

The Theoretical and Legal Framework of Startups in Algerian Legislation

الإطار النظري والقانوني للمؤسسات الناشئة في التشريع الجزائري

Hammas Omar¹

¹University Centre of Maghnia , Mediterranean Laboratory for Legal Studies, Algeria,
o.hammas@cu-maghnia.dz

Received: 16/10 /2025

Accepted: 19/07 /2026

Published: September /2026

الملخص:

تعد المؤسسات الناشئة المحرك الرئيسي لتحقيق النمو الاقتصادي والاجتماعي وكذا البديل التنموي الجديد من أجل دفع عجلة التنمية والذي تبنته كثيرا من الدول على غرار الجزائر. ومن هذا المنطلق أولت هذه الأخيرة للمؤسسات الناشئة أهمية بالغة، خاصة بعد التطور الكبير الذي شهده هذا النوع من المؤسسات على المستوى الدولي، فبعدما كان دورها محدودا في هذه التنمية ومحصورا في بعض الأنشطة، أصبح يشكل العامل الأساسي في النشاط الاقتصادي الوطني، ومحور استراتيجية "الجزائر الجديدة" الهادفة إلى التحرر التدريجي من التبعية للمحروقات، وقد تجسد هذا الاهتمام في إطلاق إطار قانوني ومؤسسي خاص ومحفز. وتتجلى أهمية هذه المؤسسات في قدرتها الفريدة على خلق القيمة المضافة، توليد فرص العمل النوعية وتسريع التحول الرقمي والتكنولوجي في الاقتصاد. تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى تسليط الضوء على الإطار النظري للمؤسسات الناشئة ونظامها القانوني في التشريع الجزائري.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المؤسسات الناشئة؛ الإطار النظري؛ الإطار القانوني؛ التشريع الجزائري؛ النمو.

Abstract:

Startups have become a major driver of economic and social development and represent a new model of development adopted by many countries, including Algeria. Recognizing their growing importance, particularly in light of their remarkable success at the international level, Algeria has placed increasing emphasis on promoting startups. While their contribution to development was once limited to specific sectors, startups have now become a key component of national economic activity and a central pillar of the "New Algeria" strategy, which aims to gradually reduce dependence on hydrocarbons. This interest has been reflected in the establishment of a dedicated legal and institutional framework. This paper examines the theoretical foundations of startups and analyzes the legal framework governing them under Algerian legislation.

Keywords: Startups; Theoretical Framework; Legal Framework; Algerian Legislation; Economic Growth.

Introduction

On numerous national and international occasions, startups are widely regarded as a cornerstone of economic and social development. They have also emerged as a new development path adopted by several industrialized countries.

In this context, Algeria established the Ministry of Small Enterprises, Startups, and the Knowledge Economy, reflecting the importance the government attaches to these enterprises, particularly in light of the significant growth they have experienced both globally and within the national economy.

It is important to note that startups face numerous challenges brought about by globalization, including exposure to both domestic and international competition, as well as rapid changes in market dynamics. Given their growing and positive impact, startups now play an essential role in economic development.

This study examines the concept of startups, the factors behind their success, and the legal framework governing them. From this perspective, the main research question can be formulated as follows: To what extent has the Algerian legislation responded to the emergence of startups?

This question gives rise to a set of sub-questions, including the following: What does the startup landscape in Algeria look like, and what are the realities surrounding it? To address these questions, the research is divided into two main sections. The first examines the theoretical framework of startups under Algerian legislation, while the second explores the legal environment in which they operate.

I. Theoretical Framework of Startups under Algerian Legislation

In recent years, the concept of startups has received significant attention as a model reflecting the dynamics of globalization and economic transformation. This development is largely linked to the increasing influence of technology on economic activities, which has contributed to the emergence of the knowledge economy and the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Some countries, including Algeria, have attempted to define the term, particularly from a legal perspective. However, there is still no consensus among scholars and professionals regarding a clear and comprehensive definition.

In this section, we will explore the concept of startups in the first subsection and examine the components of their success in the second subsection.

I.1. The Concept of a Startup

This subsection reviews several existing definitions before arriving at a clearer understanding of what a startup is.

I.1.1. Defining a Startup

A startup is a unique type of business enterprise. The well-known businessman Steve Blank defines a startup as “an organization built to search for a repeatable and scalable business model.”

Generally speaking, startups are businesses in their early stages that have the potential to expand rapidly. The scalability of a system, model, or function refers to its ability to operate effectively in the face of increasing demand. The European Economic and Social Committee states that, although all startups fall under the category of SMEs due to variations in structure and objectives, not all SMEs are startups. Additionally, the initial investment required to expand a business is generally much higher for startups than for SMEs in general, and it may even reach millions.¹

A newly created company is not necessarily a startup. Likewise, it is not essential for a company to focus on technology, secure investment, or adopt a particular format. Growth is the defining characteristic. Once growth is present, everything else commonly associated with startups tends to follow.²

While startups may face unexpected and recurring setbacks, they also have the potential for extraordinary growth. They serve as a valuable case study for examining the creation and development of a business. Rapid feedback, high profits, bold ideas that would be considered too risky for traditional businesses, and fast growth attract both scholars and entrepreneurs who seek to understand the mechanisms and risks surrounding this relatively new business phenomenon.³

Steve Blank also describes what is commonly referred to as a startup as “a temporary organization in search of a scalable and repeatable business model that allows exponential growth.”⁴ The Algerian legislator, on the other hand, did not provide a precise definition of a startup and instead linked its establishment to compliance with a set of conditions that will be discussed in the second section.

I.1.2. Characteristics of a Startup

A startup is a group of individuals who have come together to pursue a common objective through remarkable ingenuity and an unconventional business culture.

The following definitions make it possible to identify the main characteristics of startups:

A startup is an emerging company.

A startup is a temporary entity.

A widely accepted definition of a startup describes it as a temporary company created to identify a scalable and repeatable business model. Scholars generally agree that, during its early stages, a new company often lacks a coherent and sustainable business model capable of supporting the organization’s long-term objectives.⁵

The Startup Business Model

Steve Blank once said, “No business plan survives first contact with a customer.”

Regardless of the size of the company, from small startups to multinational conglomerates, Groesser and Jovy consider the business model an integral component of the enterprise. The relationship between supply and demand is a key interaction. Usually, the business model is represented visually for convenience and clarity.

One of the simpler visual representations is provided by Afuah: value delivered to customers, resources and activities, market segmentation, growth method, and revenue model constitute the model’s main components.

Four interrelated components form Johnson et al.’s business model and together shape and deliver value. These components are the profit formula, key resources, key processes, and the customer value proposition, which is considered the most essential. Gassmann et al. present the client, the value proposition, the value chain, and the profit mechanism in a triangular model with four dimensions: three vertices and a centre of gravity. Because the visualization is very simple, it is more suitable for workshops than for detailed systematization.

The Osterwalder and Pigneur Canvas is the most widely used method for visualizing a business model. It is also used as a research tool since its nine elements provide a balance between synthesis and a comprehensive overview.⁶

Business Model Viability: This indicates that the startup is searching for a model that can be produced on a larger scale or used elsewhere. It must also be viable and useful, meaning that it generates profit and that the startup understands how to obtain it.

Scalability (for accelerated growth): When one or more models exist, both the number of clients and earnings increase simultaneously. Compared to traditional institutions, the emerging firm can grow quickly due to its development potential and the presence of a viable business model.

The following table lists these attributes:

Table 1.Characteristics of startups

Dimension	Characteristics
Organization	Small-scale organization Young enterprise Homogeneous environment Informal structure Limited differentiation Centralized structure
Ownership	Owner-manager Intuitive decision-making Direct supervision
Strategy and Innovation	Niche market strategy Preference for risk-taking to achieve gains Rapid innovation First-mover or second-mover positioning Lack of product research
Financial Resources	Funding from personal savings or relatives

Source:

Nurcahyo,Rahmat, Ilhamsyah, Mohammad Akbar, Sihono Djoko, Gabriel, (2018), Characteristics of Startup Company and Its Strategy: Analysis of Indonesia Fashion Startup Companies, International Journal of Engineering & Technology, Vol 7, N°(2.34), P.44. doi:10.14419/ijet.v7i2.34.13908.

I.1.3. The Distinction Between Established Businesses and Startups

Startups and established businesses differ in that the former originates the idea, while the latter assumes the management and operation of the project after the economic business plan has been implemented. Participation in a startup also entails taking risks and facing uncertainty. Investors choose whether to support such ventures by weighing the potential for substantial returns if the initiative succeeds against the possibility of failure. The experience gained through this process is often valuable and enriching.

Furthermore, startups often experience a series of irregular setbacks and periods of progress during the period between launch and growth. Once they reach maturity, they tend to continue developing. This trajectory mirrors that of traditional companies, which progress through the stages of launch, growth, and maturity before eventually entering a period of decline.

In addition, startups typically target a broader market than traditional businesses. This means that they offer products that appeal to a larger customer base, unlike smaller ventures that operate within more limited markets.

Aside from the difference in market scope, there is also a distinction in funding. Startups rely on venture capital, angel investors, or similar sources, as banks are generally hesitant to finance high-risk enterprises. In contrast, traditional businesses often obtain funding through bank loans or government grants.

The following curve highlights the differences between startups and established businesses.

I.2. Elements Necessary for Startup Success

Establishing a new business is a highly challenging undertaking, and matters become even more complex for emerging organizations that must grow rapidly in untested or uncertain markets. To succeed, these companies require certain components, which are as follows:

I.2.1. Having an Original Idea

The first and most fundamental requirement that a startup owner must possess is creativity or innovation. This is a key factor in the success of any project and is reflected in the entrepreneur's willingness and ability to develop novel solutions to problems. Reaching truly unique and unconventional solutions that remain grounded in objective facts requires divergent thinking and intellectual development that supports the innovator.

Innovation plays a central role in entrepreneurship. It is the process through which an entrepreneur either develops new resources capable of generating income or enhances existing resources to increase their capacity to do so.

Innovation is often subjective; what one person considers novel and groundbreaking may be familiar or outdated to another. The question, "What is it that innovation processes seek to change or improve?" has served as a useful guide in examining the core focus of different innovation approaches, despite the inherent subjectivity involved in recognizing and classifying them.

John Bessant and Joe Tidd's "4Ps" model is a useful tool for this type of analysis. It expands upon the theory of successful innovation through high-quality exchange and identifies four main categories in which this change may occur:

Product innovation refers to modifications made to the goods and services provided by a company.

Process innovation refers to changes in the methods through which goods and services are produced or delivered.

Position innovation refers to changes in the context in which goods and services are presented.

Paradigm innovation refers to changes in the underlying mental models that influence the company's actions.⁷

I.2.2. The Business Owner and Their Traits

The business owner is regarded as a primary factor in a startup's success due to their personal traits and attributes, including their drive for success, willingness to take risks, and inventiveness. These qualities also include decisiveness, loyalty, initiative, goal orientation, perseverance, self-reliance, responsibility, diligence, and social skills, as well as honesty, fairness, adherence to values, politeness, consideration, and accuracy.⁸

Startup founders typically possess a high level of education and come from a variety of scientific backgrounds and fields. However, what distinguishes them are the personal traits that enable them to use their skills to transform creative ideas into actual job opportunities. Successful entrepreneurs and founders are known for their willingness to take risks, embrace challenges, and accept failure.⁹

I.2.3. The Importance of Support and Accompaniment Tools for New Businesses

Entrepreneurship is considered one of the foundations of economic growth in any nation. This approach is reflected through innovation, the reorganization of social and economic structures to take advantage of specific circumstances and resources, risk-taking, and the acceptance of failure. It is a process aimed at creating something unique and valuable by investing the necessary time and effort, assuming financial, psychological, and social risks, and obtaining rewards in the form of monetary profit and personal fulfilment.

As a result, entrepreneurship seeks to explain how opportunities for the development of goods and services that do not yet exist are identified, pursued, and utilized. For this reason, it is regarded as a crucial component in the success of emerging firms.¹⁰

Financial support must also not be overlooked, as it is considered one of the key components in the success of startups. Several organizations provide this type of assistance, including the National Microcredit Management Agency (ANGEM), the National Unemployment Insurance Fund (CNAC), and the National Agency for Youth Employment Support (ANSEJ), whose name and responsibilities were changed in November 2020 to become the National Agency for Support and Entrepreneurship Development (ANADE).

The Algerian government organized the National Seminar for Emerging Enterprises, Algeria Disrupt 2020, at the beginning of October 2020. More than a thousand participants attended, including representatives from associations, universities, research centers, and startups, as well as representatives of government and financial institutions, economic operators, and experts. During the event, the National Fund for Financing Emerging Enterprises was officially established with the aim of empowering young entrepreneurs by

enabling them to bypass banks and administrative bureaucracy. One of the most significant outcomes of this meeting was that it marked the first event of its kind in Algeria.

II. The Legal Framework for Startups

Startups have become an urgent necessity in light of the global changes currently taking place, given their positive impact on economic growth and their role in protecting economies from major systemic shocks. This shift has prompted many countries to place increasing emphasis on this type of enterprise.

In this context, Algeria has sought to develop the environment for startups through the adoption of Executive Decree No. 20-254, which sets out the procedures and conditions for their establishment.

II.1 Conditions for Granting the Startup Label

An enterprise is considered a “startup” if it is subject to Algerian law and meets the following criteria:

The enterprise must be incorporated under Algerian law.

The age of the enterprise must not exceed eight (8) years.

A natural or legal person may obtain the startup label if the conditions stipulated in Article 12 of Executive Decree No. 20-254 are fulfilled. All procedures are carried out electronically through the national online portal for startups. The company seeking to obtain the label must submit an application accompanied by the following documents:

A copy of the company’s articles of association, which formalize the establishment of the startup as a company, must be provided. The company’s articles of association are registered with the National Commercial Registry Centre. The corresponding legal notice is primarily published in daily newspapers.

A copy of the commercial register, as well as the tax and statistical identification card, must also be submitted. These documents reflect the requirement to register the activities of startups in the commercial register, with the aim of combating the growing informal economy.

In addition, a certificate of enrolment in the National Social Insurance Fund must be provided. This certificate applies to salaried workers and must be accompanied by a nominal list of employees. This condition encourages business owners to employ workers within a legal framework.

A certificate of enrolment in the National Social Insurance Fund for non-salaried workers must also be provided. The startup is required to submit a detailed business plan, along with copies of its financial statements for the current year, including its current accounts. This requirement is considered less restrictive than previous regulations, which required financial statements for the previous three years. Furthermore, the scientific and technical qualifications and experience of the employees of the startup must be presented. These include the certificates and achievements obtained by employees in the specific field of activity of the startup applying for the startup label.

It should be noted that there are also non-compulsory documents, or documents required only where necessary, as stipulated by the Algerian legislator. These include any intellectual property document or equivalent award obtained. Multiple copies of such documents may be provided, depending on the specialization and the issuing authority. They may concern copyright or related rights, as every creator of a literary or artistic work is granted intellectual property rights, or a patent issued by the Algerian National Institute of Industrial Property. The submission of these documents remains optional, and they may or may not be included in the application file.¹¹

After completing the required documents, the application, together with the aforementioned file, is submitted to the National Committee for Granting the Startup Label. According to Article 13 of the decree, the applicant receives a response within 30 days from the date of filing the application. Any delay in submitting some of the required documents suspends this period, and the applicant must provide the missing documents within 15 days from the date of notification by the National Committee, under penalty of rejection of the application. If the application is rejected, the decision must be justified, and the applicant must be notified electronically, as stipulated in Article 13.

The National Committee may reconsider its decision upon a justified request submitted by the applicant. The applicant shall be notified of the final response electronically within a period not exceeding 30 days from the date of filing the request.¹²

In other words, the law authorizes the same committee to review both the initial application and the grievance submitted against its rejection decision. This creates a situation in which the committee acts both as an adversary to the complainant and as the authority deciding on the grievance, which appears inconsistent. Such an arrangement makes the possibility of the committee reversing its own rejection decision very limited, since, in administrative practice, the review of grievances is generally entrusted to a higher authority than the one that issued the initial decision.

Once approval for granting the label has been obtained and published through the electronic portal, the startup officially acquires this designation and becomes eligible to benefit from the support measures provided by the mechanisms and bodies dedicated to assisting startups, thereby ensuring their continuity and success in achieving their objectives.

II.2 The Actual Situation of Algerian Startups

Startups are recognized as vital catalysts for national economic dynamism, going beyond their role as mere job creators. In addition to generating permanent employment opportunities, startups serve as effective tools for promoting overall market competition. By introducing disruptive technologies, new business models, and agile methodologies, they encourage established companies to innovate, thereby improving efficiency and services across the market.

Moreover, to recognize and encourage this vital economic role, startups benefit from specific privileges that facilitate their operations and help them achieve their objectives. These incentives generally include tax exemptions, preferential financing schemes, and simplified administrative procedures, all designed to reduce initial burdens and allow startups to focus on innovation and sustainable growth.

However, it is important to note that the successful achievement of these objectives, whether related to job creation, market competitiveness, or commercial performance, depends on several factors that are often considered underlying causes of failure or inefficiency. The broader macroeconomic environment, the quality of the support ecosystem, regulatory flexibility, and the availability of risk capital are all critical external and internal factors that ultimately determine whether a startup can transform its theoretical potential into lasting long-term success.

II.2.1 Advantages for New Businesses

Within the legislative framework, startups are granted a special status. By obtaining the label, these enterprises acquire legal recognition that entitles them to a range of benefits, the most notable of which are:

Access to tax exemptions: Under legislation enacted by the Algerian legislator, startups are exempt from the professional activity tax, gross income tax, corporate profits tax, and the single flat-rate tax. In addition, startups benefit from exemptions related to value-added tax on equipment purchased for the completion of their investment projects.

Exemption from capital increase and registration fees related to articles of incorporation, along with facilitated access to investment-oriented real estate, as local authorities allocate part of their industrial zones and activity areas specifically for startups.¹³

Since the interests of the state require these institutions to be capable of competing in public transactions, a portion of such transactions is allocated in their favour, granting startups a special privilege that helps them gain experience.

II.2.2 Difficulties Faced by Startups

In recent years, startups have become one of the most widely discussed topics within Algeria's business community. It should be noted that Algeria was relatively late in launching such initiatives, particularly in light of the numerous technological challenges and the limited government funding allocated to scientific research and development.

Despite the considerable efforts made to support startups and the important role they play in Algeria, these enterprises suffer from several shortcomings and face numerous challenges, which can be summarized as follows :

- Bureaucracy in the incorporation process is one of the main obstacles hindering the creation of startups. For example, while establishing a business in Algeria may take nearly a month, in the United States, it can be completed in a single day.¹⁴
- Weak financing and a lack of venture capital investment stem from the relatively recent and limited nature of Algeria's venture capital sector, which began developing in 2004 with the creation of a risk capital fund for small and medium-sized enterprises. In the same year, the Investment Loan Guarantee

Fund was established through cooperation between public authorities and banks, with a capital of 3.5 billion Algerian dinars, as announced by treasury and banking institutions.

- Another major challenge faced by startups is the lack of entrepreneurial motivation, often resulting from the formation of dysfunctional work teams. This issue is aggravated by the absence of professional counselling, support, and rehabilitation organizations. Furthermore, Algerian products struggle to compete in key markets due to low productivity and failure to meet international standards. Insufficient government funding for scientific research, combined with the physical isolation of research centres and universities, limits innovation. In addition, technological backwardness and the inability to adapt to changes in the international business environment further weaken the growth potential of startups.

Conclusion:

Startups are considered a major driver of economic growth, as their role extends beyond merely increasing production levels and revenues to include renewal within the economic structure. Like many countries, Algeria has sought to achieve comprehensive economic development across all sectors by creating support mechanisms that enable investors to access the necessary resources and promote growth. However, despite its objectives, the country has not yet achieved the desired outcomes. To move forward, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Promote innovation and support the outcomes of scientific research.
- Give greater attention to startups, especially those related to technology.
- Provide stronger incentives to encourage investment and interest in this field.
- Benefit from the experiences of developed countries in fostering startups.

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