

Urban Youth Issues

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Following years of armed conflict and economic crisis, Algeria now is experiencing a significant economic upturn (Real gross domestic product: 6.4%), in large part aided by strong oil and natural gas export revenues since 1999. As a young democracy in transition, Algeria has opted for an open-market economy, which has significant economic and social consequences. Despite that the challenges remain substantial, and it is estimated that almost a third of the Algerian population lives below the poverty line (International Labor Office, 2002).

The economic crisis in the 1980s that has affected the country has had a negative impact on the well being of the population. However, the young people have particularly suffered. Despite the huge projects launched in the beginning of 2000's by the government in different sectors of the economy, young people still face the problems of unemployment. Working, planning for the future, and making a home are beyond the reach of a majority of the young people.

As in many developing countries the present population in Algeria (32 millions inhabitants) is relatively young in age. Nearly 32 percent of the population is under 15 years of age; an additional 31 percent are between 15 and 30 years. The democratisation of the national education system has widely contributed to the realization of the objectives which were assigned to it at the independence – 96 per cent for the boys and 94 per cent for the girls are involved in primary teaching (National Office of Statistics, 2003). The intensive development of employment and education was accompanied with the necessary taking charge of the social needs generated by the rise of buying capacity and the intensive urbanization. Eighty percent of the population is concentrated in the cities and towns - seven cities in the North contains nearly a quarter of residential population - 61 percent of the population is urban (nearly 50 percent in the world). (Algerian Ministry of Health 2002).

Thus the growth of the cities, the demographic distribution combined with the declining economic situation in the 1980s and the impact of the dark decade of terrorism in the 1990s has contributed to the present youth explosion in urban areas with a myriad of socio- economic problems such as:

1. Unemployment: It is estimated that over 30% of the young people are unemployed even among the high educated ones. Every year some of 300,000 young people come onto the job market in a country where there are already two millions unemployed.(National Office of Statistics, 2003).

2. The spread of drug use among the youth: several factors led to this situation: Algeria shares a 1,600 km border with Morocco, which according to the UN

Office on Drug and Crime (UNDOC) estimates, accounts for 31% of the world Cannabis production. Because of this, Algeria has always been used as a transit area for drugs traffic, but this situation has changed, making Algeria not only .a consumer country but also a producer of cannabis (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Report 2004; Algerian Office against Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2005).

3. The impact of the terrorism on all dimensions of their lives. Like everyone else, young people suffer from the political violence and insecurity under which they have lived.

4. The consequences are a high rate of violence and criminality among the young people mostly in the urban areas.

In the context of economic decline and structuring, and social unrest affecting particularly urban youth, special priority needs have to be applied to the social, cultural and political recognition they deserve.

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