

University Graduates in Algeria: What Future Awaits Them Amid Escalating Unemployment?

Fatma Noui^{1,*}

¹ University center of Barika (Algeria)

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Abstract:

This study aims to highlight the issue of youth unemployment among graduates and postgraduates in Algeria, through an analytical and descriptive examination of the significant developments in the higher education sector, including the policies implemented for the employment of university graduates. The research also analyzes and interprets various data related to higher education and its outputs, as well as the labor market's capacity to absorb these graduates. Several factors have exacerbated this issue, primarily due to declining planning levels.

The phenomenon of unemployed graduates began to emerge with the lack of real planning by higher education for the local market's needs and orientations, resulting in high unemployment levels among Algerian university graduates, coinciding with a marked decline in the quality of university education. The importance of this study lies in pointing out the necessity of reforming higher education, as it plays a significant and effective role in promoting the social and economic development of the country, which requires the formation of a qualified and competent workforce in line with the new labor market needs.

Keywords: Employment; Higher Education; Labor Market; Unemployment; University Degrees.

1- Introduction

The university occupies a central role in catalyzing progress and steering developmental initiatives, charged with the responsibility of cultivating the necessary frameworks for development across diverse sectors. The prosperity of the nation is intrinsically linked to the university, evident in the need to bolster and evolve the relationship between educational institutions and society.

Positioned at the zenith of educational influence, the university stands as a paramount force in shaping societal dynamics. There is a consensus among specialists, experts, and the broader public opinion that universities must enhance their engagement with the wider community. Higher education, representing the culmination of the educational journey, equips the labor market with a cadre of highly educated and specialized human capital. These individuals are poised to adapt to and navigate the

* Corresponding author: e-mail: ghounane.nadia@mail.com .

technological and economic shifts on both local and global scales, thereby facilitating the anticipated economic growth.

In recent decades, Algeria has witnessed an escalation in unemployment rates among university degree holders, surpassing those with lesser or no formal qualifications. This surge in unemployment is attributed to an increase in the number of graduates coupled with a decline in the quality of educational outcomes, which do not meet the evolving demands of the labor market.

Furthermore, limited overseas employment opportunities have exacerbated this trend, highlighting a disconnect not merely with the labor market's capacity but also with the caliber of educational delivery and the resultant quality of higher education outputs. The labor market's inability to absorb the burgeoning number of graduates, compounded by prevailing economic challenges, has become increasingly apparent.

This study endeavors to examine the graduate phenomenon both quantitatively and qualitatively by analyzing the realities associated with university educational institutions and the labor market. It seeks to evaluate the educational outputs and the requisite skills demanded by the labor market, utilizing diverse data sources and annual reports from the National Office of Statistics concerning economic activity, employment, and unemployment, as well as its publications on higher education.

The objective is to provide scientific guidance to decision-makers, educational institutions, the labor market, and the graduates themselves. Central to our inquiry are the following questions: What developments have transpired in the higher education sector as indicated by statistics from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research concerning university graduates in Algeria? Will the strategies implemented in the higher education sector suffice to secure employment for the growing number of graduates, or will the labor market continue to struggle to accommodate a significant portion of them?

Study Objectives

- To monitor the developments and changes recently observed in the higher education sector in Algeria.
- To obtain the latest statistics related to the higher education sector and the labor market.
- To highlight the negative relationship between the increase in the number of students and graduates and the relative decrease in the number of jobs offered in the labor market, which is continuously rising.

Study Significance

The lack of a formative and professional character in the education system and the lack of coordination between educational policies and employment have been causes of

the imbalance between supply and demand in the labor market. The significance of this study is in highlighting that investment in the education sector needs to be reviewed so that quality and excellence become the criteria, not merely quantity. Hence, there arose a need to reconsider the state policies towards the higher education sector.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive analytical approach that allowed us to monitor the developments within the higher education sector, using available statistics about the number of students, professors, researchers, and academic institutions nationwide, with a focus on university graduates and their employment status.

1. Concept Definitions

2.1-Concept of the University

The university is delineated as the apex of the educational and scientific hierarchy within society, entrusted with the dual responsibilities of professionally preparing individuals and engaging in scientific research that underpins comprehensive development initiatives. Additionally, universities play a pivotal role in cultivating researchers, contributing fundamentally to the societal and developmental matrix (Mohamed, no year, p. 4).

2.2- Concept of Higher Education

Higher education encompasses the academic pursuits undertaken at universities or collegiate institutes subsequent to obtaining a high school diploma. These institutions offer programs ranging from two to four years, marking the culmination of formal education.

Higher education involves a structured regimen of training or directed education at establishments like universities, colleges, academies, each recognized by state authorities as bona fide institutions of higher learning. The terminologies used to describe these institutions, university, college, academy, academic institute, and graduate school, vary and often lead to discrepancies in understanding across different national contexts (Namour, 2011-2012, p. 14).

2.3- Concept of Unemployment

Unemployment, as defined by the International Labour Organization, identifies an individual who is ready, willing, and actively searching for employment but is unable to secure a position, thus lacking a means of livelihood. Economically, unemployment is quantified as the discrepancy between the labor force's supply and its employment at prevailing wage rates within the labor market over a specific timeframe.

This condition signifies a segment of the workforce remaining idle, despite the availability and eagerness to work. The unemployment rate is thus calculated as the

proportion of unemployed individuals to the total workforce within a defined period (Al-Seriti, Naja, 2008, pp. 219-321).

2. Higher Education Sector in Algeria

3.1-Development of Higher Education in Algeria

The inception of structured higher education in Algeria traces back to the post-independence era, influenced significantly by various national policies and plans through the country's political, economic, and social evolution. The cornerstone of formal higher education governance in Algeria was established with Decree No. 63-121, dated April 18, 1963, which structured the Ministry of National Education.

This decree initiated the formation of directorates, notably the Directorate of Higher Education, representing the nascent administrative framework for higher education and scientific research services. This foundational phase spanned from the attainment of independence to the establishment of the inaugural ministry specifically dedicated to higher education and scientific research, marked by the establishment of universities in major Algerian cities.

Between 1970 and 1997, a dedicated ministry for higher education and scientific research was established, leading to a significant reform initiative launched in 1971. This reform mandated that the university system undergo profound self-assessment and initiate comprehensive transformations beginning in 2002.

The expansion of the university framework included the addition of new universities, university centers, and extensions such as higher schools and institutes across forty provinces. This widespread distribution aimed to achieve a regional balance, thereby enhancing the structural integrity and democratic essence of the higher education sector (El-Zahi, 2013-2014, pp. 237-248).

In recent years, a multitude of projects and programs designed to advance higher education and refine educational methodologies have been executed. Acknowledging the extensive efforts required for such reforms, in planning, implementation, oversight, and evaluation, as well as the necessity for resource mobilization, the commitment to transition towards the LMD system (Bachelor-Master-Doctorate) has persisted. This shift adheres to a methodical approach that eschews rushed and unilateral decisions, opting instead for realism, consultation, and phased execution.

3.2-Characteristics of Higher Education in Algeria

3.2.1-Private Sector:

Since 2008, there have been initiatives to establish private universities in Algeria. However, the criteria stipulated by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research for their foundation have posed significant challenges, whether in terms of financial assurances or administrative structuring.

To date, only one proposal has been advanced to establish a private university, yet the prerequisites have not been fully satisfied. Currently, no private higher education institutions exist within the nation, despite the legal feasibility.

3.2.2-Centralized System

The Algerian higher education system is markedly centralized, as evidenced by the formalized nature of the system, extensive state involvement at all tiers, and the inclusion of government members on all institutional boards, coupled with the absence of private sector engagement. This pronounced centralization is likely to exert various impacts on the university landscape.

3.2.3-Higher Education Reform

A principal objective of ongoing reforms is to enhance the professional integration of graduates. The employability of graduates is regarded as a crucial metric for assessing the quality of training and its social and economic returns.

3.3-Types of Higher Education Institutions in Algeria

Algeria is home to a diverse array of higher education institutions, including:

- Universities
- University Centers
- Schools: This category encompasses regular higher schools, national higher schools, preparatory schools, and integrated preparatory schools.

A distinctive aspect of the Algerian higher education system is its integration of university centers alongside traditional universities. These centers, while autonomously functioning under the supervision of the Ministry alone, maintain affiliations with established universities and have the potential to evolve into independent universities in the future.

Consequently, they serve as pivotal hubs for fostering higher education development at the local level. The operational structures, including the scientific and administrative councils of university centers, mirror those of universities, facilitating a unified approach to higher education governance (World Bank, 2012, pp. 6-7).

National schools and institutes play a crucial role in the training of engineers, with programs tailored to specific sectors or extended to encompass broader academic areas. Additionally, higher education faculties contribute significantly to the training of primary and secondary school educators.

These schools are managed by a board of directors, with a leadership structure that includes a director, a deputy director, a secretary-general, and a library director, all supported by scientific evaluation bodies.

3.4-Higher Education in Numbers

Over the years, there has been a notable shift in gender dynamics within the educational sector in Algeria. Historically, the participation of females in secondary and higher education was minimal, with females constituting only a fifth of high school students in 1963-1964. However, this figure has dramatically increased, with females now representing about 60% of the student population.

This trend was first observed in 1995 when the number of girls in secondary schools surpassed that of boys, with females comprising half of the 853,000 students. By 2010, this proportion had risen to 58%, and among students in their final year of secondary education, females accounted for more than 62% of the cohort in the 2010/2011 academic year (Ouaddah-Bedidi, 2016, p. 7).

The student population in Algerian higher education has experienced exponential growth, from a mere 2,500 students in 1962 to approximately 405,000 by the 1998-1999 academic year. This increase reflects the cumulative total of students who have graduated from Algerian universities since 1962.

The burgeoning demand for higher education, a common trend in many developing countries including Algeria, has necessitated a focus on quantitative expansion, often at the expense of educational quality. This issue has been exacerbated by the rapid increase in student numbers at Algerian universities, which escalated from 24,334 in the 1971-1972 academic year to 61,410 by 1979-1980, and then to 153,043 between 1986-1987, more than doubling in just six years due to sustained government efforts (El-Zahi, 2013-2014, p. 247).

According to the National Office of Statistics and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the number of students enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programs was about 372,647 and 19,225 respectively during the 1998-1999 academic year.

By the 2017-2018 academic year, these numbers had escalated to 1,447,064 and 76,921 respectively. The number of degree holders also saw a significant rise from 44,531 in 1998-1999 to 303,100 by 2016-2017. For the University of Continuing Education, enrollments in pre-degree and degree programs increased from 14,281 and 25,569 respectively in 1998-1999, to 73,198 and 53,276 by 2016-2017.

The number of degree holders from the continuing education programs grew from 3,019 to 7,999, while the number of students enrolled in degree programs outside the Ministry of Higher Education increased from 9,940 in 1998-1999 to 17,267 by 2017-2018, with degree holders numbering 4,078 in 1998-1999 and approximately 4,915 by 2016-2017.

4. Evolution of the Labor Market in Algeria

4.1-Population of Working Age

Despite the decelerating growth rate of the working-age population, it remains a significant segment of the overall demographic structure, comprising about 4.2% of the total population between 1980 and 1985 and decreasing to 2.9% between 2000 and 2004, from a peak in 1970.

Starting in 2010, the proportion of the working-age population is anticipated to stabilize at between 67% and 70% for several years. This demographic shift has been a pivotal factor in driving substantial developments, which, coupled with high unemployment rates, have contributed to the proliferation of poverty (Boukila, Talahite, 2007, p. 3).

Furthermore, the proportion of the population aged between 16 and 29 years is projected to decrease significantly, from 25% of the total population to less than 20% by 2040. Consequently, fewer than one in five people in the Maghreb will be attending high school, enrolled in university, or entering the job market for the first time.

Moreover, the segment of the population of working age will experience a slight decline, accounting for 67.9% of the population in 2010 and projected to represent approximately 64% by 2040. The workforce is expected to increase by 26% during this period, from 53 to 67 million people, who will face intensified competition in the labor market, especially individuals entering their twenties during the period from 2000 to 2025, a time characterized by large demographic cohorts reaching working and marriageable ages (Kateb, 2014, pp. 7-9).

4.2-Economic Activity Rate

Despite the decelerating growth rate of the working-age population, it remains a significant segment of the overall demographic structure, comprising about 4.2% of the total population between 1980 and 1985 and decreasing to 2.9% between 2000 and 2004, from a peak in 1970. Starting in 2010, the proportion of the working-age population is anticipated to stabilize at between 67% and 70% for several years.

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4.3-Unemployment Rates

It has been observed that unemployment rates in Algeria doubled from 1990 to 1997, impacting 20% of the population, with a particularly severe effect on the youth. According to the National Office of Statistics (ONS), these rates experienced a significant decrease in subsequent years, from 21.4% in 1987, peaking at around 28% in 1998, and then gradually reducing to 11.7% by 2018. Thus, while job creation has been identified as a partial solution, it sits within a broader context of developmental challenges that Algeria continues to face (Boukila, Talahite, 2007, pp. 3-10).

5. Unemployment Among Higher Education Degree Holders in Algeria

The employment landscape in Algeria has become increasingly precarious since the prior demographic boom, with jobs becoming progressively scarce. From 650,000 unemployed individuals in 1984, the number escalated to 1,800,000 in 1989 and further to 2,100,000 by 1995. Among 100 workers, only 31 are able to secure employment while the remaining 69 find themselves unemployed.

The challenge in Algeria is compounded by integration issues, where over 63% of the unemployed are seeking their first job, and a staggering 62.5% of youths aged 15-19 are considered unemployed. Notably, 85% of job seekers are under 30 years old. This widespread unemployment affects youth across all educational levels, leading to a crisis among degree holders, a situation that is expected to deteriorate further.

With demographic growth, the employed population was projected to increase by 3.6% by 2010 (from 4.9 million in 1985 to 12 million in 2010). To accommodate the influx of new job seekers, it is estimated that approximately 300,000 new jobs need to be created over the next two decades as the country grapples with an exceedingly high unemployment rate (Mutin, 2009, pp. 11-15).

The discrepancy between educational qualifications and employment opportunities can result in diminishing returns from education, as many find themselves in jobs that do not align with their academic specializations. The educational system, criticized for being stereotypical and underdeveloped, has contributed to an oversupply of graduates, particularly those with mid-level qualifications, which exceeds labor market demands. This misalignment has led to a surplus of graduates in some specialities while others face deficits, failing to meet the labor market's requirements without corresponding demand (Belkacem, Khedadmia, 2011, pp. 10-11).

According to the National Office of Statistics, the data presented in Table 3 highlights that unemployment rates are notably higher among university graduates compared to those with other educational levels and vocational training certificate holders.

In 2010, the unemployment rate for university graduates was estimated at 20.3%, decreasing to 17.8% by 2018. Similarly, the rate for those with higher education certificates experienced a slight decline from 21.4% to 18.5% during the same period. Conversely, the rate among vocational training certificate holders increased from 12.5% to 13.7%, while for those without any certificates, the rate decreased from 7.3% to 9.0%.

6. Conclusion

Universities, as pivotal national educational institutions, are currently facing a multitude of challenges. These challenges stem from the evolving international landscape and include global economic, social, political, and scientific transformations, along with shifting labor market requirements. The sheer volume of university graduates now surpasses the capacity of the existing system to fully integrate them into the workforce. Consequently, it has become crucial for governmental bodies to devise alternative strategies to accommodate this well-educated demographic, on whom the state has invested significantly.

From this perspective, the Algerian government has embraced a strategy predicated on an economic approach that focuses on developing a skilled workforce and generating thousands of new jobs annually. Nonetheless, this approach alone proves inadequate; it necessitates the establishment of mechanisms that ensure higher education policies are synchronized with the growth and demands of the local labor market.

The educational system's lack of a formative and professional character, coupled with the absence of alignment between educational policies and employment opportunities, has fueled the imbalance between labor supply and demand. It is essential to acknowledge that investment in Algeria's education sector requires a fundamental overhaul, where the focus shifts from quantity to quality and excellence. This change is imperative to elevate the benchmarks within the sector.

This situation underscores the urgent need to reevaluate state policies concerning the higher education sector, aiming to create a synergy between the academic sphere and the professional world. Such an alignment would help to bridge the gap between the inputs of higher education and its outputs, and what the labor market effectively needs in terms of a skilled workforce.

To address the prevailing high unemployment rates, it is imperative to find innovative solutions that are tailored to the specific needs of the Algerian job market and to foster local economic development. Achieving this objective will require

maximizing the utilization of human talents that have been nurtured through scientific and professional training, thereby harnessing their potential to contribute effectively to the nation's progress.

Recommendations

- The field should be opened for private investment to contribute to the national effort in education, as well as relying on digital conglomerates to handle the high student enrollments.
- To adopt a proactive vision regarding the continuous review of pedagogical programs at all levels to keep pace with developments in knowledge and professions.
- To create a balance between the academic world and the labor market to narrow the gap between the inputs of higher education and its outputs and the labor market requirements.
- Continuous improvement of the sector's services in its core missions of higher education and scientific research.
- Rationalization of human, financial, and infrastructural resources, taking into account the significant increase in the current and future workforce.

Appendix of Tables and Figures

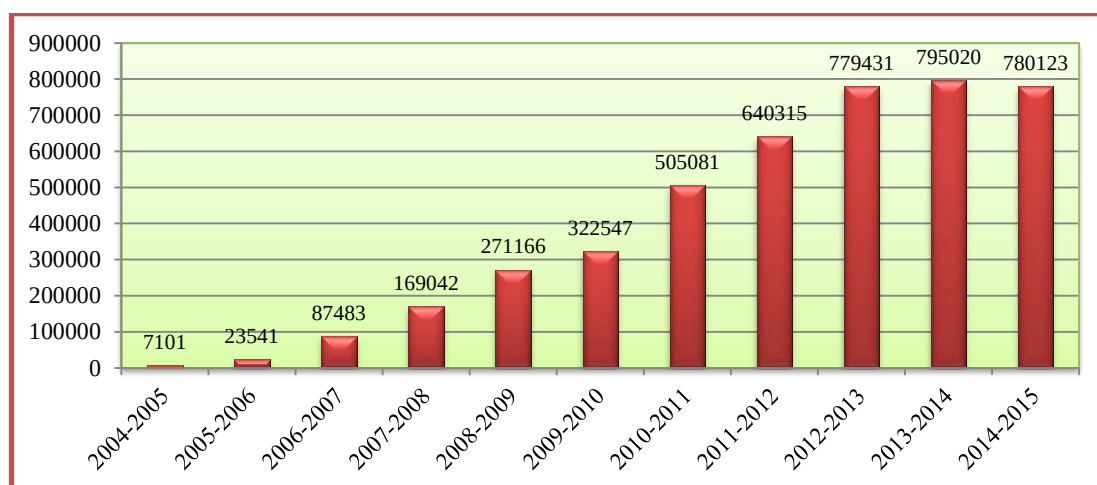
Table 1: Student Enrollment and Degree Holders in Algeria (1998-2018)

Academic Year	1998-1999	2000-2001	2003-2004	2004-2005	2007-2008	2014-2015	2016-2017	2017-2018
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research								
Undergraduate	372,647	466,084	622,980	721,833	952,067	1,165,040	1,416,045	1,447,064
Postgraduate	19,225	22,533	30,221	33,630	48,764	76,510	76,202	76,921
Degree Holders	44,531	65,192	91,828	-	146,889	311,976	303,100	-
University of Continuing Education								
Pre-Degree	14,281	19,783	28,670	23,273	29,764	48,505	73,198	-
Degree	25,569	33,043	34,581	36,364	42,628	47,924	53,276	70,170
Degree Holders	3,019	-	3,518	-	9,914	7,530	7,999	-
Outside the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research								

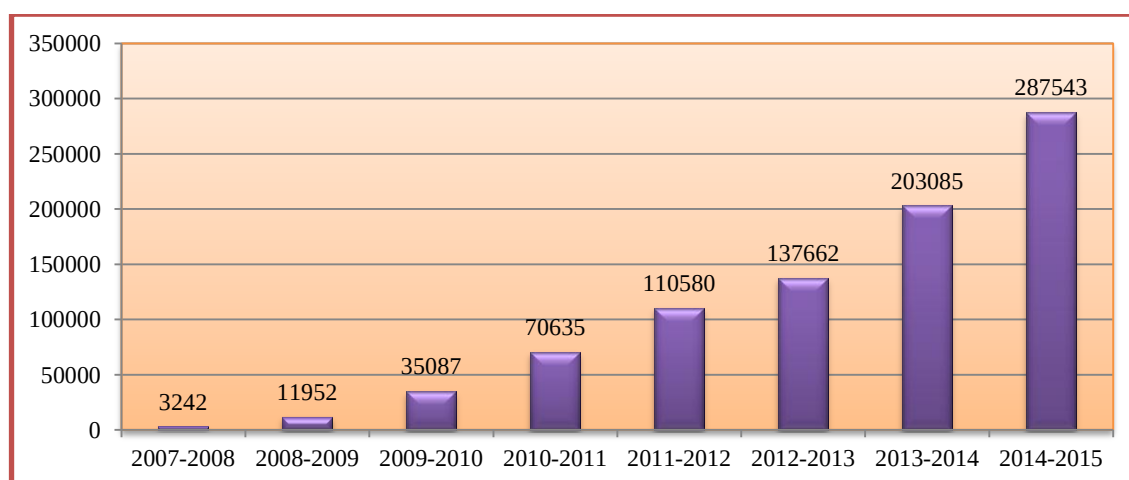
Undergraduate	9,940	7,566	7,688	3,252	11,227	18,509	17,736	17,267
Degree Holders	4,078	2,730	1,969	-	2,748	7,474	4,915	-

Sources:

- Academic Year 1998-1999: (ONS, 2001, p. 17)
- Academic Year 2000-2001: (ONS, 2003, p. 21)
- Academic Year 2003-2004: (ONS, 2006, p. 22)
- Academic Year 2007-2008: (ONS, 2009, p. 24)
- Academic Year 2014-2017: (National Office of Statistics, 2017, p. 30)
- Academic Year 2017-2018: (National Office of Statistics, 2018, p. 26)

**Figure 1: Undergraduate Student Enrollment Statistics (2004-2015)**

Source: (MESRS-DGEFS, s.d, pp. 7-9)

**Figure 2: Master's Student Enrollment Statistics (2007-2015)**

Source: (MESRS-DGEFS, s.d, pp. 7-9)

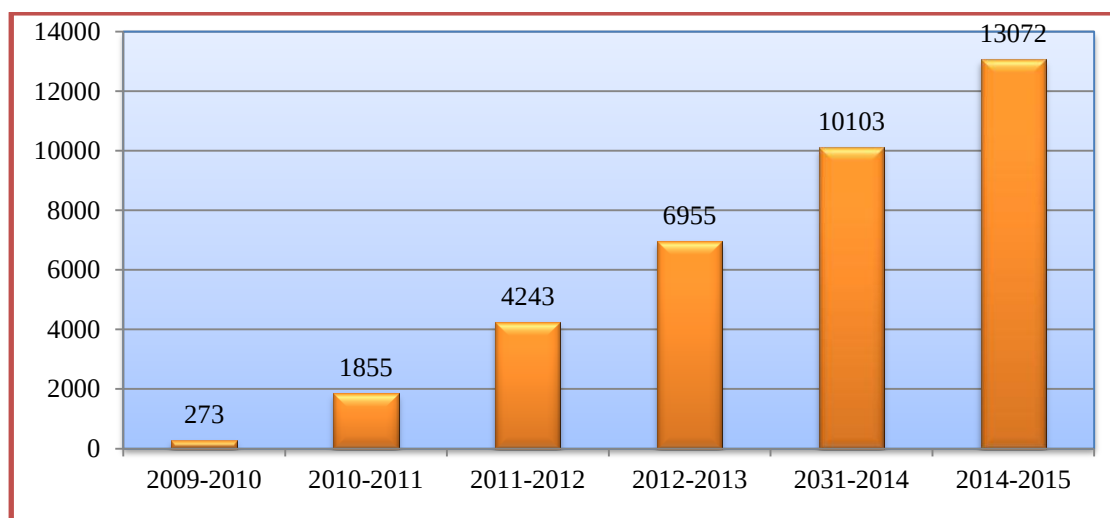


Figure 3: Doctoral Student Enrollment Statistics (2009-2015)

Source: (MESRS-DGEFS, s.d, pp. 7-9)

Table 2: Evolution of Algeria's Working-Age Population (15-64 Years) from 2010 to 2050 (in thousands)

Year	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040	2045	2050
Population	24,212	26,025	27,639	29,360	30,861	32,007	32,601	32,516	31,580

Source: (Kateb, 2014, p. 10)

Table 3: Evolution of the Economic Activity Rate (%) from 1966 to 2018

Year	1966	1977	1987	1998	2005	2015*	2018**
Economic Activity Rate %	45.83	42.11	47.04	48.81	41	41.8	41.7
Males	89.06	81.51	85.08	80.07	69.2	66.8	66.7
Females	3.85	5.43	8.7	16.96	12.4	16.4	16.4

Sources:

- 1966-2005: ONS, RGPH 66-77-87-98 and various years
- 2015: (ONS, 2015, p. 3)
- 2018: (ONS, 2018, p. 3)

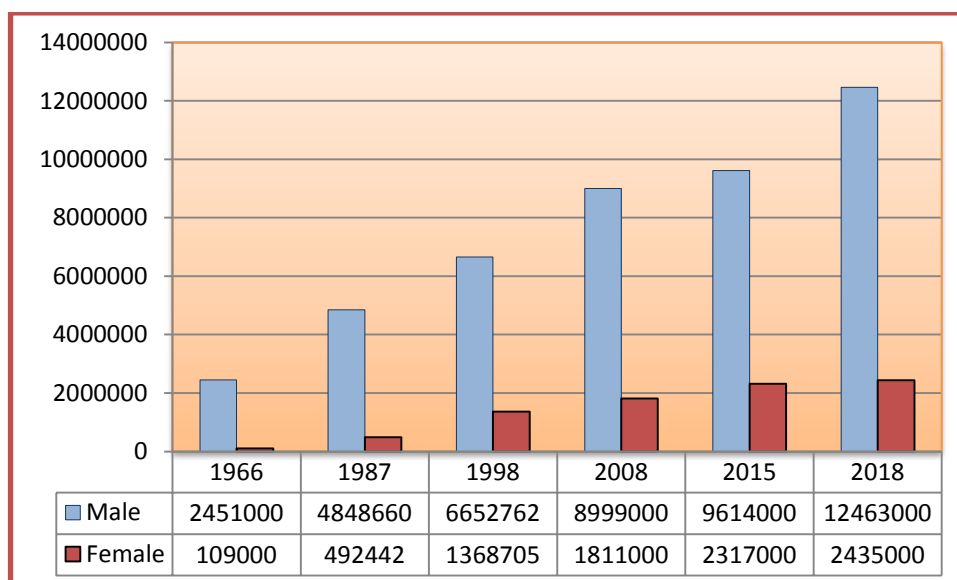


Figure 4: Evolution of the Active Population in Algeria Aged 15 and Over by Gender (1966-2018)

Source: ONS, Main Results of the Survey, Algiers

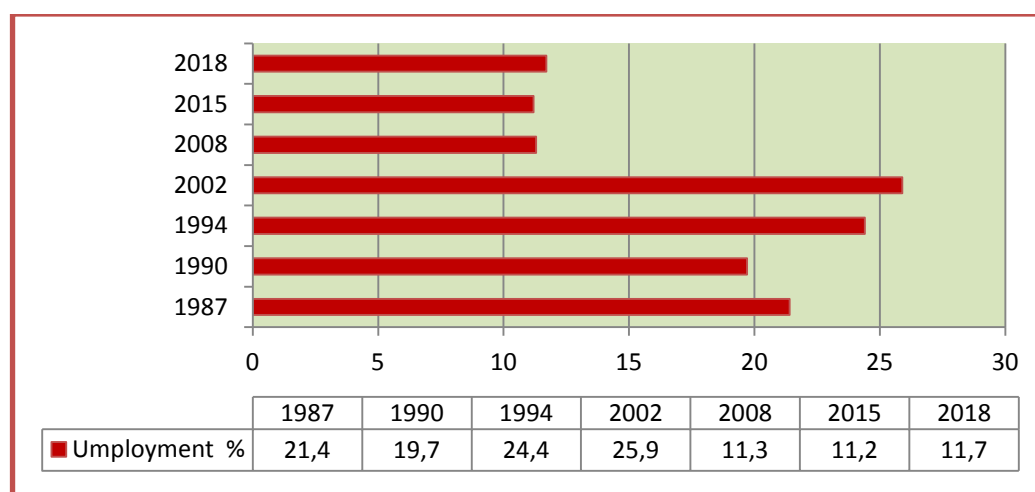


Figure 5: Evolution of Unemployment Rates (%) in Algeria 1987-2018

Source: ONS, RGPH et MOD various years

Table 3: Unemployment Rates by Educational Level and Degree Obtained in Algeria (2010-2018)

Educational Level				
Year	2010	2013	2016	2018
No Education	1.9%	2.7%	4.6%	3.1%
Primary	7.6%	6.7%	7.1%	7.1%
Middle	10.7%	11.1%	10.8%	12.2%

Secondary	8.9%	9.7%	9.3%	11.0%
University	20.3%	14.0%	12.9%	17.8%
Degree Obtained				
No Certificate	7.3%	8.1%	8.3%	9.0%
Vocational Training	12.5%	12.3%	12.1%	13.7%
Higher Education	21.4%	14.3%	13.2%	18.5%
Overall	10.0%	9.8%	9.9%	11.7%

Sources:

- 2010: (ONS, 2010, p 6)
- 2013: (ONS, 2013, p 7)
- 2016: (ONS, 2016, p 6)
- 2018: (ONS, 2018, p 7)

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