the figures is noticeable from 2021 onwards, reaching 58.1% in 2024. As for those who lived comfortably during all survey periods, they did not exceed 6%, as shown in this figure.

Fig.2. Economic situation of Tunisian academics wishing to migrate between 2018 and 2024



Source: based on data from Arab Barometer (2010-2024)

In comparative terms, the economic situation of Tunisian academics who intend to migrate abroad is more vulnerable and constant than that of their Algerian counterparts, which fluctuates with a difference of almost 54%. This means that the intention to migrate to Algeria is a reaction to a specific economic crisis. In Tunisia, on the other hand, this intention among academics is a reaction to a structural crisis.

Table 3. Comparison of the economic situation of academics wishing to migrate between 2010 and 2024

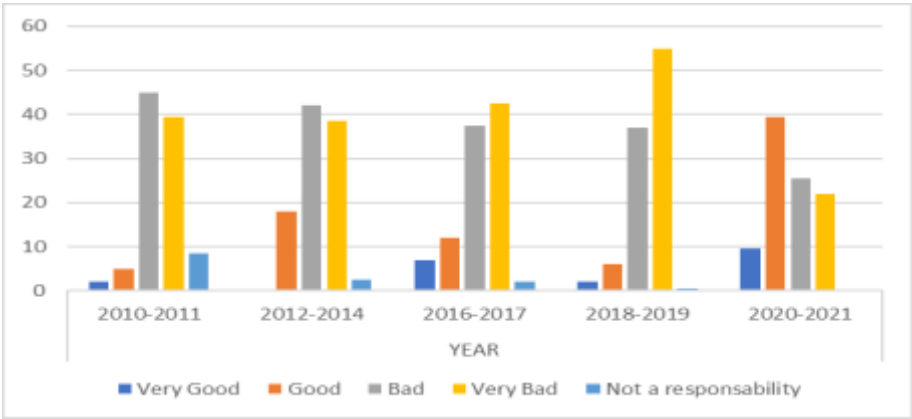
Economic situation	Tunisia average (%)	Average Algeria (%)	Difference	Observation
Very poor	~69	~32	~37%	Tunisians are much more pessimistic
Poor	~27%	~44%	~17	More moderate in Tunisia
Good	~3%	~26%	~23%	Residual optimism in Algeria
Very good	~0.5%	~4	~3.5	Rare in both cases

Source: based on data from Arab Barometer (2010-2024)

9. Government performance in job creation

Despite the political instability of both countries' government strategies, in the second decade of this millennium, Algeria and Tunisia offer few professional opportunities for their university graduates. Data from Arab Barometer (2010-2024) confirms this observation. A strong prevalence of negative judgments ranging from bad to very bad dominates Algerians' perception of government performance in creating jobs for university graduates in the period 2010-2019. The trends are reversing during the COVID period and post-pandemic. The current regime at the head of the government has succeeded in changing academics' perception of the government's performance in creating jobs. Positive ratings have risen to 39%, and negative perceptions continue to fall, as shown in the following graph:

Fig.3. Algerians' perception of government performance in job creation

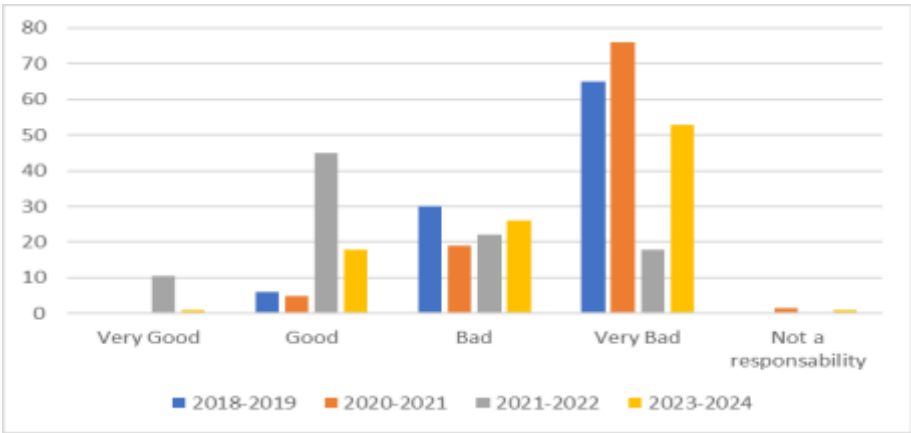


Source: based on data from Arab Barometer (2010-2022)

As for Tunisian academics, they have a more negative perception of the government's performance in terms of job creation for graduates. The trends confirm that between 2018 and 2021, there was a very high level of dissatisfaction, with estimates ranging from 65% to 76%. In the post-pandemic period, a recovery in academics'

confidence is seen as positive, at 45.8%. However, this position does not last long, and from 2023 onwards, a return to criticism is evident, with 53.4% viewing the government's strategy in terms of job creation as very poor, as shown in the following figure:

Fig.4. Tunisians' perception of government performance in job creation



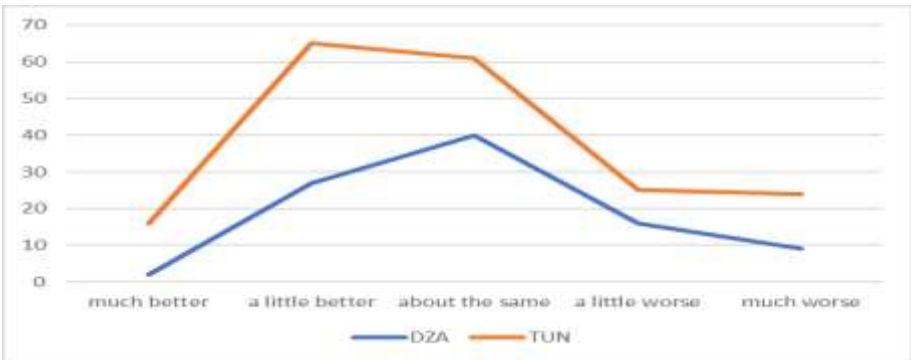
Source: based on data from Arab Barometer (2010-2024)

10.Academics' perceptions of their country's economic future until 2027

The economic situation of North African countries in the eyes of their academics varies between those who are optimistic about change and those who see the situation worsening in the near future. Tunisian academics are the most hopeful about their country's economic future despite the current difficulties facing the world in the post-pandemic period, with a rate of 51.5% compared to 35.1% of Algerians. On the other hand, those who are pessimistic do not exceed 24.7% for Algerians and 23.7% for Tunisians. Despite this slight difference, Tunisians remain much more pessimistic, with 15% viewing the future of their country as very negative. Perceiving economic stagnation, 39.8% of Algerians who intend to leave their country of origin believe

that the economic status quo will remain unchanged in the medium term. This trend is less pronounced among Tunisian university students, at 20.9%.

Fig.5. University students' perceptions of their country's economic future until 2027



Source: based on data from Arab Barometer (2022)

11. Sociodemographic profile of academics intending to migrate between 2010 and 2024

Analysis of the socio-demographic profile of Algerian and Tunisian academics reveals that the age group most likely to hope to migrate is young adults aged 25 to 39, with a rate of 56.2% for Tunisians and 53.3% for Algerians. The youngest category is highly motivated to leave after graduation. Adults hoping to migrate are much more numerous among Tunisians, with an average of 18.4%, which can be explained by the difficulties they face in overcoming the crisis.

In terms of gender, Algerian men, particularly among university graduates, are significantly more likely to consider migration than women, with a difference of 12.8%. In contrast, Tunisian women express a greater desire to emigrate than men, with a difference of around 1%. This trend can be explained by the challenges women face in integrating into the labour market.

The marital status of university graduates in Algeria and Tunisia varies according to surveys conducted by Arab Barometer between 2010 and 2024. Among Algerian university graduates, a high percentage of single people (68.9%) aspire to migrate, while only 27.3% of married people share this desire. Among Tunisians, however, the trend is reversed: 49.5% of married people also wish to migrate, compared to 47.2% of single people.

With regard to the employability of university graduates in their country of origin, it was found that 60.9% of Algerians are either inactive (retired, housewives, students, etc.) or unemployed despite their qualifications, while only 38.9% are active. In contrast, among Tunisians, the differences between occupational categories are not as marked, with 50.6% inactive compared to 49.4% employed. The table below summarises these trends:

Table 4. Socio-demographic data on university graduates who hope to migrate between 2010 and 2024

Migration intention											
Age group	Year	2010-2011	2012-2014	2016-2017	2018-2019		2020-2021		2021-2022		2023-2024
	Country	DZA	DZA	DZA	DZA	TUN	DZA	TUN	DZA	TUN	TUN
	18 to 24 years old	31.4	54	50	39.1	25.4	26.5	19.5	30.5	18.4	26
	25 to 39	63.7	44	47.6	53.2	59.3	52.2	59.7	59	55.3	50.5
	40 to 59	4.9	2	2.4	7.4	13.2	17.8	16.9	9.4	22.8	20.5
	Over 60				0.3	2.1	3.5	3.9	1.2	3.4	2.9
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Gender	Male	64.7	52	51.2	60.1	64	54.8	44.2	55.6	45.1	45.5
	Women	35.3	48	48.8	39.9	36	45.2	55.8	44.4	54.9	54.5
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Marital status	Single	72.5	84	70.7	68.1	50.8	60	42.9	57.9	43.7	51.6
	Married	25.5	14	15.9	30.2	47.1	38.3	51.5	40.2	53.4	45.8
	Divorced		2	3.7	1.6	2.1	1.7	3.9	1.2	1.5	1.1
	Other	2		9.8				1.7	0.7	1.5	1.4
	Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Employability	Yes	43.1	30	35.4	31.8	48.1	48.3	61	44.8	43.7	44.8
	No	56.9	70	63.4	68.2	51.9	51.7	39	55.2	56.3	55.2
	Total	100	100	99	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Binary regression and interpretation of OR (odds ratio) risk measures

The results of the analysis reveal that the determining factors for migration intentions include gender, country of origin and age. Regression data show that men have 38% lower migration intentions than women. This trend highlights women's greater propensity to consider migration, which can be interpreted through various social dynamics. Indeed, women in North Africa often suffer from limited integration into the labour market, which contributes to reinforcing a perception of limited professional prospects in their country. Furthermore, this desire to migrate may also stem from a desire to further their studies, to fulfil their potential, and, more broadly, to achieve emancipation.

A comparison of the migration intentions of Algerian and Tunisian university graduates reveals that the former are 2.8 times more likely to migrate than their Tunisian counterparts. This finding illustrates a growing sense of dissatisfaction among Algerian university graduates regarding the career prospects and economic opportunities available in their country. After graduation, they are faced with a labour market that is considered unwelcoming, with few professional opportunities. This climate of professional uncertainty seems to fuel their desire to seek opportunities abroad, where they hope to find conditions more conducive to their personal fulfilment and the realisation of their professional aspirations.

From a demographic perspective, the results of the regression analysis indicate a positive correlation between age and migration intentions among Tunisian and Algerian university graduates, with a notable increase in migration aspirations across different age groups. More specifically, individuals aged 25 to 39 show a significantly higher propensity to migrate than their younger counterparts. This age group is characterised by an ambitious pursuit of higher education, particularly in Algeria, to obtain a Master's or Doctorate. The

aspiring academics often face a difficult professional environment, marked by high unemployment and a scarcity of job opportunities. As a result, the intention to migrate is transformed into a mature project, taking the form of a deliberate strategy aimed at improving their socio-economic condition.

Table 5. Results of binary logistic regression on migration intentions

Variables		B	E.S	Wald value	ddl	Sig	Exp(B)	95% CI for EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1a	Gender (1)	-,472	.130	13.145	1	,000	,624	,483	,805
	Country(1)	1,039	,138	56,867	1	,000	2,826	2,157	3,701
	Age group	,776	,086	81,542	1	,000	2,172	1,836	2,571
	Constant	-1,691	,225	56,395	1	,000	,184		

Source: based on data from Arab Barometer (2022)

12. Conclusion

The study of migration intentions among university graduates in Algeria and Tunisia between 2010 and 2024 reveals distinct dynamics, but both indicate a deep malaise among highly educated young people seeking social recognition and professional opportunities. Recent migration trends in North Africa, including mixed migration forms, continue to evolve in a context of political restrictions and economic crises (Mixed Migration Centre, 2024). In Algeria, intentions to leave the country are highly sensitive to political and economic contexts, with peaks during periods of tension (2012-2014) and during the health crisis (2020-2021). This reactivity shows an ambivalent relationship with the country, a mixture of temporary disillusionment and fluctuating hopes. In Tunisia, on the other hand, the intention to migrate is part of a more structural dynamic: it reflects persistent economic insecurity, lasting mistrust of institutions, and a pessimistic view of the future, particularly since the centralisation of executive power in 2021.



The results indicate that the intention to leave the country is not limited to economic factors, but is based on a set of interdependent motives: professional dissatisfaction, perception of government performance, frustration linked to a lack of prospects, and a transition to post-materialist values. The logistic regression model confirms the importance of gender (higher tendency among women), age (stronger intention among 25–39-year-olds), and country of origin (Algerian academics are 2.8 times more likely to migrate than their Tunisian counterparts). These trends highlight a double divide: generational and gender.

In terms of destinations, academics from both countries express a strong preference for Northern countries, particularly France, Germany, Canada, and the United States. These choices reflect both the search for better economic conditions and the quest for recognition, dignity, and personal fulfilment.

Although based on solid quantitative data from the Arab Barometer and SAHWA, the study would benefit from incorporating qualitative approaches to better understand the subjective and narrative dimensions of the migration project. Expanding to other national contexts and conducting longitudinal analysis would also help to better understand the contemporary transformations in the desire for mobility among Maghreb elites who are educated locally but look to other places perceived as more promising.

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