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Youth empowerment in Algeria between knowledge formation and economic integration: An analysis in light of the enabling environment and governance

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Abstract--This study seeks to examine the state of youth empowerment in Algeria by monitoring indices of demographic distribution, cognitive and economic empowerment within the institutional and organizational context from 2000 to 2023. The research employed a descriptive-analytical methodology, utilizing official national and international statistical data. The findings indicate that Algeria is seeing a notable youth surge, with individuals aged 15 to 29 constituting 20.81% of the overall population in 2023. The state has exerted significant efforts in cognitive empowerment, as demonstrated by the rise in enrollment rates, especially in higher education. Nonetheless, this dynamism has not corresponded with equivalent favorable outcomes economically, as youth unemployment rates persist at elevated levels, and their engagement in the labor market has diminished. The study indicated a constrained enabling environment, evidenced by poor governance metrics such as government effectiveness, accountability, and regulatory quality, which impedes the youth's capacity to integrate effectively into the economy and society. The study suggests that empowering youth in Algeria necessitates a holistic approach that incorporates cognitive and economic empowerment within a more effective and transparent institutional framework.

Keywords--youth empowerment, Algeria, education, unemployment, governance, institutional environment.

Introduction

The young demographic holds a pivotal role in Algeria's population structure, as data reveal substantial proportions of this group among the overall population, underscoring the necessity of examining their traits and conditions from a developmental standpoint. This fact has been accompanied by numerous national initiatives aimed at the generalization and expansion of education, with the objective of enhancing the cognitive qualifications of youth in accordance with the social and economic transformations the country has seen in recent decades.

On the other hand, the question arises about the extent to which these efforts reflect on the economic reality of youth, especially in terms of participation in the labor market and unemployment indicators. In this context, the importance of an enabling environment that affects the effectiveness of youth-oriented policies is highlighted, including governance factors, institutional quality and opportunities for community participation.

Accordingly, this research seeks to examine the reality of youth empowerment in Algeria by linking demographic data, knowledge empowerment indicators and institutional environment conditions, and to analyze the extent of youth integration in the economic sphere, based on quantitative data and situational developments covering recent years.

The first axis: Theoretical framework and previous studies

I. The concept of youth

The concept of youth has been addressed in different forms in many fields of knowledge that reflect different trends in the definition of this concept, including: Social, legal, physiological (biological), **demographic, etc.**

1- The concept of youth in language

Derived from the act "youth", said the young man, i.e. the stage of bully and modernity, and said the young man¹ is said any realized the age of puberty," and the meaning of youth also in the dictionary of the mediator is the one who realized the age of puberty to the age of manhood and youth, is modernity and youth to his thing. Many synonyms of the word, such as teenager, boy and boy, are words that do not refer to specific and detailed age stages as much as to the physical and psychological characteristics of a period of life, meaning strength, activity, movement and enthusiasm².

2- The concept of youth: There are several definitions given to the concept of youth:

In the various studies and reports, the United Nations considers young people to be " between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four". this definition has been adopted for statistical reasons; the World Development Report 2007 focuses its definition of youth on the age of 12-24 and occasionally uses different stages depending on the subject and available data, while the World Health Organization and UNICEF use the age of 10-19 years³.

Some perspectives are summarized below:

- **The social perspective of youth:** Refers to "linking age determination to the social role of youth and the characteristics of the stage that the individual is going through, characterized by rebellion and the demand for social recognition of his full existence."
- Therefore, youth is not just an age group, but a sociocultural concept, a societal condition that connects young people to their socially expected roles, which revolve around their self-reliance and independence from the family in which they were born and raised⁴.
- **Legal perspective:** A child becomes a young person and a person responsible for his or her actions when he or she is 18 years old ⁵
- **Demographic perspective:** This trend attempts to define the concept of youth according to the age criterion, they consider youth to be an age stage or a stage of human development in which physical and organic development is complete as well as mental and psychological maturity⁶.
- **Biological perspective:** This trend confirms biological determinism as an age stage or a stage of human development, in which his physical organic maturity is complete, as well as his mental and psychological maturity, which begins from the age of 15-25, and there are those who define it from 13-35⁷.

II. Empowering the youth

The concept of youth empowerment refers to a new methodology for the comprehensive inclusion and conscious use of all the potential of young people, and the investment of available resources to reach a level that enables them to exercise their basic personal, family, national and even global level; There have been many attempts to entrench the concept of youth empowerment and give a comprehensive definition of its dimensions⁸, and here we will present some of the literature that mentioned this term.

1- **empowerment:** The word empowerment was mentioned repeatedly in the Holy Quran to take meanings expressed in the Arabic language, even if its emergence as a term is associated with social movements calling for civil and social rights of citizens in the sixties of the last century, and the term empowerment was used in several areas such as the economy, social work and development, it then develops and expresses an individual process in which the individual takes responsibility and control over his⁹ or her life.

Empowerment defines a language according to the dictionary "the tongue of the Arabs" in the sense of ability. In the lexicon "Ocean" came the act enabling the thing any of its powers to be able to command it, but in the lexicon of the "medium" he can in the thing that he has authority over it and his ability of the thing that makes him powerful and easy. Here we find that the material of the word was used in many closely related meanings that do not deviate from the origin of the use, it was used in the sense of the ability to do something and win it, as well as in the sense of authority, power and status¹⁰.

The concept of empowerment involves increasing the political, social or economic power of individuals and societies¹¹.

Empowerment is defined as the way in which individuals, groups and communities are helped to control their circumstances, achieve their goals, and thus be able to work to help themselves and others increase their standard of living, by focusing on the strengths of controlling resources by increasing participation in community work¹².

It is also defined as "the extent to which an individual has the capacity to be an active participant in various areas of economic and social life, that is, the potential to make a difference in the other, which may be an individual, a group or an entire community¹³."

2. The concept of youth empowerment: The 2016 Human Development Report states that strengthening the capacities of young people and expanding their opportunities are bilateral and supportive of their empowerment; The empowerment of young people -- with a scientific eye -- requires radical changes in both the political environment; This will lead to the expansion of opportunities for their participation in the formal political sphere and the economic environment, leading to decent work opportunities, enhancing their entrepreneurial capacities, and the social environment in its system to consolidate the foundations of justice, equality and equal opportunities, and addressing discriminatory practices based on identity, creed, or gender. Empowering young people requires serious investments in improving basic services systems to enhance the capabilities of young people, especially education, health and other social services.¹⁴

Youth empowerment is defined as "a deliberate and ongoing process aimed at giving young people power and power, the ability to make decisions and implement change in their lives and the lives of others, and youth empowerment is commonly seen as a gateway to intergenerational equality, civic participation and democracy building¹⁵."

3. Levels of youth empowerment: Individual (personal) youth empowerment: it refers to the effort exerted to develop the individual skills of young people and improve the ability of young people to compete with others, in addition to developing awareness of the need to participate effectively in the development of the organizations in which they belong and the surrounding society, and to empower young people at the organizational level (level of closed relationships): this is about supporting young people in acquiring the skills needed to deal with issues that affect their lives, preparing them as an alternative, and developing their capacity to pursue a strategy to change the surrounding conditions for the better by improving their ability to organize and influence them¹⁶.

III.Third: Previous studies:

- 1- Study (Delilah Khinche, 2020) entitled: Sustainable Human Development and Youth empowerment in Algeria: Reality and challenges, the study aimed at introducing sustainable human development, its components. Its dimensions are centered on youth empowerment, and its projection on the reality of Algerian youth in terms of education, health, unemployment, and community political participation. The study found that the empowerment of

Algerian youth according to the indicators of sustainable human development is low, especially in terms of social and political participation.

- 2- Study (Asma Waheed Idris et al., 2020), entitled: Sustainable Human Development and Youth empowerment in Algeria: Reality and challenges, the study aimed to identify some environmental and social variables associated with youth empowerment in development projects, through sub-objectives: Identifying the outstanding environmental variables by empowering youth in development projects. and identify the social variables related to the empowerment of youth in development projects, and determine the relationship of the environment and its impact on development projects submitted by the community development associations, and determine the relationship between economic variables to empower youth in development projects, and researchers relied in the collection of data on two tools: a questionnaire on youth empowerment in development projects applied to the officials of development associations in local community development associations, and a questionnaire on youth empowerment in development projects applied to the youth benefiting from development projects in local community development associations.
The most important findings of the study achieved the assumptions as follows: The existence of a statistically significant stuck between social characteristics and youth empowerment through development projects, and the existence of a statistically significant stuck between environmental characteristics and youth empowerment through development projects.
- 3- A study (Salima Saedi et al, 2022) entitled "Youth empowerment: Semantic concepts and Strategic Dimensions", aimed to identify the conceptual implications and strategic dimensions of youth empowerment as a turning point in societies, where it contributes to building human elements qualified for self-leadership, by encouraging and empowering young people to work effectively and equitably to create positive change in their societies. the study adopted the documentary approach to the study of the subject, and concluded the importance of empowering young people in all its psychological, social, economic and cultural dimensions (in building and enhancing their skills, behaviors, knowledge and experiences, to be qualified and ready for the future.

In the light of the foregoing studies, it has been shown that most of them focused on specific dimensions of youth empowerment, such as social or economic empowerment, whether through theoretical analysis or using field tools, but they often addressed these dimensions in isolation or without linking them to a broader context. The current study is characterized by its holistic approach that links cognitive and economic empowerment, taking into account the enabling environment and governance indicators, which gives a more integrated reading of the reality of youth in Algeria, and reveals the structural challenges that hinder their effective integration into development paths.

The second axis: the reality of empowering youth in Algeria

I. Indicators of the youth boom in Algeria

The age distribution of the Algerian population indicates that the number of young people in the category (15-24) was about 7.5 million according to the 2008

census, where they made up 21.73% of the total population. In 2023, according to the population projections established for this purpose, the number of young people in the category (15-29) was about 9.64 million, or 20.81% of the total population estimated at 46.34 million. As for the gender distribution, the number of males exceeds the number of females by 90668 years in 2008, while in 2023 the number of males is estimated to increase by 583263¹⁷ .

What is striking about the demographic situation in Algeria is that the proportion of the under-15 age group was about 28.15% in 2008, while in 2023 it was estimated at 30.34%¹⁸. These figures mean that for years to come, or perhaps decades to come, this youth bloc will be a drain on resources for Algeria to provide the education, employment and social services it needs. If these needs are not met, this will lead to high unemployment and poverty rates and the consequent social and economic consequences. This demographic situation of young people ranges from optimism to pessimism, and there is a physiological and economic fact that indicates that when job opportunities increase, the youth group becomes a motivating force, as this youth reality in Algeria can be an opportunity for development if the process of integration is successful. the relatively high supply of labor creates possibilities for enhanced growth by increasing per capita output while increasing the savings and investments of workers. the large working-age population also entails the possibility of increased consumption and income taxes, which in turn can be used to finance productive investments such as increased education, health and social welfare. As the population ages, this productive window begins to close with rising dependency rates, which leads to lower growth and taxes and increases pressure to spend on the elderly¹⁹, and this boom will be a source of dangerous power that may threaten social stability and hinder development. distorted development conditions may turn the region's youth bulge into a source of resource depletion rather than a source of strength and economic and social growth²⁰.

II.Youth and knowledge empowerment in Algeria

In light of the rapid technological development and the global trend toward knowledge economies, knowledge empowerment is one of the main axes in the fields of human development and education. It is intended to enhance the skills of young people through: Encouraging access to knowledge (raising enrollment rates by increasing the number of people enrolled in education at all levels).

Algeria has sought to expand investment in education, where the democracy of education (free of charge) has adopted the most fundamental principles of its education policy, as a result of the improvement in enrollment rates across various educational stages, as detailed below:

- **Those enrolled in primary education:** The National Educational Guidance Law stipulates (Act No. 08-04 of 23 January 2008) provides in article 12: (Education is compulsory for all children aged 6 years and lasts until the age of 16 years.) This principle has increased the number of primary school enrollments in Algeria, where the primary school received 5.125.210 students during the 2022/2023 school season compared to 4.975.812 in the previous year, an increase of 3%.the number of new students enrolled in the first year reached 1.006.566, up from 991.959 in 2021/²¹2022.

- **Those enrolled in intermediate education:** For middle education, the number of pupils enrolled during the 2022/2023 school year was about 3541815, with an estimated 48% female. In 2021/2022, there were 3394055 pupils, an increase of 147760. As for the number of teachers, it reached 180340 professors compared to 174329 in the previous year, an increase of 3.4%.with regard to educational institutions, the figures indicate that there were 5.894 institutions in 2022/2023 compared to 5.818 in 2021/2022, a slight increase of 1.3²²%.
- **Those enrolled in scondary school:** Similar to primary and intermediate education indicators, secondary education indicators are also on the rise. During the 2022/2023 school year, this stage received a total of 15,85764 pupils, with a female percentage of 58%. In the 2021/2022 school year, the number of pupils was 15,2381, an increase of 6383. As for the number of teachers, 118.051 professors were counted in 2022/2023, compared to 112391 in the previous year, an increase of 5%.as for the number of educational institutions, 2645 institutions were registered in 2022/2023 compared to 2594 in 2021/2022, an increase of 2%²³.
- **Those enrolled in higher education:** Tracking the total number of students enrolled in higher education in Algeria during the period 1971-2021 reveals that there has been a significant increase, from 19300 students in 1971 to 1546243 in 2021, where the number has increased by 80 times. The average annual increase was 9.74% for the period 1971-2019. In 2024, there were 1.53 million students. This development in the number of students has led Algeria to increase the rate of enrollment in higher education from 10.14% in 1990 to 15.44% in 2001 and 30.97% in 2010 to reach 55.51% in 2023. This is shown in the following figure:

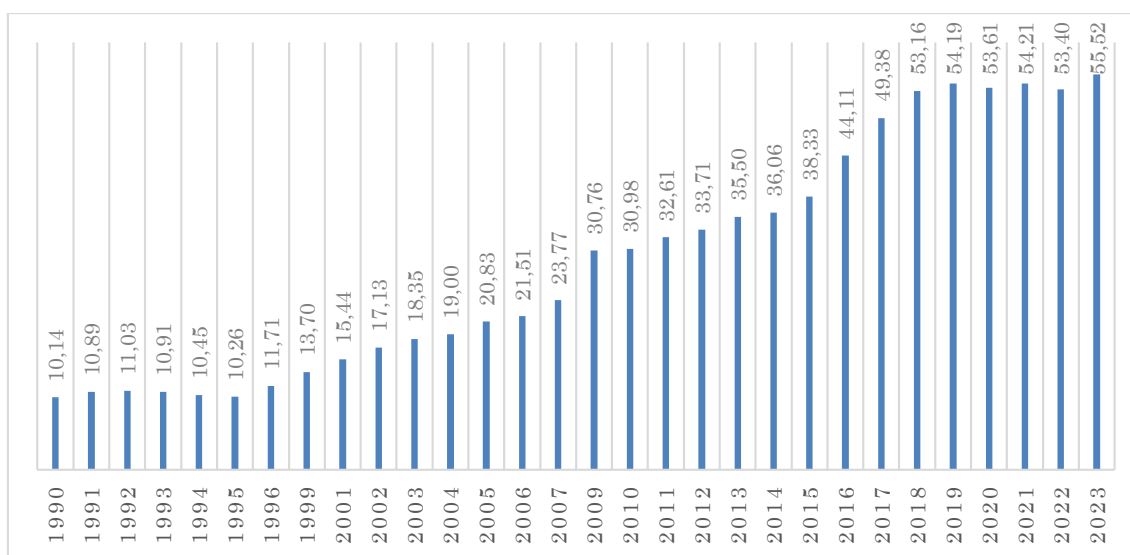


Figure 1: Gross enrollment rate in tertiary school in Algeria from 1990 to 2023

Source: <https://data.worldbank.org>

The knowledge empowerment of young people in Algeria is witnessing a remarkable development in the light of educational policies that focused on

expanding access to education at all levels. Algeria has adopted the principle of democracy and free education, which has contributed to the increase in enrollment rates, especially with compulsory education from the ages of 6 to 16.

These indicators reflect the efforts of the State in empowering youth by knowledge, as expanding the base of education and facilitating access to it is the basis for enhancing human capital, increasing development opportunities, and integrating youth into economic and social life. However, this surge in education needs to be accompanied by qualitative reforms that ensure quality education and its alignment with the labor market, so that the youth bloc becomes a demographic opportunity that supports growth rather than a burden on the state.

III. Youth and Economic Empowerment

The indicators of unemployment and labor force participation in Algeria during the period from 2000 to 2023 indicate that there are clear imbalances in the labor market for young people, reflecting real challenges in the level of economic empowerment of this segment, which is a fundamental pillar of economic and social development. The youth unemployment rate (aged 15-24 years) has remained high over the past two decades, reaching 36.69% in 2000, and gradually declined to about 21.62% in 2009, reflecting relative efforts to improve employment opportunities during that period. Unemployment rose significantly after 2011, peaking again at 35.38% in 2014, and then hovering around high rates, reaching 30.78% in 2023.

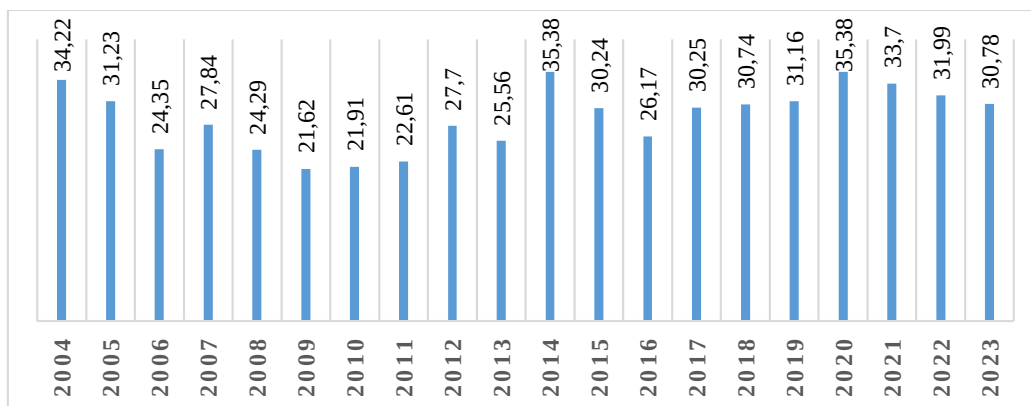


Figure 2: Youth unemployment rate in Algeria from 2004 to 2023

Source: Statista. "Youth Unemployment Rate in Algeria from 1999 to 2023
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/811617/youth-unemployment-rate-in-algeria/>.

Youth participation in the labor market, on the other hand, shows a steady decline, from 32.79% in 2004 to 23.26% in 2023, indicating that an increasing proportion of young people are out of the job market, either because of frustration with job opportunities or withdrawal from informal activities. or even to move toward immigration. This decline in participation coincides with the fact that unemployment remains high, indicating structural problems not only with the

number of jobs, but also with their quality and suitability to the qualifications and aspirations of young people.

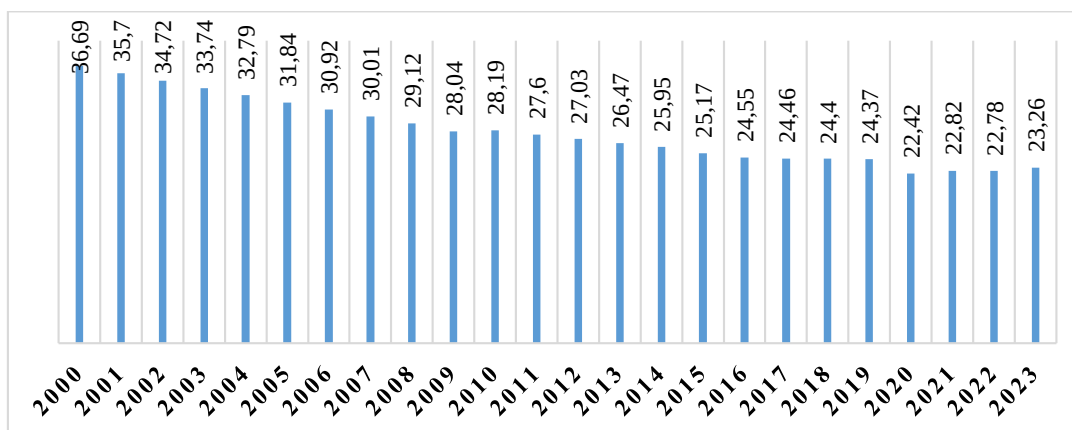


Figure 3: Youth labor force participation rate in Algeria from 2000 to 2023

Source: Statista. "Youth Unemployment Rate in Algeria from 1999 to 2023

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/811617/youth-unemployment-rate-in-algeria/>

The loss of human capital and the benefit of the youth boom in Algeria are compounded by the fact that unemployment disproportionately affects those at higher education levels who are more likely to be unemployed and other levels of education. despite the decline in unemployment rates to reach the level of 11.4% in May 2019 compared to the beginning of the first decade of the third millennium, the percentage of those with higher education degrees is still the largest. the unemployment rate for holders of higher education degrees in the same year reached 18% compared to 13.5% for holders of vocational training certificates, while those without certificates have low unemployment compared to the overall unemployment rate, which reaches 9.2%.

Rural areas face particular challenges in providing decent employment opportunities for young people. According to a study by the Economic Research Forum, young people in rural areas are 3.64 times more likely to live in poverty than young people in urban areas, especially in the north-central country. This disparity stems from limited resources and poor infrastructure in rural areas compared to urban centers, which impede employment opportunities²⁴.

IV. Youth and the enabling Environment (Governance indicators)

The governance reality in Algeria from 2013 to 2023 reflects uneven performance across various indicators, with findings revealing deep problems hindering any efforts to empower young people. For example, Algeria recorded a negative (-0.89) score in 2013, which deteriorated to (-1.00) in 2018 before improving slightly to (-0.98) in 2023, reflecting poor citizen participation, especially young people, in the political process and low levels of freedom of expression and accountability. This decline reflects the youth's sense of political marginalization and the absence of channels of influence in public policies.

On the other hand, the index of political stability and absence of violence shows a marked improvement, rising from (-1.20) in 2013 to (-0.58) in 2023, reflecting a more stable political climate than before, and a key element in creating a safe environment that encourages young people to engage in civic action and community initiatives.

On the level of government performance, the government effectiveness index recorded a continuous decline from (-0.43) in 2013 to (-0.67) in 2023, indicating weakness in the delivery of public services and the effective implementation of policies, which limits the ability of institutions to meet the aspirations of young people and provide realistic solutions to their problems. Similarly, the Organizational Quality Index, which stood at (1.35) in 2018 before improving to (0.95) in 2023, still reflects a regulatory environment that is not conducive to entrepreneurship and innovation, areas vital to the economic empowerment of young people.

Among the relatively positive indicators, the Corruption Control Index shows a significant improvement, rising from (-1.47) in 2013 to (-0.59) in 2023, demonstrating some official efforts in the fight against corruption, a necessary step to boost youth confidence in state institutions and create a transparent climate that promotes opportunities for justice and equity.

Table 1: governance indicators in Algeria for the years 2013, 2018, and 2023

indicators	2013	value	2018	Value	2023	value
Voice and accountability	2013	-0.89	2018	-1.00	2023	-0.98
Political stability and absence of violence		-1.20		-0.84		-0.58
Effectiveness of government		-0.43		-0.49		-0.67
Organizational quality		-1.14		-1.35		-0.95
Rule of law		-0.69		-0.81		-0.68
Control of corruption		-1.47		-0.66		-0.59

Source: The World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators 2023 Update, 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/governance/wgi>

In general, these indicators show that youth empowerment in Algeria cannot be effectively achieved without a comprehensive improvement in governance levels, especially in the areas of political participation, institutional effectiveness, and the quality of regulatory policies, ensuring that youth capacities are invested in building a more stable and prosperous future.

The third axis: Discussion of results and proposals

The data show that Algeria is going through a clear youth boom, with the age group (15-29) accounting for about 21% of the total population in 2023, which is

an important human asset that can be an engine for growth and development. The State has recognized the importance of this resource, focusing over the past decades on knowledge empowerment through universal education and achieving high enrollment rates in various stages, especially higher education, which saw a significant jump to reach the enrollment rate of more than 55% in 2023.

However, despite this expansion in education, labor market indicators show a severe weakness in the economic empowerment of young people, where unemployment rates remained high, reaching 30.78% in 2023, and their participation rate in the labor market fell to 23.26%, indicating a large gap between the outputs of the education system and the requirements of the market.

This gap can not only be explained by imbalances in the labor market, but is also linked to what is known as the enabling environment, especially governance indicators. Weak government effectiveness (-0.67), poor quality of regulation (-0.95), and low voice and accountability (-0.98) reflect an unstimulating institutional environment that does not provide youth with opportunities to influence policies and does not provide them with clear pathways to economic integration. Weak rule of law and bureaucracy also limit young people's ability to take initiative, both in the private sector and in entrepreneurship. This is why it is necessary to think about migration, especially those with higher degrees within the so-called brain drain, as the phenomenon of the movement of Algerian students abroad (the movement abroad) witnessed a great development during the period (2004-2023). according to UNESCO statistics, the number of students reached 24,817 in 2012, while the number in 2004 was 24,576, and in 2022 it was 35821²⁵. In particular, studies confirm that moving to education outside borders is often the first stage of permanent migration

Thus, cognitive empowerment on its quantitative side alone is not enough. Turning this youth bloc into a demographic opportunity requires an integration of knowledge, economics and governance. Education does not create added value in the absence of an organized and efficient labor market, and the economy cannot tap the potential of young people without institutions capable of translating those energies into effective operational policies. The absence of a political and community environment that encourages participation deepens youth alienation and turns them from a driving force into a social burden.

Therefore, it is necessary to adopt an integrated approach that combines the reform of the knowledge formation system to cope with the changes of the labor market, and promote economic inclusion by supporting entrepreneurship and simplifying access to finance opportunities, as well as consolidating participatory governance by involving youth in decision-making and ensuring coordination and transparency between institutions. The road to inclusive youth empowerment in Algeria goes through a three-pronged approach: Quality and appropriate education, a productive and inclusive economy, and transparent, rational institutions.

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