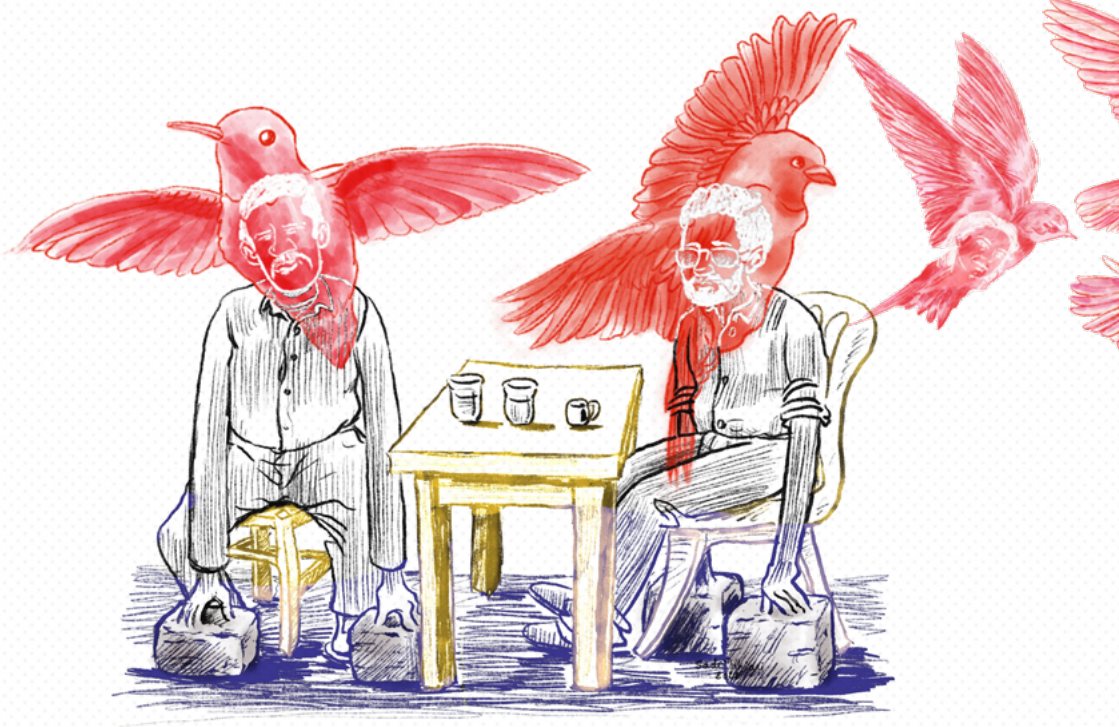


# UNEMPLOYED WORKING-CLASS NEIGHBOURHOOD YOUTH: survival and resistance strategies in Libya, Tunisia and Morocco

**Under the supervision of :**  
Olfa Lamoum & Mariam Abdel Baky

**Research and Editing Team :**  
Asmaa Khalifa / Fawzi Boukhriss / Mohamed Rami Abdelmoula



**UNEMPLOYED WORKING-CLASS  
NEIGHBOURHOOD YOUTH:**

Survival and resistance strategies  
in Libya, Tunisia and Morocco

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OLFA LAMLOUM AND MARIAM ABDEL BAKY

**RESEARCH AND EDITING TEAM:**

ASMA KHALIFA  
FAOUZI BOUKHRISS  
MOHAMED RAMI ABDELMOULA

**TRANSLATION:**

CHRIS HITCHCOCK

**FIELDWORK:**

SIHEM CHERFADI  
ASSOCIATION SALA AL MOUSTAQBAL  
MOHAMED ESSUL

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## **BIOGRAPHIES OF RESEARCHERS AND SUPERVISORS**

**Asma Khalifa** is a Libyan activist and researcher who has been working in human and women's rights and youth training since 2011. She focuses on promoting women's participation in local government and fighting gender-based violence. In 2015, she was one of the founders of the Amazigh Women's Movement. She has held various other positions, including acting as a consultant and researcher on gender and capacity-building in peacebuilding in Libya. She is currently writing her PhD on the effect of the civil war on relationships between the sexes at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies.

**Olfa Lamoum** is the country director of International Alert's Tunisia office. She holds a PhD in political science, and previously worked at the Institut français du Proche-Orient in Beirut and as an associate professor of political science at the University of Nanterre in Paris. Her publications include:

*Jeunes et violences institutionnelles. Enquêtes dix ans après la révolution Tunisienne, (co-dir.), International Alert et Arabesques, Tunis, 2021.*

*The Middle East in the Media. Conflicts, Censorship and Public Opinion (co-dir.) Saqi Books, London, 2009.*

**Fouzi Boukhriss** is professor of higher education and deputy dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Ibn Tufail University in Qneitra, Morocco. He holds a PhD in sociology and a teaching certificate in philosophy. His publications include:

*Environmental Education and the Making of an Ecological Citizen, Rabat Net Publications, Rabat, 2021 (with Malika Mouhati, in Arabic).*

*On the Sociology of Political Parties: Political Parties in Morocco between Local and Political Development, Rabat Net Publications, Rabat, 2019 (with Malika Mouhati, in Arabic).*

*On the Sociology of Collective Action in Morocco: From Voluntarism to Paid Work, Kawtar Print, Rabat, 2015.*

**Mohamed Rami Abdelmoula** holds an MA in French-language literature and another in multimedia journalism. He is a translator and journalist interested in socioeconomic issues: illegal immigration, the shadow economy, economic policy, management of public services, the environment and the use of natural resources. He is part of the team at al-Safir al-Arabi as well as working with various other platforms, including the Lebanese newspaper al-Akhbar, Orient XXI, al-Mufakkira al-Qanuniyya, al-Murasil and The Funambulist.

**Mariam Abdel Bakry** holds an MA in the theory of international relations from the LSE. She is a Program Director at International Alert's Tunisia office. She has previously worked on socio-economic projects in Egypt and as a teaching assistant covering Middle East politics and international relations in Cairo.

# **Contents**

## **Unemployed youth and strategies for survival and resistance in Tunisia, Morocco and Libya ..... 08**

Olfa Lamloum and Mariam Abdel Bakry

## **Abu Selim neighbourhood, Libya ..... 13**

Asma Khalifa

## **Ettadhamen neighbourhood, Tunisia ..... 24**

Mohamed Rami Abdelmoula

## **Salé Medina neighbourhood, Morocco ..... 61**

Fauzi Boukhriss



# **Unemployed youth and strategies for survival and resistance in Tunisia, Morocco and Libya**

Olfa Lamloum and Mariam Abdel Bakry

Ever since Marie Jahoda's pioneering 1930 monograph on work in a small Austrian village,<sup>1</sup> sociology has consistently emphasised that unemployment is a terrible ordeal comparable to social death.<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, studies on unemployment's impact on the health and wellbeing of the unemployed have been few and far between, some significant contributions notwithstanding. In France, for example, one study has shown that death rates among unemployed men and women are higher and that their physical and mental health is worse, a fact borne out by the frequency with which this demographic exhibits addictive behaviours. Another demonstrates a direct link between unemployment and higher rates of cardiovascular disease and cancer.<sup>3</sup> In a similar context, a study conducted in Egypt has shown that there is a causal relationship between the precariousness of their work situation and their mental and physical health, concluding that the more stable and contractual their job, the better an individual's mental health will be. The same study found that women were more affected by this than men and that losing a stable job and taking up seasonal or short-term work had similar effects on individuals' mental health to unemployment.<sup>4</sup>

It is particularly rare to find studies drawing out unemployed people's own ideas about their work status, their life trajectories and jobhunting experiences, or the strategies by which they make ends meet, adapt to unemployed life and deal with social isolation, stigma, family pressure and free time.<sup>5</sup> The dearth of studies of this kind is particularly marked in the Arab region. Despite growing interest in social and youth issues, particularly since the revolutions of the Arab Spring, these issues have not received the necessary attention. Most publications have focused on unemployed people's protest movements, particularly among graduates.<sup>6</sup>

1 JAHODA (Marie) et al., *Les Chômeurs de Marienthal*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1982 [1933], 144 p.

2 See: LINHART (Danièle) et al., *Perte d'emploi, perte de soi*, Paris, Erès, 2009, 190 p, DEMAZIÈRE (Didier), *La Sociologie du chômage*, Paris, La Découverte, 1995, 128 p., PAUGAM (Serge), « L'épreuve du chômage : une rupture cumulative des liens sociaux ? », *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, XLIV-135, 2006, pp. 11-27.

3 Pierre Meneton, Léopold Fezeu, Serge Hercberg, Joël Ménard, Mmes Emmanuelle Kesse-Guyot, Pilar Galan and Caroline Méjean, « Unemployment is associated with high cardiovascular event rate and increased all-cause mortality in middle-aged socially privileged individuals », enquête SUIVIMAX International archives of occupational and environmental health.

4 Ehab, M. (2019), *Employment transitions youth and mental health implications in Egypt*, Economic Research Forum. <https://erf.org.eg/publications/employment-transitions-of-youth-and-mental-health-implications-in-egypt/?tab=undefined&c=undefined>

5 See: Mona Amer, 2015, "Patterns of Labor Market insertion in Egypt. 1998-2012"; in Ragui Assaad and Caroline Krafft, *The Egyptian Labor Market in Era of Revolution*, Oxford Scholarship Online, June 2015.

6 See, for example: Montserrat Emperador Badimon. *Lutter pour ne pas chômer : le mouvement des diplômés chômeurs au Maroc*. Lyon, Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2020.

This International Alert study looks at these issues in detail, focusing on the psychological effects of unemployment on unemployed young people and how they combat, confront and adapt to these effects and their consequences on a day-to-day basis. Its three chapters adopt a qualitative-comparative approach based on individual interviews, testimonies and interactive focus group discussions conducted with young people from three working-class neighbourhoods in Morocco, Tunisia and Libya: Salé Medina in Rabat, Abu Salim in Tripoli, and Ettadhamen in Tunis. The interviewers followed the same interview guide in all three regions.

Three focus groups were organised in each neighbourhood. The first consisted of unemployed young men who had not completed their education; the second of young women in the same situation; and the third of young unemployed graduates, both men and women.

The choice of countries reflects International Alert's desire to expand the scope of its comparative field approach to the study of young people at the margins beyond Tunisia, where it has operated for many years. Youth unemployment is one of the greatest challenges facing our societies in the Maghreb and in the Arab World as a whole, and is an important part of the egregious injustice that faces the region.

Although the Arab region lacks regular statistics on income and wealth, which are crucial to measuring economic and social disparities, there is near-consensus that it is one of the most unequal places in the world. Figures suggest that the wealthiest 10% of citizens account for 58% of income, more than in Brazil or South Africa, well-known for stark inequality, where the number ranges between 50% and 55%.<sup>7</sup>

The most recent ESCWA report, for 2022, reiterates that youth unemployment in the region has been the highest in the world for the last twenty-five years.

In recent years, this issue has emerged as an overwhelming structural phenomenon. The figures are not always precise, and when they do exist give no more than a broad sense of scale.<sup>8</sup> But the World Bank, for example, estimated in 2020 that youth unemployment sat at around 28.4%.<sup>9</sup> It predicted that this percentage was likely to grow, with the number of people affected set to rise from 14.3 million in 2019 to 17.2 million in 2030.<sup>10</sup> It put unemployment among 15-24-year-olds at 51.5% in Libya, 26.6% in Morocco, and 38.1% in Tunisia

Nor has unemployment been rising only among new arrivals to the workforce. All indicators suggest that the average amount of time spent unemployed has been rising, particularly among young people in the urban periphery. Above all, this problem has affected young women, despite the major advances they have made in education and qualifications compared to their mothers' generation. 40% of young women in the region are unemployed, the highest rate worldwide and almost twice the figure among young men.<sup>11</sup> ILO figures based on the most recent statistics gives rates of 40.82% (men) and 67.84% (women) for Libya, 22.05% and 22.75% for Morocco, and 33.8% and 37.2% in Tunisia.

7 See: Thomas Piketty, *Le Capital au XXI siècle*.

8 International institutions consider anyone of "working age" (that is, 15 years old) who has worked recently at the time that they are surveyed as being "employed".

9 <https://donnees.banquemondiale.org/indicateur/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=1A>.

10 *Ibid*.

11 International Labor Organization. *Global Employment for Youth 2020: Arab States*, [wcms\\_737672.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-/dgreports/2020/wcms_737672.pdf) (ilo.org)

Precarity and vulnerability are the other face of unemployment: workers without contracts, health cover or social security. Although it is difficult to calculate precise figures or to grasp all the different manifestations of these phenomena, the number of young people working in the unregulated sector is clearly one indicator. This accounts for around 85% of young workers in the Arab region.<sup>12</sup>

It goes without saying that the COVID-19 pandemic has had catastrophic economic and social consequences for young people from working-class backgrounds, with many of them (or their family members) losing their jobs in the unregulated sector or the precarious service sector. In Tunisia, for example, some 20% of unemployed young people between 18 and 29 years of age reported that they had lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic, and another 18% said that a family member had become unemployed for the same reason.

The pandemic drove some 16 million people in the Arab region into poverty. The number of people living in poverty in the region is now more than 116 million, around a quarter of the whole population.

### ***The neighbourhoods***

Abu Salim, in the south of Tripoli, is one of the capital's largest neighbourhoods. Young people here suffer from the stigma attached to their place of residence: the area is primarily known for Abu Salim Prison, where thousands of political detainees have been tortured and killed. Very densely populated, it has long been neglected by the government, and saw violent clashes during the Libyan Revolution.

Ettadhamen, on the outskirts of Tunis, is the product of successive waves of internal migration. Under-29s make up more than half of the local population, and youth unemployment sits at 20%, rising to 28% among graduates. Although young people played a central role in the neighbourhood during the revolution, subsequent governments have come and gone without any of their promises of change having any effect on the difficult conditions that these young people face in their daily lives.

Salé is one of the most important urban centres in the Rabat area. Like Ettadhamen, it has grown rapidly as a result of internal migration, and today is home to around half a million people. The unemployment rate, according to official estimates, is around 13.5%, and considerably higher for women.

The three chapters of this study look at four major points. The first of these points is the effect of unemployment on young people's physical and mental health, their relationships with family and friends and how they manage their free time. The second concerns the strategies used by young people to counteract the effects of unemployment and precarity: training courses, small projects or temporary work. The third is young people's day-to-day experiences with public employment policy. The final point is young people's conceptions of and experiences with mass protest.

There are many points of divergence between the three countries covered by the study: the scale of the economic crisis, the system of government, or the different trajectories taken by political conflict and the restructuring of the institutional sphere after the fall of Ben Ali and Gaddhafi in Tunisia and Libya and the 20 February Movement in Morocco. But there are also many similarities as regards youth unemployment and the strategies

<sup>12</sup> According to the ILO, the figure is around 77% for Tunisia.

of resistance and coexistence that young people use to confront the social exclusion that it generates. The difficult, demoralising and painful aspects of jobhunting are similar, much as they are elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> In all three countries, a lack of public transport throws up additional barriers to employment, as does the absence of social networks or public support for the unemployed. And young people in all three countries paint a similar picture of ubiquitous bribery, nepotism, bureaucratic obstacles to small-scale projects and an education system that is failing to keep up with the needs of the labour market.

The primary cause in all three countries is the same: the absence of sustainable job opportunities for young people as a result of a policy of austerity. Although of varying severity, these policies are rooted in the same neoliberal dispensation of cutting or at least freezing public employment and reducing social services spending, reducing youth employment policy to a sticking plaster – notwithstanding the many laws promulgated to this end, particularly in Tunisia and Morocco.

In Libya, as Asma Khalifa shows in Chapter 1, the failure of unemployed people to organise politically or as a union and the growing restrictions on civil society and the right to assembly are major impediments to change. It is likely that youth unemployment will exacerbate existing tensions and encourage the growth of armed groups as an alternative capable of providing better compensation than traditional government or private sector jobs.

In Tunisia, as Mohamed Rami Abdelmoula shows in Chapter 2, the youth employment policies pursued since the Revolution have had little effect. These policies have ultimately continued to depend on fragile mechanisms whose purpose is simply to buy off major social dissent. Indeed, it is precisely these policies that lie behind young people's mistrust of ruling elites since 2011, as well as the growing disillusionment with President Kaïs Saïed.

In Morocco, as Faouzi Boukhriss shows in the final chapter, all the government programs adopted by the state to address youth unemployment – the program to promote self-employment and low-level contracting or the FORSA program, for example – are not only falling far short of the scale of the challenge, but form part of a general neoliberal approach whose aim is to 'combat poverty'.

As ESCWA put it in the title of its latest report: in Libya, Tunisia and Morocco, youth unemployment is a "ticking time bomb", which will only be defused when we finally dispense with a politics of austerity.

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<sup>13</sup> Lynda Lavitry, *La morale de l'emploi. Les coulisses de l'Etat social actif, et de Flexibilité des chômeurs, mode d'emploi*, Presses universitaires de France, 2015.



# **Abu Selim neighbourhood, Libya**

Asma Khalifa

## **INTRODUCTION**

Unemployment in Libya was growing steadily even before the events of 2011: specialist studies of North Africa have pointed to unemployment as a major motivation for those young people who came out onto the streets to demonstrate in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. The pre-2011 regime sought to confront this problem by opening up the economy to foreign investment and creating jobs in the construction sector. But these promising initiatives were not accompanied by any reform of the public sector. Nor were they rooted in any strategic public policy. Between 2000 and 2010, after sanctions were lifted and foreign involvement in non-oil sectors was permitted, external investment in the country increased by billions of dollars.<sup>14</sup> This provided job opportunities for Libyans in a range of companies and projects. But the shift from revolution to civil war saw all these projects suspended and the country grind to a halt. Unable to protect their investments, foreign companies left the country in droves, and the ongoing conflict has prevented their return.

Conflict has created a new economic reality in Libya. Young people now find job opportunities by joining armed groups, helping to perpetuate the conflict in a way that serves the interests of those in power. This vicious circle of violence has accelerated the deterioration of infrastructure and created many challenges with respect to unemployment. The COVID-19 pandemic has made things even worse, making joblessness, already a widespread phenomenon, into a chronic problem. Libya currently has one of the highest unemployment rates in the region – at a time when continuing conflict, interspersed by fragile ceasefires made unsustainable by ineffective policy, threatens to plunge the country back into civil war.

Taking this reality as its starting-point, this study focuses on the repercussions of the economic situation as felt in one of the largest working-class districts of Tripoli. It assesses the effects of rising unemployment via a human lens, drawing out the experiences of unemployed young people and the forms that joblessness and marginalisation have taken in their everyday lives. Not only does it investigate the economic and social circumstances under which these young people live in working-class areas, it also seeks to identify the effects that joblessness has had on them and the behaviours that they adopt in dealing with the problem. Interviews were conducted with three focus groups in order to draw out socioeconomic circumstances at an individual level, with questions focusing on a range of different issues including education, psychological effects, survival strategies and public policy. This has afforded us a better understanding of many aspects of the unemployment phenomenon.

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<sup>14</sup> Hamoudi and Aimer, 2017.

## METHODOLOGY

The sources that we have consulted in the course of putting together this study consist primarily of news articles and reports that deal with unemployment indirectly,<sup>15</sup> as well as one study on Libyan women in the labour market. There is thus a major gap in the literature with regard to unemployment in Libya. This study adopts a qualitative approach. Three focus groups were organised with inhabitants of Abu Salim, a south Tripoli neighbourhood. At 128,500m<sup>2</sup> – there is no precise data available on population or other demographic details<sup>16</sup> – Abu Salim is one of the capital's largest and most diverse neighbourhoods. Long marginalised, it still contains many very poor areas.

The focus groups were distributed as follows: a women's group, comprising unemployed women, students, and homemakers; a men's group, comprising unemployed, self-employed and private sector workers; and a mixed group, comprising graduates who were either unemployed or unable to look for work opportunities. Each session lasted between two and three hours, in the course of which we discussed questions on the effect of unemployment on mental health, strategies for coping with unemployment, development opportunities and the kind of support available.

Abu Salim was chosen because we wanted to identify the effects of unemployment on a neighbourhood that has been facing difficulties for many years. Some participants report that areas within Abu Salim have been experiencing a renaissance since the election of the municipal council, which is an example of the sort of information it is difficult to acquire or study. The focus groups included individuals who had fled to the neighbourhood from other areas as well as inhabitants from the outskirts of the neighbourhood, who face different challenges in their day-to-day lives.

## UNEMPLOYMENT IN LIBYA

World Bank statistics published in 2021 put the employment rate in Libya at 20.1%.<sup>17</sup> According to a Statista report drawing on the available data for the last several decades, this is the highest rate since 1999.<sup>18</sup> This means that unemployment in the country today is far worse than it was under the crippling sanctions imposed at the height of its international isolation in the 1990s, although the National Unity Government's Minister of Labour has pooh-poohed these figures, claiming that they cannot but be imprecise given the existence of two competing governments fighting for control and maintaining that there are currently 300,000 jobseekers to more than 2.4 million employees.<sup>19</sup>

The growth of unemployment is largely attributable to ten years of civil war. The war has not only negatively affected economic growth, it has also led to the seizure and suspension of production in a number of oil fields and refineries. The UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) predicts that inflation, rising import costs and falling oil prices are likely to further exacerbate unemployment in Libya, driving it up to the highest level in the region.<sup>20</sup> The problem has been compounded by the failure of the various provisional governments elected and appointed since 2011 to treat

15 An Introductory Study on the Status, Challenges and Prospects of the Libyan Economy : Part I of A Baseline Study for the Libya Socioeconomic Dialogue Project.

16 Main page, Abu Salim Municipality website, n. d.

17 Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate) – Libya.

18 O'Neill, Aaron. "Libya: Unemployment rate from 1999 to 2020".

19 Anadolu Agency, 2021.

20 Abdulrahman, 2021.

unemployment as a priority.

These unprecedented levels of unemployment are being recorded in a country with a population of around 7 million people, almost 50% of whom are young people.<sup>21</sup> In order to clearly recognise the social ramifications of this reality, we first have to understand the meaning of unemployment in the Libyan context, since its interpretation differs from place to place. To be unemployed in Libya is to receive a monthly wage without engaging in any genuine work. Over the course of several decades, Muammar Gaddafi's regime put in place a government payment available to all those not in employment. This situation only got worse with the emergence of two separate governments in 2014, which increased the amount of money being paid out. The failure of the two governments to confront this problem has allowed it to grow steadily ever since.

Since the revolution that toppled the Gaddafi regime in 2011, the country's slide into violent conflict has checked economic growth and reduced job opportunities. Economic policy in Libya relies almost entirely on imports: the country's only exports are oil and raw materials, which creates few jobs.<sup>22</sup> The civil war has exacerbated this situation with the growth of a war economy, the seductions of membership in armed groups and the spread of black marketeering and smuggling. The effect of all this on Libyans is multi-faceted: they find themselves in an entirely unstable environment in which all everyday activities – going to work, for example, or applying for an official document – are becoming more and more challenging.

Alongside the various other pressures produced by exhaustion and the constant anxiety of living in a warzone, all this has a huge effect on inhabitants' mental ability to produce and prevents them from participating in the development of society.<sup>23</sup> Young people in particular suffer under these conditions. As a result of their inability to make ends meet, the number who make the desperate decision to risk the crossing to Europe has been steadily rising. Several young people who had made it to Italy and were subsequently interviewed by the news site Al-Ain cited unemployment as one of their main motivations.<sup>24</sup> Hopelessness in Libya has more tangible effects: it has to do not only with shattered ambitions and squandered opportunities but also with an inability to provide even the most basic life needs.

## EDUCATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Participants in all three focus groups agreed that education does not provide the preparation or qualification appropriate to today's Libyan labour market. There is a great disparity between the needs and aspirations of students and the reality that awaits them after graduation. Opinions on the value of earning a degree were influenced by gender. Female participants emphasised the need to get a degree, even if it will only end up on a shelf somewhere. During the group discussions, I observed that female participants saw degrees as a sort of insurance. One reason for this is prevailing gender norms, which expect women to prioritise raising a family and as a result are not expected to continue their studies to degree level. Many women, however – even those who get married and have a provider – feel that degrees are nonetheless a must, something they can rely on in the event of a change of circumstances.

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21 UN Population Fund (UNPFA).

22 ReliefWeb.

23 Mu/min, 2019.

24 Al-Ain, 2020.



The male participants had a different view. They were more willing to abandon or delay their studies for long periods in order to pursue employment of various kinds. The conflict has caused many problems for universities, including for online learning, which is dogged by constant power cuts and poor internet connection. To make things worse, there is no financial support available for students to help cover the high costs of internet access. The lack of libraries and the difficulty of accessing resources is also a problem, 'obliging students to study at private universities'.

Alongside the lack of support or encouragement for students to continue their studies, young people, especially young men are expected by society to become breadwinners. This social pressure is another reason driving young men to delay or abandon their studies. Many also decide to pursue their education at a much more relaxed pace alongside work, describing it as a 'part-time job'. Although these young men will eventually earn their degree, for many of them it is not their main aim. As one participant put it, 'the aim of studying is to gain knowledge. I'll keep my degree for myself – it's of no use whatsoever for working in the real world or creating opportunities in the job market. The opportunities aren't there, whatever you study.' Given that many young people have been waiting for government employment contracts for more than seven years, this is an understandable perspective. 'What use is a degree?' is a legitimate question that many Libyan students find themselves asking, particularly when they realise that it does little to improve their job prospects.

These opinions are not restricted to formal education. Participants expressed similar views on training and capacity-building programs, which likewise do not lead to job opportunities.

*I did my last two semesters online, during the war. Because of the power cuts and bad connection, I couldn't keep up with the lessons or even hear the lectures. – Female participant in the third focus group.*

*The aim of studying is to gain knowledge. I'll keep my degree for myself – it's of no use whatsoever for working in the real world or creating opportunities in the job market. The opportunities aren't there, whatever you study. – Male participant in the third focus group.*

## PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Both male and female participants in all three focus groups were hesitant to discuss their own mental health and the psychological impact of unemployment; as expected, it proved easier for them to give examples from their social environment. During the discussions, participants repeatedly returned to describing their own problems, pointing to their own deep frustration. One male participant said that morale overall was very low. The assessment of the effects of unemployment on mental health did not seem to vary by gender, although female participants cited additional issues such as unpaid labour, responsibility for childcare and a lack of entertainment.

The students and graduates of the third focus group described the psychological impact of unemployment as 'enormous'. They brought up the proliferation of drugs among young people and the growing psychological exhaustion leading to mental health problems. We must bear in mind the traumatic events experienced by Libyans over the

last decade, as well as the lack of stability and the inability to plan for the future.<sup>25</sup> One female participant described the difficulties she faced in coming to terms with the situation: *'I graduated, and nobody cared. That was a real shock. It left a psychological mark.'*

As the discussions went on, participants suggested that the psychological impact of unemployment varied from person to person, arguing that having a supportive family or a privileged class background allows individuals to pursue their own projects. Personal testimony given by female participants showed that they receive more financial and logistical support than do male participants, who suggested that they did not expect support of this kind. Although participants from all three focus groups agreed that both genders must participate in the economy, men face higher expectations, since according to social convention they are supposed to be the main breadwinners, provide a house, and generally act as head of the household. Although in practice the division and distribution of labour differs according to a range of socioeconomic factors, men are nonetheless expected to bear greater responsibility for meeting their families' needs.

This is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, women are offered more support; on the other, their financial independence is entirely constrained. Men, too, fear the social stigma they may face if they fail to live up to the stereotypical image of the breadwinner, even those who rely on support from their families. At the same time, current conditions are changing strict social norms in this regard. War, an overwhelmingly masculine endeavour, has left a gap in the division of burdens and responsibilities. More and more women have become heads of their households, obliging many to work. Students and young graduates believe that finding work and gaining skills and experience should depend on ability. But whether a political and economic environment exists that is appropriate to their entry into the job market is something else entirely.

*The lack of job opportunities limits even your ability to self-realise. Your income is your life – your life, broadly speaking.*

*When a young person cannot find a job even in the private sector, that has a big effect. I see young people all around me taking to drugs or suffering from great psychological pressure. – Female participant, third focus group.*

## STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH AND OVERCOMING UNEMPLOYMENT

Given the difficult economic circumstances and the violent conflict environment, there was much discussion of strategies for coping with and overcoming unemployment, from finding alternative job opportunities to leisure activities. Female participants emphasised the lack of leisure opportunities available to women outside the household, other than meeting in cafes or attending special gyms, both of which require the ability to use public transport and to pay (not possible for many women). Male respondents had more freedom in public space, and cited their enjoyment of sport, particularly football, in the fresh air. Although the focus group discussions were conducted in the country's biggest city, men dominated public space.

Most participants agreed that there were two major alternatives to unemployment: starting a small business or finding a job in the private sector. Although the first option was generally held to be preferable, it requires funding, which is often unavailable; Lib-

<sup>25</sup> Khalifa, 2022.

ya has a striking lack of infrastructure and funding mechanisms for small businesses. Banks' unwillingness to offer loans for this purpose is not the only obstacle. Registering a new business is also bureaucratically complicated, deterring many prospective entrepreneurs.

*After graduating from a private university, I started working in administration. The pay was bad and the work was exhausting. I felt frustrated and depressed, not just because of the pay but also because of how I was treated. I wasn't given tasks that had anything to do with my field of study. The last straw came when I was asked to clean the library. When I applied for this job, I'd been hoping I would get some useful experience, but instead I ended up working in a chaotic environment, for low pay, having to invent work for myself. – Female participant, third focus group.*

Two female participants who each had their own small business discussed their personal experiences and the difficulties they had faced in keeping their businesses open during wartime and the COVID-19 pandemic. Their work had been disrupted by long power cuts, curfews and road closures, and one of the participants had ultimately been forced to liquidate her business when her losses began to far outstrip profits.

Working in the private sector, on the other hand, was generally held to have complex effects. Libya has seen great changes both in the technology sector and in job opportunities. One participant claimed that the private sector now employs the majority of young people (although a study from 2017 shows that women are very underrepresented in private sector jobs<sup>26</sup>). In any case, working culture has certainly changed. Participants in all three focus groups agreed that at one time, Libyans would never have agreed to work in 'pink-collar' or 'blue-collar' jobs (jobs that do not require higher qualifications): waiters, cleaners or delivery workers, for example. Now, however, such jobs have become normal, which in their view is a positive development.

One female participant provided a women-only taxi service using her own car. She noted that for a woman to work in this sector or in retail was considered shameful only a few years ago, but that things had changed. Despite the variety and flexibility of job opportunities available in the private sector, all participants had unfortunately suffered exploitation or very low wages; in some cases young women had been offered work for no pay at all (other than 'experience'). When asked how they dealt with this problem, participants said that they had no alternative. They maintained that employers are exploiting current economic circumstances, taking advantage of the fact that desperate jobseekers will accept poor conditions and low pay. Participants also cited widespread nepotism as an obstacle standing between qualified people and the jobs available in both the private and public sectors.

*There are job opportunities available in Libya, OK? But you can only get at them if you've got connections, or if you know someone who'll get you into the job. When you graduate, there're no job opportunities. There's a real problem. – Male participant, second focus group.*

*Providing job opportunities isn't easy. There are thousands of applications piling up at the Ministry of Labour, which hasn't helped anyone find a job. Administrative corruption is really widespread. – Female participant, third focus group.*

26 Bugaigis, 2017.

All participants had observed changes taking place in working culture around them and on the internet. Male participants expressed a more positive evaluation of the use of social media to search for work. There is no reliable information on capacity building and training opportunities. Participants affirmed that it took great effort to look for or join groups that had access to this information. These opportunities include joint projects between international organisations and the Ministry of Labour or other ministries.

Naturally, if these opportunities were accompanied by serious job offers, they would be far more useful. But as they stand, as some participants pointed out, they provide no new horizons.

## PUBLIC POLICY

Successive Libyan governments, even before 2011, failed to put in place clear policies to fight unemployment. Under the Gaddhafi regime there were radical changes to Libya's economic system, including the dismantling of the private sector in the 1980s and the sanctions (which first targeted the oil industry and then steadily expanded) that lasted more than 20 years.<sup>27</sup> Libyan governments responded to these changes in ad hoc fashion: they subsidised oil and food products and textiles and sought to make up for the shortfall in imports by providing goods directly and paying citizens a wage. These were the conditions under which most Libyans lived until 2004. After 2011, the war made the situation much worse.

In the discussions, participants in the three focus groups made many suggestions on what Libyan governments could do to improve economic conditions in the country. Successive transitional governments largely ignored unemployment through to 2020, when the UN appointed the current National Unity Government (NUG). Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, the first politician to speak directly to young people, has made and broken many promises, but he has also spoken candidly about the many difficulties facing today's Libyans (even if he did so only for political gain). His government has launched the populist-tinged Ihya Libya program, a massive drive to rebuild public infrastructure. This program calls for a budgetary allocation of perhaps 200 billion USD over the next decade, and the Labour Minister claims that it will provide job opportunities for both Libyans and foreigners.<sup>28</sup>

Another initiative – perhaps the most popular of all the NUG's policies – is the 'marriage grant', which offers financial support to young people to allow them to get married. Although this policy has had the indirect effect of increasing the number of underage marriages to catastrophic levels, it has been broadly welcomed by the public.<sup>29</sup> The intended aims of both projects resonate with the aspirations of participants: job security, financial independence and starting a family. But if the government is serious about achieving its aims, then it will have to solve its own major problems with widespread financial and administrative corruption.

Participants brought up corruption whenever a new idea was introduced to the discussion. They maintained that nepotism and other forms of corruption made it very difficult to get a job without having influential connections. Perhaps the best example of this is

<sup>27</sup> Vandewalle, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Anadolu Agency, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Fitzgerald, 2022.

medicine graduates, who often remain unemployed or are forced to work for a far lower wage than their counterparts who join armed groups.

The discussion in the third focus group touched on an important issue: the lack of communication and cooperation between ministries, in particular between the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education. Participants described this as a major problem that needs solving, since the failure to come up with strategies based on the reality and conditions faced by Libyans continues to push up unemployment and increase the number of frustrated graduates.

The Ministry of Labour does not provide support to young entrepreneurs and business owners. In fact, it provides a (small) benefit payment to those who register as jobseekers. The number of registered jobseekers rises month-on-month; some have been waiting for job opportunities for more than seven years. Moreover, the registration process is very complicated, takes many months, and may go nowhere in the absence of personal connections with ministry employees. Nonetheless, participants still prefer this option to private sector employment, for the reasons already discussed.

The participants had a number of suggestions on how to strengthen and diversify the private sector, including reforming the current complex bureaucratic structure and addressing the political and economic environment so as to provide more freedom. Participants suggested that future Libyan governments give priority to creating an economic policy that not only seeks to address the effects of the ten-year civil war but also facilitates, legally and administratively, projects that need workers. This would require a strategic study aiming to bring about multi-sector reform.

## LABOUR ORGANISING AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Participants' accounts of their union and civil society activities paint a grim picture of growing restraints on civil liberties. In the private sector there are no unions at all, while in the public sector the unions are new and do not cover unemployed people; none of the participants in the focus group discussions had had any dealings with them. Participants' views of union activity and protest varied with gender, with male participants referring more clearly to citizenship questions, perhaps because men in Libya are generally better informed on public affairs and thus have more opportunities for participation and interaction.

When participants were asked whether they had organised or taken part in protests on the economic situation, they responded that it is impossible to protest under the current security conditions. Fear of confrontation with armed groups and the possible consequences prevent young people from organising civil protests. Nonetheless, in August 2020 there were major demonstrations against corruption in Tripoli, which then spread to Misrata and Zawiya, continuing through to October of the same year. *Hirak Shabab*, a group that organised some of the protests, reports that 24 demonstrators were arrested and that attendees had faced brutal violence from armed groups loyal to the NUG.<sup>30</sup>

All participants said that they were afraid of expressing their opinions publicly and of protesting against current conditions. In the first few months after Libya's liberation in October 2011, there were demonstrations in Tripoli on a weekly – sometimes more than weekly – basis. But after 2014, this culture of free expression began to decline, to be replaced by a deafening silence.

<sup>30</sup> Human Rights Watch, 2020.

## CONCLUSION

Given the ongoing political deadlock, violent disruption of oil production and rising inflation, the unemployed inhabitants of Abu Salim – whether recent graduates or long-term registered jobseekers – are sceptical about the prospects for better economic conditions. Libya once again finds itself under two rival governments, and the opportunity for change and stability seems to be vanishing. Unemployment cannot be seen as a separate problem: it is both a product of and an exacerbating factor in the ongoing conflict.

Both the available literature and the focus group discussions carried out for this study show a gap in our knowledge of unemployment in Libya. There is a real need for more studies on this issue in different parts of the country in order to get a more complete picture of its different aspects, including the similarities and differences between the areas under the control of the two governments. For example, in Abu Salim there is no great difference between the two genders' assessments of the effects of unemployment. But there may be a greater difference in rural regions, and this phenomenon is worth looking at in more depth.

Unemployed Libyans are not active in political organisations, and there are no bodies that exist to defend them or protect their rights, unlike other countries in North Africa (in particular Tunisia and Morocco). Given the constant attacks on civil organisations and freedom of assembly and expression, especially in Tripoli, it seems unlikely that this will change soon.

Finally, it is clear that the social effects of unemployment on young people, particularly young men, have played a part in fomenting tension and in increasing the strength and influence of armed groups, given that these groups offer alternative employment opportunities with more benefits and better wages than those in ordinary jobs, particularly in the private sector.

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# **Ettadhamen neighbourhood, Tunisia**

Mohamed Rami Abdelmoula

## **INTRODUCTION**

Ever since it began working in Tunisia, International Alert has had a particular interest in the geographical and social margins. It has published quantitative and qualitative studies drawing out citizens' views – and particularly young citizens' views – on a range of topics: state policies and services (education, health, access to clean water, etc), political and economic marginalisation, unemployment, smuggling, the unregulated economy, migration, police and domestic violence, politics, religion, and risk-taking behaviours (drug addiction, crime, prison, illegal migration and terrorism).<sup>31</sup>

The Ettadhamen neighbourhood has been central to the majority of these research projects. As a marginalised and impoverished urban area on the urban periphery, associated with crime and terror, it is fertile ground for any study of these phenomena. For similar reasons, we have chosen to make it the focus of this study of youth unemployment, which looks at the phenomenon not only as a set of economic/material conditions but also in terms of its social, psychological and political repercussions. We have attempted to focus not only on 'dry' figures and data but also on how young unemployed people survive long-term failure.

The study is divided into four main sections. The first looks at the effects of unemployment on mental health and how respondents deal with them. It also addresses the effects that unemployed people believe unemployment to have had on their relationships with their (close and extended) family and friends and on their romantic relationships. The second section follows young people's journeys with jobhunting, making ends meet and developing their skills to improve their employment chances, as well as drawing out the obstacles that they run up against in the process. In the third section, we survey young unemployed people's attitudes towards and awareness of public employment policy. The fourth and final section attempts to determine the extent of their involvement in social movements, their attitudes to protest movements and their relationship with parties and other organisations.

## **METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE SELECTION**

Although unemployment is ubiquitous among young people irrespective of age, education and gender, there are nonetheless qualities unique to each group. In order to account for these qualities, we divided participants into three focus groups. Group 1 consisted of eight young men aged 20–29 who had not completed their studies and Group 2 of eight young women aged 22–29 in the same situation. Group 3 was made up of three young women and three young men, all aged between 24 and 29, who had completed university.

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.international-alert.org/locations/tunisia/>

Each focus group session lasted between two and three hours, and was based on participants' responses to questionnaires standardised for each focus group. Each questionnaire included various questions relevant to the four sections of the study, around 5-6 questions on each section. In order to draw out issues particular to each group, we included extra questions on the relevant questionnaires: the effect of unemployment on female respondents' freedom of movement, for example, and their involvement in housework as a solution to their economic situation, or the extent to which graduates regretted completing their studies and how many of them had applied for government jobs. The sample selection process, the structure of the study and the interview prompt sheet were all put together following a series of workshops held with specialists in youth issues and public policy.

## ETTADHAMEN

Ettadhamen is part of the Governorate of Ariana in Greater Tunis (in the northeast of the country). It is one of the largest working-class districts in Tunisia and the Maghreb as a whole. The neighbourhood first began to develop in the mid-1960s, when it comprised only a few dozen houses and a few hundred inhabitants; it has since grown rapidly, with the population increasing many times over without the state providing any of the necessary infrastructural improvements. Today it is part of the 'poverty belt' surrounding the capital, attracting poor and marginalised jobhunters in need of cheap housing from all across the country (particularly the northwest). Despite some public investment in the area following the 1978 January Uprising, intended to absorb popular anger, the main thrust of state policy has continued to be socioeconomic exclusion on the one hand and police surveillance on the other. Its regular appearances in the media since January 2011 – usually for all the wrong reasons – have meant that many Tunisians think of it as a Salafi-Jihadist stronghold rife with drugs and 'saboteurs' intent on looting shops and public institutions under the cover of night-time protests. Stigma has thus been added to poverty and marginalisation, creating a three-pronged problem that dogs the young people of the neighbourhood.

In order to better understand just how marginalised this neighbourhood and its inhabitants are, let us consider some of the statistics included in International Alert's documentary *Feeling What's Going On* (2021, International Alert Tunis, directed by Olfa Lamloum and Michel Tabet),<sup>32</sup> which provides a perspective on the frustrations of public youth policy in Ettadhamen and Douar Hicher ten years after the 2011 January Revolution. Ettadhamen has a population of 84,312 people distributed over some 3,372km<sup>2</sup>. Its demographic makeup is dominated by young people, with 47.02% of the population under 29, and by high unemployment, with a rate (19.5%) far exceeding the national average (14.82%). Unemployment is even worse for graduates, where the unemployment rate sits at 27.88%, more than seven points higher than the national average of 20.06%. Many young people also have limited family means: 27.7% of fathers in the 18-35 age group are day workers, and 80% of mothers are homemakers. Furthermore, state spending is very low: despite high population density and the serious socioeconomic problems that the area faces, the municipal investment budget is a mere 221,933 DT. This is a pitiful sum that says a lot about the disparities and discrimination that the area faces, particularly when compared with other areas with similar populations in the

<sup>32</sup> *Sentir ce qui se passe | Un docu sur la jeunesse en Tunisie*. Disponible sur Youtube: <https://bit.ly/3k3VBM9><https://bit.ly/3k3VBM9>

same region: in the same year, nearby La Marsa had an investment budget of 5,171,000 DT. The same applies to the budget for sporting activities: 10,938 DT in Ettadhamen compared to 146,476 DT in La Marsa.

## UNEMPLOYMENT, MENTAL HEALTH AND TIES TO ENVIRONMENT

### Psychological effects of unemployment

Since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Tunisia has been facing a worsening unemployment crisis, whose foremost victims have been young people. Although this crisis has affected people of all educational levels and social backgrounds, its worst effects have been felt by graduates, who now face structural unemployment, and young people from marginalised areas (the interior and the 'poverty belts' surrounding the major coastal cities). Its long duration and the great increase in the number of unemployed people over the course of the last two decades have made the authorities complacent; they now treat mass unemployment as 'normal', and discuss it in public largely in the dry language of statistics and figures. The human side of the crisis, its effect on mental health, rarely appears. In this study, we have tried to draw out this understudied aspect of unemployment, making use of participants' responses in the focus group discussions. We have also tried to identify the aspects that are specific to the experiences of the different groups and of the two sexes.

### Unemployment and the sense of uselessness

The longer an individual is unemployed – particularly if they do not work at all, even on a temporary or precarious basis – the more they are likely to feel that there is no value to their existence or efforts, that they are excluded from life properly speaking, and that they are nothing but a burden on their family. Slowly but surely, they lose their self-esteem and their hopes for a better life and begin to feel that they have no value to society or the state and its public policy. This feeling naturally undermines their determination and ability to acquire new skills and experience, making finding a job and escaping unemployment even more difficult.

*Lasaad: It's the same every day, the same people, the same stuff you keep on repeating every day.*

*Jihan: You feel like you're completely inactive in society, like you don't have the money to do anything, to improve yourself. You're lacking all sorts of things. You're always taking money from your parents, you always feel like a spare part. You're taking money, you're not producing anything, you're just consuming, not producing.*

### Hopelessness and regret

Tunisian students are fully aware that graduate employment in the country has long been in crisis and that there are no radical solutions on the horizon. They live on a combination of hope, a sense that unemployment is something that happens to 'other people' and a belief in individual salvation. But this hope quickly runs up against reality, particularly for graduates from areas where few connections or financial resources are available to help them find alternatives. The joy of graduating – of never having to do another exam again – quickly gives way to the grind of jobhunting, interviews, applying

for civil service exams and temporary work.

*Marwa: When you're studying, you have this idea that you're going to go straight into work. I wasn't that interested in the degree, I did the short version, thinking I'd get it over and done with quickly and start working. But then reality hits you and you find yourself unemployed.*

As the weeks and months turn into years, young graduates begin to doubt their choices and ask whether their degree has any value at all. In many cases, they become deeply regretful – a feeling expressed clearly by many participants.

*Jihan: You start blaming your mum and dad. They could have encouraged me to do professional training. Why did you get me to study? Your relatives are always telling you to complete your studies. They must know that you're not going to get a job, but they still tell you to carry on and get your degree. They have this idea that having a degree is better than not having one.*

*Mohamad Ali: They could have guided you towards something else. Something you like, something that gets you a job straight away. There's no need for you to waste three years [studying].*

*Marwa: Yeah, I regret it. I could have gone and learned a trade. Professional training is better – better than a degree. There's no work available.*

These negative feelings only get worse with time. They are not limited to stress and frustration; they also, over time, cause young unemployed people to lose their self-confidence. The knowledge that they have gained during their education slowly drains away, and eventually they may ask themselves if they are even able to do the job that their degree prepared them for:

*Hilmi: Even the education you do, or did, changes as time goes by. You forget it, you stop even knowing how to think, how to work. Everything freezes up, you don't understand anything anymore.*

*Marwa: You'll even go to a job and say, I think I can still do it, I think I can work – then suddenly you feel like you've forgotten. They'll do an interview with you and find that you're missing lots of things, so you have to revise the core stuff and relearn it from scratch. You have to go back over everything you studied and memorised, and you still don't get back to the level you were at before.*

### Feelings of weakness and illness

The psychological effects of unemployment on an individual get worse as time goes on and their horizons shrink, and may develop – as many responses suggested – into exhaustion and a sense of constant stress, fatigue and even 'imagined' physical illness.

*Khalil: You end up just sitting at home. It's a disease – a proper disease.*

*Sanaa: You feel older than you are. You're sitting around at home, you feel like you're not... You feel heavy...*

This feeling seemed to be more common among women, particularly those who did not have a degree. This is perhaps attributable to the proportionally greater time spent by this group at home (for cultural reasons having to do with families' willingness to allow their daughters to be out in public unaccompanied or without a practical 'reason' for doing so) than male participants and even female participants who were graduates. Not working, studying or being in training only makes things worse:

*Ghada: When I went, I thought I must have something wrong with my heart or something. But every time I go, they tell me there's nothing wrong with you, it's a psychological thing and it'll pass.*

*Marwa: Unemployment and money are the whole story. When you get to the end of the month and you've got no money, you feel exhausted, awful, you don't go out. You only get moving again once you've got money.*

Of course, this sense of being ill is no mere delusion. Being unemployed, facing constant frustration, constantly trying to think of ways out of your predicament – all this affects sleep, eating, energy levels and even weight. Moreover, the endless free time and the search for ways to deal with the psychological pressure make some participants resort to excessive use of sleeping pills, drugs and cigarettes, which in the medium and long term also take their toll on their health.

## Shame

The participants in all three focus groups belong to an age group generally assumed to be economically active and financially independent. Being unemployed, however, has meant that they are relatively or entirely financially dependent on their families, especially since the state does not provide specific assistance to the unemployed that would allow them to retain their dignity and search for new opportunities. This position does not only prevent them from achieving self-realisation and meeting their personal needs, it also engenders in them a constant sense of shame which can rise to remarkable levels of intensity. Responsibility is thus shifted off the state and its policies and onto the 'failure' of the unemployed person who 'does not make enough effort' and lacks the 'spirit of innovation' that would allow them to achieve 'individual salvation' by starting their own business. It is easy to imagine how much worse these feelings become as time goes by, the individual gets older, and their family becomes less understanding.

*Karim: Let me just tell you about my own experience. I'll ask my dad to give me some money – even 2 [DT]. He'll say go and earn your own money. Even such a tiny amount they make you feel bad about.*

*Wael: We weren't raised to go to our mothers and ask for money, say 20 [DT]. You go out and you make your money and you go home.*

*Hilmi: The way families look at men is different. If you're a man, bro, you've got to sort yourself out, you've got to go out and work, you're a man.*

*Sanaa: You might want something, but you can't ask for money, because you're not studying and you're not even working.*

*Marwa: You feel like you're still dependent on them – your mum and dad. They*

*brought you up, they put you through university, they've worked for you. You feel like you're mistreating them. They pay for everything for you. You've finished [studying], you've graduated, and typically you'll have found a job, you'll work and try and return the favour they did for you...*

The participants' responses show that all three focus groups share this feeling, but its intensity may differ depending on educational level and sex. For example, non-graduates were more likely to feel this way than graduates, perhaps because the graduates have made an additional effort compared to those who abandoned their studies earlier, making them less ashamed and their families more likely to be understanding.

While most female participants express similar feelings, they seemed to be less intense than those felt by the male respondents. Despite cultural changes and the growing role of women in the economy and in the public sphere more broadly, a significant part of Tunisian society still believes that women of whatever age and educational background should be supported by the men of her family if she is not able to provide for herself. Men, on the other hand, are expected to become financially independent and support their families, as well as being responsible for the majority of the cost of getting married and setting up a household. Female participants' feelings of shame also differed depending on how dependent they were – meaning that graduates were generally less likely to feel this way than their counterparts who had abandoned their studies earlier.

*Mohamed Ali: Even family members tell you – a male child shouldn't ask [for money], he's a man, he should earn his own money and provide for himself. Girls are treated a bit better, a bit.*

*Sanaa: When they [her family] see that you're upset, they don't like it. They try and make you feel better, or they say just give it a go, see what happens...*

*Marwa: They already know that you don't have a solution, a way to get a job. And they're paying for everything for you.*

*Ghada: I went to university and I stayed at home. It is a bit difficult for me to ask my parents for money, to say give me some spending money or give me some money so I can buy such and such. But I don't have problems with my family.*

*Marwa: I'm married, and I get my spending money from my husband. Since I got married, I haven't done anything to bring in money.*

## Isolation

This sense of shame, irrespective of educational level or sex, drives many participants – deliberately or otherwise – to 'hide themselves away', withdrawing from social and even family life. This withdrawal may be partial or temporary or may, in some cases, develop into near-total isolation. Participants offered various reasons for, and forms taken by, this isolation. Some spend all their time in their bedroom or at home more generally (especially common among women), or at the local coffee shop. By doing so, they hope to avoid putting their lack of a job 'on display', to keep out of 'public view' and to dodge the 'embarrassing questions' they are constantly being asked by those around them (friends, neighbours, family) – or even the awkwardness of going out with friends and not having enough money to spend on anything. This desire not to be seen by others can also take other forms: excessive consumption of drugs or sleeping pills or

constant use of social media and the internet. This 'voluntary' (actually forced) isolation exacerbates the psychological effects of unemployment and puts major limits on young people's social networks, often depriving them of important information, work opportunities and new ideas that might help improve their situation.

*Sanaa: Imagine – you're going shopping, but your pockets are completely empty. You go out to eat with your friends, but you don't have enough money to pay for yourself. You have to wait for others to pay for you.*

*Raja: You're always at home, always locking yourself away, with the mobile phone.*

*Mohamed: You go home, they bother you. So you go out from morning to night, but you're not working. There's no difference between sitting at home, watching TV, and going out to the café. It's all the same.*

*Mondher: So people don't see that you're unemployed and sitting around doing nothing in the street, you go to the café and sit there for 3 or 4 hours. That's better than hanging around on the street. If you stay on the street, people will say oh, look, he's not doing anything, he's unemployed.*

*Sanaa: There's also a bad side to it: when you give your whole life over to Facebook, so it becomes like an addiction. When you live an entirely different life, like a digital life. You're not living in reality. Sometimes you wake up and think, I don't experience anything in real life, my whole life is digital. You're just a Facebook profile. You feel like you're living a fantasy.*

### Leisure time and combatting stress

Unemployed young people make use of various means and strategies to get some relief from the various psychological effects of their socioeconomic status, some of which are common to all three groups and some of which vary by sex and/or educational level. This issue is not a simple one: we are largely talking about young people from low or middle-income families who live in an underdeveloped area with a major lack of entertainment, art and sports facilities, whether public or private. As well as this lack of facilities and poor public transport connections (which exacerbate the isolation of young people living in Ettadhamen), there is another obstacle facing young women: neither working nor studying, their ability to leave the house 'without a good reason' is far more limited. Many female participants also noted that their families were less likely to give them spending money than their male relatives, who – at least in their perception – go out more and have more cash to hand.

*Jihan: The majority will say oh, she's a girl, she's staying at home. They think even if she goes out, she will not go out or stay out late like boys do.*

In what follows we look at some of the most significant ways that participants seek relief from the psychological burden of unemployment and empty time.

## Religious rituals

Most participants felt that religion (prayer, reading and listening to the Qur'an) had a positive effect on mental health, as well as improving their chances of escaping their plight. But this did not mean that the majority performed religious rituals regularly. In general, female participants tended to be more religious, or have a stronger belief in the importance of religion, than their male counterparts, irrespective of level of education.

*Jihan: Yeah, it helps you psychologically. A lot of people feel a lot better when they pray. We go back to praying, and we think of our religious teachings. Rely on God and he won't let you down.*

*Marwa: It takes you out of the situation you're in – you go into another world. You tell yourself, 'God will make it up to me'. Your faith in God is what keeps you going.*

*Sanaa: Put the Qur'an on in your headphones. There's nothing better to calm you down.*

## Exercise

All three focus groups agreed on the importance of exercise to physical and mental health and said that they would like to exercise more, but that the lack of pitches, sports centres and other kinds of free public infrastructure made it difficult. Although private facilities are available, they cost far too much for most unemployed people to make use of them. Some participants, both men and women, noted that sports often require additional equipment, kit and even a particular diet, making it an expensive hobby. Some also said that they did not feel safe exercising outside early in the morning or at night, fearing assault or mugging. This feeling was particularly common among women.

*Sana: There's no circle of people to encourage you. I'd like a group like that, but I haven't been able to find one.*

*Hilmi: If you want to go to a sports facility, you'll have to pay at least 80 DT. When you're unemployed and you don't even have enough to eat, are you going to play sport? [Laughs]*

*Ahmad: There are people who go out walking in the morning. My mum and my cousin went, and someone took my cousin's phone, in broad daylight.*

Many of the non-graduate participants said that they exercised, especially body-building and solo sports. Some of them had been involved with football clubs or even the national team, but had been unable to carry on because of their health and the lack of provision. They also asserted that their class backgrounds and addresses had contributed to the end of their careers: nepotism, exclusion and limited means, etc.

*I was supposed to be put [on the team], but they didn't do it, they put someone else on because his dad was involved with the [Football] Federation.*

*Khalil: I was training with Hammam-Lif until they found out I was from Ettadhamen. I was supposed to be doing an apprenticeship [with the team], but then they withdrew the offer because I was from Ettadhamen.*



## Coffee shops

Frequenting coffee shops was seen quite differently by male and female participants. While female participants – both graduates and non-graduates – described it as a kind of leisure activity they indulged in only occasionally, most male participants saw it as a fundamental part of their daily routine, even a necessary way of escaping their families.

*Marwa: Yeah, you go out, get a change of scenery, meet people. Meeting up with people definitely makes me feel better.*

*Mohamed Ali: In working-class areas like Ettadhamen, the only leisure facility we go to is the coffee shop – every day, I mean, on a daily basis. You go and watch football – you can kill three or four hours that way, then go home. It improves your mood for a bit.*

## Social media

The graduate group was the most active on social media, not only as a leisure activity but also as a means of looking for work, improving their knowledge within their own fields and learning new things or following 'human development' trainers. The most significant platforms used were Facebook, YouTube, Tik Tok and Instagram. The female non-graduates also reported spending a lot of time on social media, but primarily for entertainment and to kill time. Social media did not seem to play a major role in the day-to-day lives of male non-graduates, however, and some did not even own a smartphone.

*Sanaa: It's true, it's a good thing and a bad thing. The good thing is that anything you want to make use of, anything you want to learn, anything you want, you can find it. You can do coaching, even psychological coaching. You can subscribe to big coaches who can make a big difference to your life. It's useful. But there's also a bad side to it: when you give your whole life over to Facebook, so it becomes like an addiction.*

Many participants (from the graduate and female non-graduate groups) were aware of spending many hours on social media, to an extent that resembled addiction, and that what they were doing was in some form a means of escaping their lived reality. Some of them also noted that these sites – which are supposed to be entertaining – could have the opposite effect. They said that seeing posts, pictures and videos from those living more privileged lives showing off their wealth and happiness (big events, leisure activities, travel, clothing, accessories, fancy cars etc) often made them more unhappy and more aware of their poverty, their lack of jobs, their narrow horizons and in some cases their social isolation.

*Mohamed Ali: People, people I talk to or who I'm friends with on Instagram – I see a different life there. And you're unemployed, you can't afford the same life-style or the same rhythm. The pictures, the stories, everyone staying out late, the clothes...*

## **Alcohol, sleeping pills and drugs**

Here, too, there are notable disparities by sex and education level. Most female participants, whether graduates or otherwise, were strongly opposed to consuming alcohol and drugs (and to a lesser extent sleeping pills), primarily for religious reasons or because they considered them to be unhelpful and dangerous. Male participants showed a broader range of views: although most said they did not take sleeping pills, some reported that they used alcohol or cannabis or sympathised with those who did, their recognition of the dangers of addiction and the limited utility of these products as an escape from reality notwithstanding. The male non-graduates were the most likely to have used drugs or sleeping pills, with many saying that they were essential in order to deal with the pressure of their situation and avoid total breakdown. Most participants in this group did not drink, although this was less because of religious misgivings or awareness of the dangers and more to do with pure economic calculations: many believed that the money they might have spent on alcohol could buy them a longer-lasting and better high if spent on drugs or sleeping pills instead.

## **UNEMPLOYMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE WORLD AROUND**

In this section, we attempted to draw out the effects of unemployment on young people's relationships with their immediate environment: their family (nuclear and extended), friends and romantic partners. How did participants think about these relationships, and were these thoughts influenced by educational level or sex?

### **Family relationships**

Family is the relationship that has the greatest effect on the life of an unemployed person. It is the framework within which they spend most of their time and which provides them with (varying degrees of) financial and moral support. The financial and psychological consequences of one of its members being unemployed have a serious effect on a family, especially if it is poor, large or lacks a breadwinner. This daily interaction, accompanied by lasting inactivity with no clear end in sight, creates a complex relationship between the family and the unemployed person. This relationship naturally differs from family to family, but there are many similarities and intersections in the testimonies of participants from all three focus groups, as well as significant differences in the ways these groups thought about this relationship. Most participants expressed a strong sense of being a financial burden on their family. The longer an individual had been unemployed, the more tense their relationship with their family became, sometimes taking violent or humiliating forms. We also noted that gender and level of education had significant effects on these relationships.

Analysis of participants' testimony shows clearly that male non-graduates' relationships with their families suffer most from unemployment. The great tension they describe can be attributed to various factors. Most of the participants in this group are from poor families, many of which have more than one unemployed member; this deprives the family of some or all of its resources and means additional mouths to feed. Families may see in their unemployed children a double failure: they have neither earned a degree capable of putting them into a 'respectable' job nor have they managed to carve out a niche in the job market that would allow them to earn a steady income for themselves

(and their families). This group was also much more likely to engage in risky behaviours (drugs, antisocial behaviour, violence, illegal migration) than the other groups, which may mean that families are more worried about their sons' endless free time and keener to get them away from 'bad company'.

This tension in male non-graduates' relationships with their families leads many to spend as much time as possible out of the house or alone in their bedrooms, avoiding contact with other family members.

Wael: *Our relationship [boils down to] 'good morning, mum', saying hi, then going out. Coming back at night and going to bed. That's it.*

Mohamed: *You go home, they bother you. So you go out from morning to night, but you're not working. There's no difference between sitting at home, watching TV, and going out to the café. It's all the same.*

Hosni: *I can't be in the same room as dad for more than ten minutes. Either I go out, or he does. He's your dad – but he can't say two words to you.*

Relationships with fathers seem to be more difficult and complicated, sometimes reaching the point of physical violence or insults, while mothers seem to be more understanding and likely to play the role of intercessor and protector:

Lasaad: *Your mum will say to your dad, look, he went looking [for a job] and he couldn't find one... Your dad isn't like your mum. Your dad will just say straight out: 'get out there and look'. With your mum, when you're going out at 10PM or 9PM, she'll say he's out there in the cold, what's going to happen? Have they beaten him up? Is he wrapped up warm? Your dad, he's not interested.*

Mohamed: *She'll say 'God deliver you', that's mothers. Fathers will say 'get out there and look', 'go and find a solution', 'go and make some money'. But there's no work.*

Khalil: *Dad locks me in the kitchen... You never know when he'll smack you, when he'll hit you.*

This harsh paternal attitude may be rooted in the fact that fathers are usually the main and only breadwinner, as well as socialisation, which teaches men that being strict with their sons is the best way to make them into 'men', responsible and tough. The relationship often differs depending on the exact circumstances of the son: when they find temporary work and contribute to the household budget, it improves noticeably. It is not hard to imagine how this changing treatment affects young men:

Mondher: *Relationships with your parents change on a day-by-day basis. They're like the weather – you have good days and bad days. One day they'll be relaxed with you, the next your mum will wake you up at 6 in the morning and tell to get up and go looking for work.*

Lasaad: *When I have money, dad treats me like the apple of his eye. When you don't have money, it's like you're not a person, like you're doing it deliberately and you don't want to work.*

Unemployment has a less dramatic effect on graduates' relationships with their families. In these cases, parents are often aware of the efforts made by their children during their long years of study. Graduate unemployment is a long-standing and familiar phenomenon that has been getting worse for more than 25 years. Moreover, there is a conviction – and a hope – that even completing a degree is a success and a good thing in itself which will eventually make it easier to get a good and stable job. The testimonies of many of the participants in this group attested to this:

*Marwa: They already know that you don't have a solution, a way to get a job. And they're paying for everything for you.*

*Ghada: I went to university and I stayed at home. It is a bit difficult for me to ask my parents for money, to say give me some spending money or give me some money so I can buy such and such. But I don't have problems with my family.*

Nonetheless, participants' assessment of these relationships did differ even within this group. Male graduates felt more embarrassed about having to rely on their families, creating an additional source of stress even where their families themselves did not express their frustration.

Unemployed daughters were, relatively speaking, generally better treated than unemployed sons. This may be the result of social norms which dictate that women are ultimately the responsibility of their male relatives (father, brothers, fiancé, husband) and that they cannot be forced to work, as well as a general belief that 'if worst comes to worst', a husband will eventually come along and provide for them. But this better treatment comes at a cost: unemployment may make parents less willing to accept their daughters going out in public and less likely to give them the pocket money they received when they were studying:

*You can't ask [for money] in the same way as you can when you're studying. When you're studying you can ask for pocket money, but when you're unemployed, you can't ask for anything. You think about what you want, but you don't say anything.*

*Ghada: Something funny happened to me. I wanted to go out, and I needed money. Mum spoils my brother because he's a boy, so he goes off to the coffee shop. I asked her why she gives him money and not me, and she said it's because he smokes. So I said, why don't you give me some money and I'll smoke too!*

In the graduate group, we noted a countervailing trend with respect to blame. Many participants blamed their families (and their broader relationships) for insisting that they complete their studies instead of encouraging them to pursue professional training or go into the job market earlier or because they had not given them enough advice when they were deciding what to study:

Mohamed Ali: *It would have been good to have someone older than me to send me in the right direction. Then I wouldn't have ended up in the situation I'm in now.*

Jihan: *You start blaming your mum and dad. They could have encouraged me to do professional training. Why did you get me to study? Your relatives are always telling you to complete your studies. They must know that you're not going to get a job, but they still tell you to carry on and get your degree. They have this idea that having a degree is better than not having one.*

Interestingly, and irrespective of the attitude of participants' close families to qualifications, there were great similarities, almost consensus, regarding the role of the extended family. Most participants felt like their extended families did not provide any help and in fact became an additional source of pressure for both them and their parents. Relatives' constant questions about how they are getting along, their willingness to share their opinions on their choices and the comparisons they make with other family members who have managed to find a job (with or without a degree) and achieved professional or financial success are a source of embarrassment for the young person and often increase their parents' anxieties, generating further tensions. This may, of course, simply be a matter of oversensitivity worsened by a long time spent unemployed. Members of the graduate group were more likely to express sharply negative views of their relationships with their extended family, which seems to support this interpretation.

Sanaa: *Of course, when they get together, it's all 'is your son still looking for work?', 'he still doesn't have a job?', 'how long has it been since your daughter graduated? Has she not found a job yet?' 'So-and-so's kid has found a job and he's doing really well', 'what's your problem, didn't you study so and so?' People are always saying things like that in families. In a way that affects you.*

Hilmi: *This sort of thing happens more often among women. Some [auntie] will tell you that her son didn't go to university and now he's got a job, and another one's son did go and now he's not working. She'll be going on and on about him as though her son graduated from this or that place! My son has a car and a house...*

Raja: *Especially if you have the kind of dad who gets worked up quickly. They'll say 'hasn't she applied for any jobs?', he'll say 'no, she hasn't'. They'll say 'hasn't she registered with the Work Bureau?', he'll say 'no, she hasn't'. 'Oh, there's a [civil service] exam coming up'... Dad, that's completely wrong! There are exams, but they're full up. No, either you didn't study hard enough, or else you chose the wrong thing.*

## Relationships with friends

We might think that friends would be a central element of a young person's web of relationships, and to play a major part in reducing the effects of unemployment and the crises that come along with it. But most participants' responses, in all three focus groups, paint a more complicated picture. Firstly – and particularly among graduates – friendships gradually break down the longer an individual remains unemployed. Secondly, respondents had a general sense of being let down and ignored by their friends.

Thirdly, there was a strong belief that access to money plays a key role in the form and strength of friendships.

For those who had not completed degrees, 'friends' primarily meant 'neighbourhood kids'; other young people from the same area, since not attending higher education meant that they had had few opportunities to meet new people. This creates a sort of geographical isolation and limits the scope of their relationships. The similar economic circumstances of unemployed people from the same neighbourhood, and the necessity of dividing up limited resources, also mean that these relationships are often marked by mutual suspicion.

*Karim: If you don't have money, you can't make friends. People will be your friend to leech off you or so you make them look better by comparison. Why would they be friends with you? With one friend I cut off the supply, and now he doesn't even say 'good morning' when he sees me. That's happened five or six times, and I never learn.*

*Khalil: The tiniest thing [will do it]. Say I'm not from your neighbourhood and I'm walking along with you in Soukra, not thinking anything. Someone will say 'this guy is trying to trick us'. I'll go and see my friend three or four times, then he'll think about it and decide 'oh, he's only coming because he hasn't got any money.*

Respondents in the graduate group had geographically broader circles of friends, since they had studied outside the neighbourhood and met students from elsewhere. But the strength of these friendships was fairly limited, and was greatly affected by money and work. When two friends are in the same socioeconomic position (unemployment or temporary, precarious work), they are much more likely to remain friends and keep in contact. The bigger the gap in status gets, however – when one of them gets a job and a steady income – the more the friendship is likely to deteriorate. It is difficult to know the exact reason for the breakdown of these friendships. Is it because one friend has 'risen' to a higher socioeconomic stratum and is developing new social networks, or because of the sensitivity of the other friend, whose feelings of failure are deepened by comparisons with a friend of similar age, background, and educational level? The limited availability of jobs also puts graduate 'friends' in direct competition with one another, and some respondents said that they would not share information on job offers, training opportunities or civil service examinations with friends in order to improve their own chances.

*Jihan: When you get a good job, you ditch your friends. [Laughs] When you have money in your pocket, you ditch your friends. Even if there's an interview or something like that. You're sorting your own life out, screw that guy! Even if it's a really close friend. Everyone always thinks about themselves. They only think about themselves, and once they get a job and get some money in their pocket, they turn their noses up at you. I'm working, you're unemployed.*

*Hilmi: I have two guy friends, friends closer than family, from university. [When] they were doing training, we were inseparable. But when they got a job, they cut me off completely. They wouldn't even say hello.*

The non-graduate female participants had a more varied assessment of their friendships. Some said that unemployment had not had much effect on their relationships, while others argued that financial and social circumstances were very important in determining whether a friendship would last. There was an important additional factor here: the double difficulty (money and gender) that affected their ability to move around outside the house and preserve non-familial relationships.

Marwa: *Not all friends don't understand. There are people who say 'you've got no money, don't worry, we'll pay for you'. Not always, but sometimes.*

Ghada: *I'm too embarrassed to go out and have someone pay for me.*

Raja: *For me, [it's OK], because we're part of the same generation, we're in the same situation.*

Raja: *We're all either working or studying. But once either is over, it's rare that anyone tries to stay in touch with the others.*

Sara: *Yeah, you can see that they don't want to hang out with you anymore. You'll be in Ettahrir neighbourhood, and they'll want to have coffee in Lac. You'll go downtown to eat lunch, and they'll be eating in La Marsa.*

In general, there is near-consensus that pre-unemployment friendships are not very durable and are quickly undermined by a change in socioeconomic circumstances on the part of one or the other friend. Combined with tense family relationships, unemployed people find themselves – or at least imagine that they are – without 'real' friends, compounding their psychological isolation and its effects, as well as reducing their ability to rely on connections to secure a job.

### Romantic relationships

The participants in this study are at a stage of life generally imagined to be full of romantic entanglements both 'casual' and 'official'. The majority of their responses, however, show that the reality is totally different. Quite apart from the fact that much of Tunisian society is opposed to the idea of sexual relationships outside marriage, at least openly, there are many other factors at work in the 'desertification' of participants' romantic lives. With only three exceptions, none of the participants in any of the three groups was married or engaged, and relationships outside this framework were almost entirely absent; sex *per se* was not directly referenced in the questionnaire and was not discussed in the groups. Responses were very similar irrespective of educational background, with the vast majority asserting that unemployment (and the resulting shortage or total lack of financial resources) was a major obstacle to beginning or continuing with any kind of romantic relationship.

Lasaad: *You start a relationship, three days go by, and on the fourth day she'll ask you what you're doing with your life. Then you block her and move on to the next one.*

Karim: *You don't have enough money even to go out for a coffee, you don't have clothes to go on a date with her, you don't have a phone. I've been avoiding seeing her for the last month.*

Hosni: *I had a girlfriend, we were together six years. What was the point? Was I going to marry her?*

The responses suggest that male participants feel they are hurt more by all this, because – in their view, at least – social convention says men should be the one who pays for things, whether with respect to marriage or in relationships outside marriage.

*Wael: Of course it has an effect. 'Why haven't you brought me anything?' 'Why haven't you given me money so I can go to the hammam like real women do?' 'So-and-so's son has new trainers, my son's are falling apart.' Imagine a man on the street and his son going up to him saying 'dad, give me 500 [DT]' – what you'd do, how you'd feel. 'Dad, buy me a ball so we can play football'; 'dad, give me some money to spend with my friends'. You feel like you're falling short, like you're not up to the responsibility.*

*Ahmed: There's a particular idea that's always there on a man's mind: 'you've gotta take care of it'. This mentality's always there. When you get to a particular age, you have to sort yourself out, start a family, get a source of income, everything. So you can furnish a house. So you can buy gas, buy a TV. You have to take all the responsibility on yourself.*

The responses of female participants, however, put this 'masculine' conception into perspective, showing the great pressures that women are also exposed to. Most female participants argued that the great transformations taking place in society meant that women, too, had to become financially independent, and that they were also expected to provide financial support to their families. Some said that men now expected – or even demanded – that women have jobs before marrying them, meaning that unemployment had serious effects on their marital prospects in a society that still gives the initiative in such issues to men.

*Ghada: We live in a society where women need to have authority, to work, otherwise they'll be asking their husbands for everything.*

*Raja: We've got to a point where both the woman and the man need to have salaries in order to start a family. Men on their own can't manage. In your mum and dad's day, you could support one another. But [now] he'll say, if you want such and such so badly, go out and work.*

*Sara: [Men] choose women on the basis of whether they work or not. Especially when they get to an age when they're supposed to be getting married.*

*Rania: Of course it makes a difference. From the beginning, he pulls out the minute he hears she's unemployed. He'll tell you he's got too many responsibilities already, he shouldn't have to have someone telling him 'do this', 'spend on this', 'buy this'.*

*Sanaa: You can't get married because you don't have money.*

### **Making ends meet**

Unemployed people have various ways of making ends meet. The strategies adopted vary from person to person, according to their family's circumstances, their educational level, their skills and energy and their ability to adapt. But there are certainly commonalities between participants, particularly those of the same educational level or sex. For



example, families are the main source of support in the majority of cases, and provide some limited amount of spending money to their unemployed children, although in most cases this will not be enough – not to mention the embarrassment most participants feel at asking for it. However, the absence of stable work does not mean that participants had no professional experience whatsoever. All of them had tried, in their own way, to escape unemployment, even if only temporarily and for pitiful wages.

## **JOBHUNTING STRATEGIES**

Before discussing the various strategies, we should note an important point: many participants consider nepotism, clientelism and bribes to be the easiest and most widespread way of getting a good job.

Most participants do not rely on independent job bureaus because there are so few opportunities available there, and private 'employment offices' in particular are widely disliked, with many saying that they are scams whose purpose is to deplete their limited resources while giving nothing back.

Male non-graduates seem to face a more difficult situation than the other two groups, more often being obliged to accept the most precarious, dangerous, exhausting and temporary of jobs for very little pay, without safe equipment or insurance being provided (construction, painting, gardening, loading and unloading, security, etc), or marginal jobs in the service sector (restaurants and cafes, for example). Members of this group were the most 'random' in their approach to finding new job opportunities, relying primarily on coincidence and family or neighbours to secure a few days of work here and there.

While graduates also faced many difficulties in finding jobs related to their academic training, the temporary opportunities they were able to find from time to time were still less exhausting, dangerous and precarious: tutoring, working for charity organisations, photography, technical jobs in labs or factories, etc. They were also better informed as to job opportunities, training courses and employment mechanisms, thanks to their internet skills and broader networks of contacts compared to their non-graduate peers.

The position of female non-graduates is more complicated. On the one hand, precarious jobs involving hard physical labour, which men take up because they are forced to, are simply not available to them; even if they wanted to, it would be very difficult to get anyone to employ them, and the relevant workplaces are often remote, raising the usual issues of transport and safety. On the other hand, they do not have the qualifications that they would need in order to secure a relatively comfortable job. But this does not mean that they have no solutions available. Some participants, for example, try to make money by working from home – making sweets for sale, for example.

## **Obstacles to jobhunting**

Quite apart from the 'traditional' obstacles that stand between most young Tunisians and the chance of getting a job, participants from Ettadhamen – and in other similar areas – face a unique set of barriers which make their situation ever more complicated. The first of these barriers is geographical and social stigma. Most participants believe that having 'Ettadhamen' listed as their address on their ID card reduces, or even destroys, their chances of getting any job they apply for. The many overlapping testimo-

nies within individual focus groups and the commonalities between the three different groups on this point seem to rule out the possibility that this is simply imagined or a culture of 'victimhood' speaking. A quick review of media coverage of the protests and other incidents that occur in Ettadhamen every so often is enough to show the depth of the stigma faced by the inhabitants of this area, which many Tunisians think of as a nest of violence, crime and drugs. Male non-graduate participants are the worst affected by this stigma: they have no education to 'mitigate' their background, and unlike women their gender does not help to ease anxieties about them. Even the most exhausting and worst paid jobs are sometimes beyond their reach for this reason. The second obstacle concerns the absence of development policy in the area and the weakness of the local economy, which compounds its poverty and forces inhabitants to go far afield if they want to look for jobs. This, in turn, leads us to the third obstacle: poor or non-existent public transport infrastructure means that people from Ettadhamen have to pay large sums just to get to their jobs, burning through much of their wages and encouraging many to stay at home.

*Karim: For example, you might go and work in Ennasr, and when they find out you're from Ettadhamen, they get worried and they don't give you a job. [The police] stop you, look at your ID card, see you're from Ettadhamen and detain you for three hours before deciding you're clean and letting you go. Or you might go downtown, and when they ask for your papers and find out you're from Ettadhamen they ask you what you're doing there, as though you'd turned up in Switzerland or somewhere!*

*Wael: Once I was working for a doctor. There was some sort of problem, and they said oh, well, it's because he's from Ettadhamen! So what?*

*Khalil: They judge you from your clothes, from your face. People judge you.*

## Migration

It is common knowledge that many, many young Tunisians – and even their middle-aged counterparts – want to migrate, irrespective of their educational level and professional position. This is not a guess or a general perception but a fact borne out by various studies, including International Alert Tunisia's *Youth on the Margins: Perceptions of Danger, Religion and Politics in Tataouine North, Kasserine North and Douar Hicher*, which showed that some 40% of respondents in all three areas 'think constantly about migration' and another 28% in North Kasserine think about migration 'sometimes', followed by 23.2% in North Tataouine and 21.4% in Douar Hicher. Given widespread unemployment and the limited financial resources of most participants, it is not surprising that migration was one of the most frequently considered solutions to their plight. This applies to both men and women, graduates and non-graduates. There are, however, significant differences when it comes to the *kind* of migration and perceptions of its risks. Many female participants, while not ruling migration out, were unwilling to risk their lives by attempting the journey across the Mediterranean illegally, preferring to seek contracts or other opportunities to migrate legally. Male graduates were keener to migrate than women in the same group and more willing to risk death in the process, as well as being more familiar with the various ways of getting into the EU. Male non-graduates, meanwhile, reported thinking about migration more than any other group and

were the most willing to take risks; they were also the group with the 'rosiest' idea of the realities of migration and of life in destination countries.

*Sanaa: When you see the financial situation, it drives you to do it. But emotionally, how can you consign yourself to doom like that? God knows whether he'll come back or not.*

*Ahmed: I like living with my family. But if someone came and said if you go illegally, you can work, you'll have money, you can live and do what everyone wants to do – of course I'd go. Live or die, the important thing is that I live the kind of life I want to live.*

*Mohamed Ali: I can take you to districts in Ettadhamen, where you'll see... a 14-year-old kid just hanging around. If you ask him what he wants to do when you grow up, he'll say he wants to migrate illegally. I'm saving up so I can do it. We can all see clearly that [Tunisia] has no transport and no future at all. Whatever you do, you won't get anywhere.*

*Ahmed: Say you get 15 thousand and start a business. You'll need a licence, a shop. You'll need to work, and maybe you'll even need credit. You think you'll make a profit, then you lose it all. Better to migrate illegally.*

### Legality and ethics of work

In this section, we tried to draw out the sample's willingness to accept jobs that are considered religiously unacceptable or are straightforwardly illegal (the parallel or unregulated economy). In general, participants had few reservations about taking jobs in the parallel economy or which failed to comply with the law: street pedlars, for example, or unregistered work for others (without a contract or social security), at home (making food, selling clothes or makeup, etc) or over the internet (multi-level marketing, remote services, etc). This willingness to accept unregulated and illegal forms of work is the product of their precarious situation. Participants lack ways to make a living and meet their most basic expenses, and the parallel economy has rapidly expanded over the last two decades, becoming a normal party of life. In a study titled *Unregulated Work Indicators in 2019*,<sup>33</sup> the National Institute of Statistics suggested that 'of 3566.4 thousand workers in 2019, 1967.7 worked in the regulated [sector], and 1598.7 thousand were in the unregulated [sector]. Those working in the unregulated sector thus comprise 44.8% of the total workforce'. 81.2% of those working in the unregulated sector were men (1297.6 thousand). According to an ILO study,<sup>34</sup> meanwhile, some 77% of workers aged 15-29 (the age group to which most of our participants belong) are in unregulated work (uncontracted wage labourers, unlicensed workers, unpaid employees of family businesses and independent workers). No wonder that most participants had no objection to working in the unregulated market, and that many of them had not even realised it was illegal.

<sup>33</sup> <https://bit.ly/3uP5T8U>

<sup>34</sup> La jeunesse Tunisienne et l'économie informelle. Organisation internationale du Travail 2015. <https://bit.ly/3M8Bt7p>

Hosni: *You don't have anyone to help you. I couldn't imagine any of us ever being offered a job with pay and turning it down, even if there was no contract.*

Mohamed: *I've worked on a street stand – I thought I'd make myself a bit of money, sell some fruit. They drove me off the road, told me to get out, go away, go and work in the market.*

There was more variation on the question of religiously or morally impermissible jobs, with clear variation based on educational level, economic position and sex. For example, the male non-graduates were more open – compared to the other two groups – to ways of making money that would generally be considered haram, primarily theft and burglary. Participants from this group justified resorting to 'dirty money' (*mal haram*) by reference to their terrible economic position, which they said forced them to use any means necessary to meet their basic needs, pointing out that even when jobs were available they often did not provide a basic wage, stability, social security or dignified working conditions. There was near-consensus that a 'moral', upstanding job is hard to come by, and that those that do exist do not meet basic needs:

Mohamed: *You've got no money to draw on, so you end up being willing to do anything, anything, just to get your hands on 10 [DT]. Even if it'll get you five years, you'll do it.*

Ahmed: *I come wanting to earn money morally, then you come, and – how should I put this – you treat me like crap, you say 'do this', 'do that'. They act like they're better than you.*

Lasaad: *At the end of the day, people either have to do things that don't help them, that they're not happy with, in order to get money, or else they have to do something that's morally wrong. In Ettadhamen, you've got no options. So you go and you steal, you take people's stuff.*

Wael: *Listen, everybody has their own stuff they're dealing with. Some people have a brother who's ill or a sister who's ill, some have a dad who's God knows where, some have a mum... Some people earn money morally and some get it immorally, and God looks after them because they're doing right by their mum and dad.*

Lasaad: *Sorry – do you live in Tunis or not? Give me an example of one person who's had a job and it's been halal. Impossible.*

Hosni: *It doesn't make any difference whether you blame them or not. When you don't know what their circumstances are, from a distance you might say what's wrong with this guy, he's got something wrong with him, how can he do that, does he want to go to prison? But when you know what his circumstances are, you wonder how you can help him make some money. And you stop caring about whether it's haram or halal.*

This does not mean that the participants are entirely reconciled to ways of earning money that are 'haram' or that they pay no attention to the 'consequences'. Many of them were bothered by fits of conscience, or even shame, and wished their circumstances were better:

Mondher: *As soon as I put my head on the pillow, I start thinking, why did I do that? I start thinking, 'poor guy', and then I get angry, I think 'God overcomes all', and then I don't think about it. You have to get money from somewhere.*

Lasaad: *I was going to buy my mum a dress for 15 [DT], but I didn't want to get it with dirty money. Am I tricking my mum or tricking God? She said, you've got money, why didn't you get it for me? I tell her it's dirty money, I can't use it to get you one.*

Even in the graduate group, men were more accepting of religiously impermissible ways of earning money, although they were strictly opposed to criminal acts that might cause harm to others (theft and burglary). They had no problem, for example, with gambling (sports betting) as a source of income. They likewise had no objection to jobs which, while legal, have irreligious associations: working in bars or coffee shops that open during Ramadan. This openness was relative, however, and justified with reference to the absolute necessity of finding work. In some cases the responses suggested an internal conflict or a sense of guilt:

Mohamed Ali: *I ended up in a really dodgy place one Ramadan. I worked in a coffee shop in Lac during the day. My parents kept saying don't do it, it's wrong. I went to the imam and said, I'm fasting, but I've got no other way of working, should I do the job or not? He told me to work. It was clear. So I carried on working. There were more people coming to the coffee shop in the day than in the night – do you understand what I'm saying? But you've got no other option. You're working, and that's it. Another time, I was working in a hotel in Gammarth, serving alcohol on the seaside, and so on. I asked [the imam] about that, too. He said I don't know whether it's haram or halal, but I'll ask someone for you and let you know.*

Female participants, both graduates and otherwise, were more clearly and firmly opposed to any way of making money that was *haram* or might be suspected of being so:

Marwa: *I'm completely against this idea. He could have done any other job, anything – picking up bottles, for example – and made some money. He didn't need to serve alcohol. I would never feed my kids using dirty money. How could I live like that? I would have died in that moment. If God has forbidden it, what am I supposed to say?*

Sanaa: *Anything that's a bit suspect, I'm absolutely against it.*

Ghada: *[Laughs] I know loads of people who've done that, who've started doing haram things – now they've got cars, and fun times, and what you might make in a month they make in a day or two.*

There were, of course, more flexible responses, and some participants said that they understood how unemployment could drive some people to earn money in immoral ways. But they were a minority in both groups:

Faten: *He didn't do that, I mean, he won't have done it just like that. When you see how someone was living – well, if you haven't lived it, don't judge.*

Jihan: *Circumstances make you work. Circumstances make you do it. When the landlord comes around for the rent and you haven't got enough money for bread, you stop thinking about halal and haram.*

These differences between men and women with respect to religion correspond with the findings of International Alert's *Youth on the Margins* report, which found that there was a 'statistically significant difference' between the two sexes on this point. 73.7% of women in Douar Hichar and 57.4% of men, and 70% of women in North Kasserine and 58.1% of men, were 'somewhat concerned with religion'. In Tataouine, 15.3% of men and 34% of women reported being 'very concerned with religion'. This disparity is of course not limited to unemployed women or even to Tunisians; it is a veritable global trend witnessed across cultures and religions.<sup>35</sup> Some attribute this to women's precarious position and sense that they are not safe.

It is no coincidence that the unregulated economy began to grow rapidly in the 1990s and has flourished in particular over the last decade. It is not a disease in itself but a symptom of the many diseases of the Tunisian economy. The unregulated economy has developed in conjunction with various political and socioeconomic changes: the transition from a 'welfare' economy in which the state plays a major role in every sphere to the era of neoliberal policy and austerity; the decline of the agricultural sector and the shrinking of its workforce; the growth of internal migration towards the poverty belts surrounding the major cities; the hardening of European immigration policy; the growth of the unemployment crisis; falling employment in many major sectors, including fabric and leather; the shrinking of the middle classes' purchasing power; the rise of families and business empires controlling whole sectors of the economy; and the state's endorsement of precarious work and adoption of 'flexible' labour laws in order to 'encourage investment' (low wages, deregulation of hiring and firing, reduced social security contributions, outsourcing).

At a time of widespread unemployment, when it is difficult to get a legal job in the 'regulated' sector, attempting to fight the 'unregulated' or 'parallel' economy ultimately means starving hundreds of thousands of Tunisians and driving them to crime or migration at any price. The Tunisian state is well aware of this, and its rhetoric around protecting the 'regulated' economy is not taken seriously by anyone, officials included; they know that it is one way of channelling popular anger and maintaining 'social peace', and of avoiding putting in place a genuinely effective policy for fighting unemployment and poverty. Every so often, the relevant government bodies and the security forces launch campaigns to catch some of the weakest links in the chain, responding to pressure from 'legitimate' businessmen and taking the opportunity to flex their own muscles. But in many cases, all it takes is a few bribes in the right hands to get the officials to turn a blind eye.

In some parts of Tunisia, the idea of a 'parallel' economy becomes meaningless, even ridiculous: in these areas it is the 'regulated' economy that exists 'in parallel to' the unregulated economy. For a growing number of Tunisians (as well as illegal immigrants

35 <https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199608102.001.0001/acprof-9780199608102>

<https://www.cairn.info/revue-travail-genre-et-societes-2012-1-page-33.htm>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2016/03/22/the-gender-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/>

resident in the country), there is no choice in the matter. The unregulated economy is their only means of ensuring their survival and preserving their dignity. In poor areas and among more precarious demographics, asking whether the parallel economy (and the same goes for crime) is 'legal' or 'illegal', 'moral' or 'immoral', 'haram' or 'halal' is a luxury not available to many who face a dangerous combination of poverty, marginalisation and a lack of options. It ignores the fact that 'moral systems' are not fixed or independent from the socioeconomic reality. Criminalising the non-regulated economy and analysing crime from a 'moralist' standpoint does not give us a better understanding of, or solutions to, these phenomena, and absolves the ruling elite of any responsibility for the situation.

## PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT POLICY AND RESPONDENTS' ASSESSMENTS

'Work, freedom, national dignity'. This was one of the most prominent slogans of the Tunisian revolution, a revolution whose roots – although some may have forgotten this, or tried to forget this – were thoroughly sociopolitical: unemployment, poverty, regional disparities, failed development policy, etc. Many of those who were killed or injured during the events of the revolution and the subsequent weeks were young people aged 20-30 who had fallen victim to the structural unemployment crisis that has dogged Tunisia for many decades. In the months and years following 14 January 2011, Tunisian elites have given priority to the so-called 'democratic transition process' and civil and political rights at the expense of the sociopolitical 'aims of the revolution', most important of which was employment.

There have been 12 different Ministers of Employment and Professional Training since 18 January 2011, one third of them from Ennahda (arguably more if we include the 'independent' ministers close to the movement) and the majority from economically liberal parties. The sheer number of people who have held the portfolio attests to the general political confusion faced by the country (confusion that has affected almost every ministry) over the last decade, as well as the low priority placed on employment by political elites, who have generally selected these ministers as part of inter-party deals and compromises. It also shows that the crisis is structural and cannot be fixed by introducing a couple of policies and switching officials; it requires a thoroughgoing socioeconomic policy platform.

Tunisians expected that the ruling elite would break with pre-revolutionary policy and reassess an economic model and development strategy that had clearly failed. In practice, however, the new rulers elected to stick with the same approach that had brought the country to this impasse in the first place. A glance at the 'new' employment policies – repackaged versions of the old policies – is enough to demonstrate this fact. In the first few years following the revolution (2011-2014), employment policy was effectively a matter of 'purchasing social peace'. In what some have described as an attempt to 'drown' the public sector and a burden on the public purse and what others have claimed was an effort to 'infiltrate' it by the new rulers, thousands of new public sector employees were taken on almost at random with no concern for real needs and priorities. This has been exploited politically by various groups, who have either exaggerated the numbers or been very imprecise in defining exactly who has benefited. Abid Briki, Minister of Public Service and Governance under Youssef Chahid (27 August 2016 to 25 February 2017), gave the following detailed figures:<sup>36</sup> alongside the 510,000 civil ser-

<sup>36</sup> In a media interview on Channel 9, 14 October 2016: <https://bit.ly/3xuBEpz>

vant positions that already existed in 2011, a further 200,000 had been added between 2012 and 2016, including 70,000 former agency workers who had been brought in-house, 16,000 employed under 'Mechanism 16', 10,000 'sector workers' and 9,000 beneficiaries of the General Amnesty and the programs providing for those injured during the revolution and the families of those killed.

With respect to the General Amnesty and the Exceptional Public Sector Appointment Decrees, a report by the Auditor's Office on exceptional hires at the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Young People and Sport between 2011 and 2015<sup>37</sup> concluded that 'as a result of the various exceptional privileges granted under this order, many [have found themselves] in an employment status that does not accord with the principles of justice and equality in public employment. The decision to continue these appointments without specifying any end point necessarily increases the burden on public service and on the state budget, even without taking into account the fact that the state is now responsible for social security contributions paid on the unemployment period of reassigned individuals.'

In terms of programs, structure and direction, all post-revolutionary governments have maintained the legacy of the Ministry of Employment. The majority of the employment programs currently operational well predate the revolution. The 'Sector Work' (*ouvriers de chantier*) mechanism, for example, was launched shortly after independence to provide work to the most impoverished and poorly educated parts of society and is still running today. The Environment, Growing and Gardening Companies, similarly, were originally set up in 2008 as part of efforts to reduce tensions after the Gafsa Mining Basin Uprising, and still employ thousands of people across several governorates without a basic law to regulate them; this program, too, is aimed primarily at the most vulnerable groups. Even the programs set up to deal with graduate unemployment are old, with some launched in the late 1980s and others in the 2000s, most significantly those created by Order 349/2009 (9 February 2009):

- Professional life apprenticeship
- The higher education graduate integration contract
- Rehabilitation and professional integration contract
- The reintegration into active life contract
- The small business mentorship program
- The employment and solidarity contract

Most of these mechanisms serve the interests of employers, allowing them to hire specialised workers who are partially or fully paid by the government and exempting them from social security payments on their behalf for a certain amount of time. They are not even obliged to give these workers a permanent contract after the apprenticeship is over. The state is thus ignoring the reality of supply and demand in the labour market – the number of unemployed people versus the number of job opportunities available – which has long favoured employers (by obliging jobhunters to accept unfavourable contracts and low wages), and supporting the stronger party, creating new forms of precarious and temporary work with taxpayers' money.

Some of these mechanisms were amended after the revolution, whether simple name changes or more substantial modifications. The professional life apprenticeship, for

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37 The report is available at: <https://bit.ly/3EnRFyV>



example, was renamed the 'professional life training contract, with the aim – in theory at least – of guaranteeing greater rights for jobseekers and obliging business owners to take on more social responsibility; a new mechanism was also created for employees of charity organisations, the 'social service contract'. In 2011, the government began issuing *Amal* ('hope') grants of 200 DT to unemployed graduates, but this decision was reversed only a few months later. In 2016, the Chahed government announced the *Forsati* ('My Opportunity') program,<sup>38</sup> whose aim was to provide jobhunters with 'personalised mentoring to develop a future professional plan and help them to make it a reality' and 'provide supplementary training in languages, IT, communications, life skills or other technical specialisations according to their professional plan and personalised needs, with the aim of meeting the needs of the labour market and businesses, facilitating access to paid work or self-employment'. In 2017, it launched the 'dignity contract', offering two years of employment at 600 TD a month with the government covering two thirds of the cost and the employer only one third. In 2018, it announced its intention to freeze public sector appointments – with exceptions made only for graduates of the *écoles supérieures* and for certain parts of government (primarily the Defence and Interior Ministries) – in order to reduce the deficit, in accordance with IMF 'advice' and the conditions of its newest bailout loan. Despite protests by unemployed graduates and the UCCT's rejection of the decision, the freeze is still *de facto* operative: the majority of new appointments in the last few years have been within the security forces or else the product of in-housing of former agency workers. Even Law 38/2020 on Exceptional Provisions for Public Sector Appointments, which was intended to guarantee jobs for graduates who had been unemployed for more than ten years, has been a non-starter: having initially ratified the bill on 16 August 2020, the President then announced in November 2021 (after assuming full legislative and executive powers) that it would not be implemented, since 'it was created as a tool of control, to contain anger and sell illusions, not for implementation'!

More than ten governments, each representing a range of parties and ideological tendencies, have held power since the revolution. But their employment policies have all been based on 'encouraging private initiative on the part of the unemployed and have relied on the private sector – both local and foreign – to soak up unemployment, disregarding the limitations of the Tunisian market, its poor competitiveness and its weak capacity for employment. There have been no public employment programs, no investment in public transport and infrastructure, and no changes to development policy capable of improving conditions in the most marginalised areas and making them more attractive to investment. Even public bodies concerned with employment now operate more like mediators between jobhunters and private sector businesses, a fact which is visible in the great number of programs designed to encourage self-employment and entrepreneurship and even in the names of these organisations: the Tunisian Agency for Employment and Freelance Work, Enterprise and Small Business Spaces for example. The state continues to pin its hopes on encouraging the development of small business by providing support and funding mechanisms via various public bodies, including the Tunisian Solidarity Bank, the National Fund for Improving Traditional Handicrafts and Trades, the Integrated Urban Development Bank, the Development Organisations (microfinance), and the National Employment Fund. Even in the legislative sphere, there is a clear trend towards relying on 'self-employment' and 'individual enterprise', for example in Law 20/2018 (the 'Start-Up Act'), Law 47/2019 (the 'Investment Climate Im-

<sup>38</sup> The introduction to the program is available at: <https://bit.ly/3MsU923>

provement Act') and Law 81/2020 (the 'Auto-Entrepreneurship Act'), the last of which was drafted under the Fakhfakh government but has never been ratified.

None of these bodies, programs and laws seems to have achieved much in the way of real change in the figures or the distribution of unemployment, particularly with respect to unemployed graduates. In late 2011, there were around 738,400 people (including 223,700 graduates) without a job in Tunisia. By 2019, this figure had fallen to 623,900 (including 255,500 graduates),<sup>39</sup> despite a dramatic increase in the number of private firms, which rose from 597,597 to 782,115 in the same period,<sup>40</sup> and despite high levels of migration over the last decade.

### Participants' assessment of employment policy

The first point that the participants' testimony makes clear is that there is a great shortage of information on public employment policy and the grants and social assistance available, particularly along those who are less educated. In addition to the main reason – the lack of actual job opportunities that these policies offer – this is the product of the state's failure to properly advertise these policies or to create a single central platform to provide information and guidance, as well as many unemployed people's difficulties with finding and accessing it.

The second point is that participants feel that the state does not have real employment policies and that the majority of the proposed solutions are either total failures or of limited efficacy, attacking the symptoms rather than the cause. This negative perspective extends to the various programs and mechanisms as well as the performance of the public bodies created to deal with unemployment.

In all three groups, we noted a general resentment of employment and self-employment bureaus, which most participants believed to be useless, corrupt and contemptuous towards unemployed people. Many also asked what the purpose of an employment bureau is if the only job offers it can tell you about are those that can easily be found on the internet or in private employment offices. This negative assessment is sharper among non-graduates, the more marginalised group, than among graduates, whether men or women.

*Khalil: I have one hope. I would go to Monoprix or to Aziza, but I would not go to the employment bureau. I have a real problem with it. They always close doors in my face.*

*Mondher: It provides no help at all, if they cancel it altogether it would be better. Nobody's gone to the Employment Bureau and got what they needed. They're just sitting there claiming their salary. Good for them.*

*Marwa: I used to go and follow everything up, go on the website every day. Then I realised what a complete waste of time it was. Even the Work Bureaus operate on connections. When they hear about a good job, they ring up one of their contacts and sort it out for them, even if it's something simple, a charity job or something.*

39 STATISTIQUES ISSUES DU RÉPERTOIRE NATIONAL DES ENTREPRISES. Edition 2020. Institut National de la Statistique (INS). <https://bit.ly/3xzioqM>

40 STATISTIQUES ISSUES DU RÉPERTOIRE NATIONAL DES ENTREPRISES. Edition 2020. Institut National de la Statistique (INS). <https://bit.ly/3xzioqM>

Mohamed Ali: *When you go to the government Work Bureau, you see it. They don't understand anything. And when I go and ask them about something, they don't understand, they won't give you any information. And they can't give you work.*

The graduate group expressed a more positive view, particularly with respect to the training courses and mentoring for prospective female entrepreneurs.

Ghada: *Especially at the Work Bureau, you can do a project plan and everything, and they explain to you how to make the investment that you're thinking about.*

Umaima: *We go to the Work Bureau and that's it. The Work Bureau is better. But as I told you, you have to attend two years of project and then they bring you the bank [people] and you present the project. It's not guaranteed.*

Employment programs, meanwhile, were universally held to be ineffective and the criteria for employment unobjective and based on nepotism or bribery. The non-graduates, both men and women, had benefited least from and had least experience with such programs. Neither organisations nor local authorities provide them with sufficient information on these programs or on how to apply. The situation for graduates was somewhat better, with some having benefited from the apprenticeship scheme or 'social service contracts', as well as training courses.

Opinions on state efforts to encourage entrepreneurship were more varied. The non-graduate men seemed entirely uninterested: the state's programs are not directed at this group, and they lack the funding, connections, support and training to start a business. The graduates and the non-graduate women expressed more desire, but also hesitancy and anxiety about prospective failure. This fear has objective justifications: limited financial resources, fear of getting into debt and going bankrupt, the limited support provided to young entrepreneurs, bureaucratic obstacles, the economic crisis facing the country, etc.

Faten: *There's no work. When you go, there are always long, stupid procedures to follow. You get scared, and they undermine you anyway. Then you have to see if they like the project or not, if they'll give you money or not...*

Hilmi: *The problem is the state of the country. You don't know what business you can make.*

Ahmed: *If in the future, God willing, I wanted to start a business, would I be able to find training? For example, I don't like the field I'm in, I want to learn something more profitable – will the state give me training? That's not falling short, that it gives me a training, and helps me succeed. What are the ideas for businesses, what fields are successful, what you should do, what you shouldn't do. But not just 'go launch your own projects'. I don't have the resources, I don't have the ideas, I don't have anything. How do you push me into the abyss.*

Marwa: *If you start when you're still in high school, you can start a business or something. But when you get to university and then find you're going to go back to working as a hairdresser, you suddenly find you can't change anything.*

## RESISTANCE AND ORGANISING

Young people in Ettadhamen suffer twice over from the failure of Tunisian employment and development policy: at the local level, and also at the national level. They belong to a generation that has experienced structural unemployment, and live in an area that has experienced a decade of neglect. We have tried to draw out their responses to this situation and the extent to which they are involved in social mobilisation and organisation against these policies.

Ettadhamen was one of the areas that rebelled in January 2011, and has seen various other protest movements since; the sharpest, in January 2021, met with intense police violence and was treated with great hostility by parts of the media. Many participants, particularly in the non-graduate group, had participated in some of these mobilisations, hoping to improve their conditions. But their responses suggest a sense of futility in these struggles, which play out again and again without any change. Some participants expressed their fear that they would face police violence and prison as well as poverty if arrested during protests. These fears show yet again that political freedoms, rights and bodily autonomy are still not guaranteed in Tunisia, particularly in the margins and among groups with no influential protector to 'support' them.

*Khalil: They push us to throw stones. You're there to protest, but they provoke you, they try and get you to throw stones, then they fire [tear] gas at you.*

*Hosni: In the last round of protests on Habib Bourguiba Street, they were firing [tear] gas and hot water at them. Are these people or animals who've hurt you?*

*Mondher: Even in 'civilian' life you're dying of hunger. What do you think prison will be like? If you want a life here, you need money. You can't resist them, 'on land or on sea'. It's pointless.*

Most participants evinced a hostility to traditional political and institutional activity via parties and electoral participation, with more sympathy for protest movements and sectoral/regional struggles. But this does not mean that participants had much faith in protest of this kind. Some expressed a belief that the collective mobilisations which have occurred again and again with the same form and the same content were pointless. This belief meant that some participants looked for individual salvation, despite the national, collective and shared nature of the crisis.

*Marwa: We made a revolution. But now I feel like it's a waste of time. They go out and shout and shout and go home again.*

*Umaila: It's a waste of time. They held sit-ins against the President's decisions on new appointments, they kept demonstrating for ages, but it was a waste of time. Kais said there's no work, for the next five years don't even bother trying. Someone tells you that there's no money, there's no work, and they're still going out [to protest]. I think it's a waste of time, and doesn't provide any hope of a solution.*

*Hilmi: This question is connected to the last one. When I go out to protest, I know that it's not going to change anything. It's pointless – I'll find a solution myself.*

Graduates, in particular, had very limited involvement in collective protest movements and the bodies that exist to defend their rights, despite their educational level, their notional political consciousness and their contact with these organisations during their years of study. No participant within this group had been a member of a student union, an unemployed people's coordination committee or a political party, even though they had graduated after 2011, at a time when there was far less fear attached to student union or party-political activity in universities. This raises questions about the role and effectiveness of organisations, student unions and political groups in universities, as well as why educated young people are so hostile to organised protest and traditional political activity (within parties and organisations). This group was also the least enthusiastic about civil struggle and clashes with the security forces, perhaps reflecting the relative success of government containment policies (employment promises, training programs, temporary grants, further education, using civil society to provide jobs). Despite being unemployed and facing very poor economic conditions, this group are better positioned than their peers to exploit the (very limited) opportunities offered by the economic system and have more hope of improving their situation. As a result, they are less inclined to seek change by force or through collective struggle. Non-graduates were more open to protesting, even if that meant facing extreme police violence. This was particularly true of young men, whose testimony showed that they had nothing to lose and that they had no faith whatsoever in the government and no hope of improving their situation.

Participants had a better relationship with civil society organisations. There was a general belief in their role as intermediary organisations between citizens and the government and as a means of integrating into society, perhaps because activism within civil society is more flexible and less hierarchical than within political parties. These organisations have also benefited from the near-total absence of parties and the general retreat of the state from its social functions, particularly providing infrastructure, a minimum level of leisure and the basic requirements of a dignified life. Most organisations of this kind mentioned by participants are charities that provide support, regularly or otherwise, or leisure activities (sport for example); none of them brought up human rights or 'political' organisations. Some participants had a 'pragmatic' approach, which is to say that they made use of financial support or training courses where available. This positive assessment was particularly visible within the graduate group and among the non-graduate women. The non-graduate men had less of a relationship with civil society organisations, and their interactions were limited to 'charity' organisations that provide food or similar services.

*Ahmed: Organisations sometimes provide you with useful training. They give you something to do. And they mean you're able to do things, integrate, get to know people.*

*Mohamed Ali: Organisations play an important role. They try to bring citizens together with the local authorities. You have to learn to be active – depending on the quality of the organisation.*

Respondents in all three groups said that they had little confidence in political parties of any orientation. None of them had been involved in party-political activity. Their responses suggested that parties were either totally absent from their social milieu or appeared only around election time, hoping to exploit their poverty and the crises that

they face according to a 'clientelist' logic that does not differ much from vote-buying. Many believed that parties did not care about them and had nothing to offer. Ennahda was almost the only party actually named, raising questions about the role of the leftist parties in the poverty-stricken areas that are supposedly their natural habitats. This generally negative attitude has concerning implications for the future of democracy and political activity, since parties are intermediary bodies that should play a crucial role in public debate and in governance (whether in government or opposition). This disillusionment with parties is also reflected in participants' attitudes to elections:

*Karim: The parties take advantage of us. As soon as people have voted for them, the parties forget about them, that's all. Those who fought by their side. This means that you've used me. So I'll be keeping well away.*

*Faten: They come and use you to do what they need to do at election time. They give you leaflets with projects that don't really exist, they tell you a million things they're going to do for you, then after that you never see them again. We don't go anywhere, and they never come back, they don't come out here and see what's going on. At the next election I don't think anyone will vote. Even the ones who voted two and three years ago won't do it again.*

*Sanaa: I'm sick of elections.*

These young people's relationship to political affairs and civil activism cannot be analysed in isolation from their class and regional background. In her study *Politics on the Margins in Tunisia*,<sup>41</sup> Olfa Lamoum notes that 'any analysis of the relationship between young people and politics in Douar Hicher and Ettadhamen must take into account their specific position "on the fringes of the city and the State"', pointing out their double difficulty 'in which one layer of inequality is stacked on top of another. First, there is social inequality [...] having low social capital and being prone to precarity and unemployment. Then on top of social inequality, there is urban inequality, meaning unequal access to the available resources and services [...] all of which is compounded by the effects of the stigmatisation and discrimination to which these young people are subjected.'

This peculiar position has a particular effect on young people's assessment of the 2011 revolution and subsequent developments, not from the 'abstract' perspective of rights and democracy but from that of its actual achievements:

*Nonetheless, although the qualitative study shows that some young people (primarily graduates) value the freedom of expression that they have recently acquired as a result of the revolution, and have set about putting it to good use to demand that the authorities give them their rights, the quantitative study shows that 44% of young people believe that their daily life has not changed since 14 January 2011. Worse still, 46% say that their living conditions have deteriorated. Some of the most disadvantaged people even miss the days of Ben Ali.*

*As may be expected, the most common reason given is an economic one, relating to the ongoing problem of unemployment and the steep rise in the price of staple goods. During interviews, many young women also cited safety fears that hindered their freedom of movement; some of them even had to give up their jobs because of a lack of safe transport in the evenings.*

41 Tunisia-Politics-On-The-Margins-EN-2016.pdf (international-alert.org)

Free expression and the regular transfer of power without improved economic and social conditions, and the distancing of young people and the margins from decision-making, are all indicators that the young people of Ettadhamen and other similar areas 'remain excluded from all the benefits of social citizenship (such as health insurance, social protection, community facilities), and deprived of access to cultural or leisure infrastructures.' This exclusion does not necessarily mean that young people have no hope whatsoever of change and no interest in politics or attempts to influence it. But it does mean that they have less faith – or none whatsoever – in formal political institutions and in parties, and to a lesser extent, in civil society organisations with a rights-based approach. This aversion, as Lamloum puts it, is evidence of their separation from institutionalised politics, which they have 'no influence over'.

It is worth noting that Lamloum's paper was written in 2015, meaning that the hostility to and lack of confidence in institutional politics expressed by participants in this study (conducted in 2022) did not come from nowhere. It is a form of 'silent' protest, the natural product of the failure of the political class that has governed the country for a decade to provide those who live on the margins (and vulnerable groups more broadly) with any reason to feel a sense of citizenship.

Nobody can deny the great role played by young people, particularly those aged 18–25 and to a lesser extent those aged 26–35, in Kaïs Saïed's landslide victory over Nabil Karoui in the 2019 presidential elections. This victory – in the first round of voting, no less – came as a shock to many political forces and even to educated people and political scientists, perhaps because of their limited contact with young people and reality on the ground (especially in marginalised areas). But the results were not a total surprise. International Alert's study *Youth on the Margins* (conducted between 15 April and 5 May 2019) found that Saïed was the most popular politician among young people in Douar Hicher and Kasserine and the second most popular in Tataouine, irrespective of education level or economic activity level.

Many analysts attributed Saïed's success to the fact that he had no links to the political establishment, which many Tunisians no longer trust, or to the elite (ruling and opposition) that have dominated the political scene since 14 January 2011, which many groups – especially young people – see as a monolithic bloc responsible for the political and economic crisis in the country, and perhaps sought to punish. The image of the 'poor' candidate with 'clean hands', whose unconventional and low-key electoral campaign took in even the most marginal areas of the country without claiming any public money (costing only 'a cigarette and an espresso', as his supporters put it), gave Saïed a great deal of credibility, casting him as the moral candidate at a time when corruption was rife. This may explain why so many unemployed and impoverished young people pinned their hopes on Saïed, who was 'different from the rest', 'religious' without being 'ideological', intent on fighting corruption and 'rebuilding the political system', improving socioeconomic conditions and 'rescuing the country'.

Alongside these 'objective' factors, there is another dimension, too: the President is a native of neighbouring El Mniha, which formerly fell within the same municipality as Ettadhamen, and as such is seen by many participants as a 'neighbourhood boy'. But while this may have served him in the elections, it has not helped him much in terms of their assessment of his time in power. Participants generally expressed great disillusionment with his socioeconomic achievements. This negative view was more common among the graduate group, who openly said that they had lost all hope and that the

President had nothing to offer them, particularly since his decision to suspend Law 38/2021 (which guaranteed state employment to those who had been unemployed for a long time) and his regular statements to the effect that the state cannot afford to employ graduates.

*Marwa: He was elected by young people. We thought he was our great hope.*

*Interviewer: Do you feel, or have you felt, that things have changed since President Saied came to power?*

*All respond: Now we're even more disillusioned!*

The non-graduate men were similarly disappointed with the 'neighbourhood boy', who they had expected to improve conditions in his home area. Despite this disappointment, however, many members of this group were still convinced that if he wanted to, he could make things better. This suggests that the collective understanding of the presidency has not changed much despite the transformation of the political system following the revolution and the greater power granted to the parliament. This older view is likely to be further reinvigorated following the introduction of 'exceptional measures' on 25 July 2021 and Saied's concentration of power in his own hands.

*Mondher: Let me tell you what happened. He's the president, and the president, who voted for him, it's the youth of Ettadhamen, he's considered one of the neighbourhood boys. He came and said Ariana and Manouba will be offered jobs. So we were happy, we said we know this guy, better him than somebody we don't know.*

*Hosni: Kais Saied gets things done.*

*Laaad: Had Kais Saied wanted to get things done, he would have gotten it done.*

Among the non-graduate women there was greater variation in the assessment of Saied's time in office. While they were certainly disappointed, in some cases there was a degree of sympathy for the difficult circumstances that might have 'prevented' the President from doing more to address unemployment:

*Amna: He can't change everything between day and night. There's a lot of problems.*

*Raja: The economy's in a hole. How will he provide us with things? Those fake promises are just ink on paper.*

## CONCLUSION

The participants' testimony has allowed us to 'zoom in' on poverty in Ettadhamen and see in detail the various aspects of unemployed people's lives: their daily lives, how they make ends meet, their connections with their environment and isolation from it, their jobhunting, their solutions to 'leisure' time, their anxieties and hopes, and their frustration with and resistance to state policy.

Unemployment is not only an economic condition. Unemployed people also suffer from a social 'functionlessness' which affects their relationships with those around them.



Some of these relationships become tenser as the years of unemployment drag on. They make take on a violent aspect (family), while others simply break down as a result of time and different trajectories (friendships) or else are smothered in the cradle or crushed after many years by a lack of money (romantic relationships).

Unemployment is not only material. It also involves intense psychological suffering that exhausts the unemployed person and may develop into physical illness. The longer the period of unemployment goes on for, the more both male and female participants feel the weight of their inactivity and financial dependence and the 'burden' they impose on their environment, and they begin to feel ashamed. This sense of shame is more noticeable among men, who believe that society is more willing to accept women staying at home and depending on their families. The testimonies of female respondents, however, show how unemployment also makes women's position more precarious and puts them at the 'mercy' of others. Economic empowerment and financial independence guarantee women a minimum level of protection and grant them relative freedom of movement, giving them a greater 'margin of choice' with respect to romantic relationships.

Many respondents expressed a great exhaustion with their situation, which left them stuck in place as the rest of the world moved quickly around them. All of them look for ways to combat this psychological state. But the lack of leisure facilities, limited financial resources and the relative isolation of the neighbourhood mean they do not have many options: social media, TV series, coffee shops, private sports facilities, and risk-taking behaviour like unprescribed sleeping pills and drugs (mainly cannabis and most commonly among non-graduate men).

All unemployed people try and find ways of making ends meet. Relying on family members, however, remains the main solution, alongside temporary and precarious work. In an area like Ettadhamen where high unemployment comes along with poverty, stigma (crime, terror, drugs), poor infrastructure and a lack of public transport, social isolation is worse and the chance of getting a decent and dignified job capable of providing economic security even lower. Male participants who had not completed their education and did not have professional training degrees or trade skills were the most vulnerable to 'long-term' unemployment; in many cases, even the unregulated economy closes its doors to them, and they are left with no solution other than crime or illegal migration. Of course, thoughts of migration are not unique to this group. Most participants, particularly men, consider it a serious solution to their problems, although their willingness to face the risks of illegal migration varied, particularly among female participants.

Some participants who held degrees regretted continuing with their studies or their 'unlucky' choice to pursue a subject that offered employment opportunities. They often blamed those around them for not helping them to make a better choice. They also blamed the state for failing to make the educational and training opportunities available correspond to economic realities and 'market needs', as well as the limited practical skills that their courses had provided them with. They were afraid that even those things that they had learned were quickly being forgotten or being made obsolete by new developments. Some, particularly women, suggested that a university degree could even be an obstacle to getting certain kinds of work, because employers were likely to think of candidates as overqualified.

All three focus groups agreed on their assessment of public policy, which they saw as

ineffective; they also said that they did not have enough information (or any information at all) about what was available. Most of them also agreed that the official (and even party-political) rhetoric on unemployment was 'nonsense' peddled at election-time. They were generally dissatisfied with Employment and Freelance Work Bureaus, describing them as a 'waste of time'; some gave accounts of particularly negative experiences. Non-graduate men were the least likely to be familiar with state employment policy or to have made use of Employment Bureaus. Graduates and non-graduate women were more familiar, and some had benefited from training courses, temporary contracts or grants as part of public employment programs, particularly the institutions set up to encourage entrepreneurship, private initiative or freelance work.

Faced with unemployment, marginalisation and the poor results of state employment programs and policies, a significant number of respondents have sought to mobilise for their rights and to put pressure on local and central government. But this socioeconomic struggle is not generally mediated by 'institutions' of any kind, party-political or otherwise, and there is a great distrust of parties and a marked preference for 'apolitical' organisations and 'spontaneous', non-party mobilisation. Non-graduate men are the most likely to participate in civil protest and clashes with the security forces, and the most likely to have experienced police violence as a result.

Most respondents had no confidence in the political class, whether government or opposition, that has dominated the political scene over the last decade, and have little hope of them providing a solution to unemployment, poverty or marginalisation. Even President Kais Saied, who enjoyed broad support among young people in Ettadhamen – including many of the respondents – and elsewhere in the 2019 elections, and who they had very high hopes for, has not been able to change this attitude. Many respondents, particularly graduates, felt that his performance in government – particularly with respect to unemployment and development – had been yet another disappointment, and had not lived up to expectations.

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# **Salé Medina neighbourhood**

## **Morocco**

Faouzi Boukhriss

### **INTRODUCTION**

This study aims to trace the trajectories of unemployed young people and draw out their everyday experiences with unemployment and precarity. The research question might be couched as follows:

How do young people live with, suffer from and deal with unemployment?

This question invites several others:

- What is the effect of unemployment on young people?
- What are the strategies that they use to fend off the effects of unemployment and precarity?
- How do they conceptualise and how have they experienced public policy in this field?
- What are their experiences of collective organisation and resistance in this regard?

We will attempt to answer these questions over the course of four sections:

- The effect of unemployment on mental health and on young people's relationships with their families and their direct environment.
- Young people's strategies for living and confronting unemployment and precarity: looking for work and attempting to improve working conditions
- Public policy and its effects on young people
- Social mobilisation, the organisational fabric and young people's experiences

As well as trying to cast light on the socioeconomic conditions that young people experience in working-class neighbourhoods like Salé Medina, we also assess how unemployment has affected them and how they act in response to it. We have also sought to draw out participants' opinions on public policy, particularly employment policy, and its relationship to other relevant policies (education and training) and to urban life more broadly.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study takes a qualitative approach based on close listening to three focus groups made up of young people with diverse profiles. It seeks to identify their experiences, expectations and aspirations and the possible alternatives that they propose to the current situation. By doing so, it hopes to establish how they conceive of and justify their own practices.

The study was conducted in the old city (Medina) of Salé using qualitative research tools: ethnographic observation, individual interviews, and focus groups.

- Ethnographic observation: carried out over ten days from 26 January to 4 February 2022. This provided preliminary information on Salé Medina, the inhabitants' circumstances and the general distinguishing characteristics of life there, as well as allowing the research team to make contact with prospective focus group participants. The contacts made at this stage did not focus exclusively on young people, but also included other inhabitants of the Medina, both men and women.
- Individual interviews: nine individual interviews were carried out with young people of both sexes (5 women, 4 men) aged 18–30, alongside ethnographic observation, in order to develop a preliminary understanding of unemployment within the Medina and identify their opinions on relevant public policy. Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. As well as casting light on the situation of unemployed young people, we sought to use these interviews to select possible focus group participants.
- Focus groups: three focus group discussions were conducted on 6 February 2022, each lasting between 2 and 3 hours. There were 25 participants (13 men, 12 women), all between 18 and 31 years of age. The groups were composed as follows:
  - Group 1: Unemployed young men from the Medina living in unstable socioeconomic circumstances.
  - Group 2: Unemployed young women from the Medina living in unstable socioeconomic circumstances.
  - Group 3: A mixed group of unemployed graduates from the Medina living in unstable socioeconomic circumstances.

The focus groups were conducted according to a single prompt sheet setting out the basic questions intended to direct discussion towards the research question. These questions were divided into four main subjects:

- The psychological and social effects of unemployment on young people.
- Young people's strategies for resisting the effects of unemployment and precarity.
- Young people's conceptualisations and experiences of employment policy.
- Young people and collective action: experiences of resistance

Using the prompt sheet required a team of assistant researchers, some of whom guided discussion while others observed, took notes, or recorded the session (with the consent of participants).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Focus groups always require a research team, more than any other research tool. See: Sophie Duchesne et Florence Haegel, *L'entretien Collectif*, éd Armand Colin, Paris, 2009.

## LOCATION

This study was conducted in the old town (Medina) of the city of Salé, a major urban centre in the Rabat-Salé- Kénitra region. We spent ten days conducting our preliminary investigation, a period which – although naturally insufficient to carry out an in-depth sociological and anthropological study like Kenneth Brown's *The People of Salé*<sup>43</sup> – allowed us to make contacts in the area and develop various observations.

There are many recognisable features that allow visitors to Salé to quickly get their bearings. All Moroccan medinas, their differences notwithstanding, share various common characteristics, most obviously the walls that encircle them on every side, making entrances to the neighbourhood – the gates – major landmarks.

In geographical terms, the Medina is part of the *arrondissement* of Bab el-Mrissa, in the northwest of the city. It is bordered by Laayayda to the north, the Bou Regreg river to the south, the neighbourhoods of Tabriquet and Bettana to the east and the Atlantic Ocean in the west.

Before entering the Medina, a visitor approaching from Rabat city crosses the Hasan II bridge and finds themselves in a large open area that stretches from the marina up to the Bab al-Khamis gate. This area includes various sports grounds used by young people of both sexes (particularly young men), as well as small parks and – more recently – a large digital vaccination centre. As we enter the Medina itself, however, it becomes obvious that we are passing into an entirely different world. Everything changes: the smells, the sights, the sounds, the rhythm of life. Like a beehive, the Medina is always alive with movement, although the pace of movement speeds up or slows down from hour to hour and day to day. The further in we go, the clearer this impression becomes.

Although there are certain general characteristics that apply to the whole Medina, this does not mean that it is a homogenous space. Its inhabitants have different incomes and socioeconomic circumstances, different lifestyles, different jobs (shopkeepers, salesmen, service workers). Even their access to public amenities differs.

Like other parts of Salé, the Medina has been the destination of successive waves of internal migration,<sup>44</sup> leading to rapid urbanisation; some 93.2% of Salé's more than 500,000 inhabitants now live in an urban environment, with an average 1,462 people per square kilometre. The city has welcomed more migrants than anywhere else in the region.<sup>45</sup> Although these migrants left their homes in the interior in search of work, upon

43 Kenneth L. Brown, *People of Salé: Tradition and Change in a Moroccan City, 1830-1930*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1976.

44 These waves of migration began in the late 19th century, when colonial policy began to shift the country's centre of gravity away from the cities and villages of the interior out towards the cities of the Atlantic seaboard (including Salé). At the beginning of the 20th century, the population of Rabat and Salé taken together was no more than 50,000 people, but by 1951 it had risen to 203,000, an increase of more than four times, and in 2019 (six decades after independence) it was 1.6 million. Thanks to migration from the interior, net population growth in Salé between the 1960s and early 1970s was as high as 50%. See, for example:

- Abdellatif Lafrakh, *Croissance démographique et dynamique urbaine au Maroc*, in *Actes du colloque de Rabat*, mai 1990, Publication de l'Association internationale des démographes de langue française, 1993 p167-176.

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45 *Monograph on Rabat-Salé-Kénitra*, Supreme Planning Commission, Rabat-Salé-Kénitra Regional Directorate, 2017 (in Arabic). P. 25.



arrival they have found themselves in an environment providing fewer jobs than ever before, exacerbating the problem of unemployment and leading to a rapid expansion of shanty towns and unregulated labour. Of the 39.7% of inhabitants aged 15 or over who were 'economically active' in 2016 – that is, in or looking for work – around a third were unemployed (13.5% of the total population), the highest figure ever. Unemployment in Salé is an urban phenomenon, affecting women more than men, and young graduates more than others.<sup>46</sup>

The difficult situation in Salé is complicated by the fact that it has become 'a dormitory town for the capital, Rabat; a city resembling a museum'<sup>47</sup> – a city that looks more to the past than to the future. Its public image is that it is old, beautiful, and much-loved, but it has nonetheless been neglected in employment and training policy, particularly with regard to young people, who represent its future. This neglect, which has affected the working-class districts in particular, has led to the growth of many negative phenomena, not least among young people, the most prominent of which are crime, antisocial behaviour and violence.

Statistics taken from the Supreme Planning Commission, the Ministry of Employment and Professional Training, the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education and other relevant bodies all show that the greatest problem facing young people in Morocco is access to work. There are around 11.7 million young people aged 15–34 in the country, around 37% of the total population. Around 5.6 million of these, 48%, are economically active, a slightly lower number than the national figure (49.6%).<sup>48</sup>

Within the economically active group, those without any qualifications predominate, accounting for 62.3% of the total, while 25.7% hold a secondary certificate and 12% a degree. The figures also show that young people are most vulnerable to unemployment. For example, of the million people recorded as unemployed in 2010, 80% were aged between 15 and 34 (39% 15–24 and 41% 25–34).

Although there has been a marked improvement in the unemployment figures generally, they are still high within several demographics, particularly young people aged 15–24 living in urban areas. This is partly attributable to the economy's limited ability to create jobs. Between 1999 and 2010, only 1.6 million new jobs were created, while the economically active population grew from 8.8 to 10.4 million in the same period.<sup>49</sup>

The government statistics also show that young graduates are the group most hurt by unemployment: this demographic faces higher unemployment rates than its peers. Paradoxically, completing higher education is inversely correlated with escaping unemployment, with a degree guaranteeing neither a job nor social mobility. Young people are also more vulnerable to long-term unemployment, which is a distinctive feature of the national and local labour markets. It is well-established that the longer an individual remains unemployed, the more difficult it is to reintegrate into the workplace. This may explain why young people continue to face unstable unemployment characterised by high levels of precarity, low wages and absence of contracts or social security coverage. Some 40% of young people are in unpaid jobs, working for their families, while less than 10% have health coverage, and more than 80% have no formal contract (including around half of graduates). The underemployment rate for young people, meanwhile, sits at 17.3%.<sup>50</sup>

46 Monograph on Rabat-Salé-Kénitra, *ibid.* P. 73.

47 Kenneth L. Brown, *People of Salé*, *ibid.*

48 See the report on the website of the Social and Economic Council (CES): [www.ces.ma](http://www.ces.ma)

49 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

It is important to note here that it is difficult to obtain specific statistics on young people in the old town of Salé and their socioeconomic situation. Despite the importance of the statistics that are available and the various maps and studies provided by the Supreme Planning Commission, the information that is published is generally focused on the centre and not updated, only rarely and partially drilling down to the very local level (the region, the commune, the city). The smallest territorial unit regularly covered by the statistics is the commune, which in our case is Bab el-Mrisa, the commune within which the Medina is located. But even here, only very limited data is available. The 2014 Census, for example, tells us only that there were 174,934 people living in Bab el-Mrisa, 16.3% of whom were aged 20-29 (and 32% of whom were aged 15-34), and that the local unemployment rate was 18.8%, with the rate among women (27.0%) almost double that among men (14.6%).

The old town of Salé does not have enough businesses, services or trades to provide young people with job opportunities, and it is far away from those areas that do (areas with a strong industrial, services or government sector, for example). Like other working class districts, it also has its own specific set of long-standing problems – crime, anti-social behaviour, violence, a lack of security, sexual harassment – which are a source of stigma for its inhabitants, reducing their chances of finding work outside its walls and making it more likely that they themselves will fall victim to such problems.

All these problems must be understood in the context of the spatial mobility of today's urban inhabitants. These young people are not only the young people of their neighbourhood or commune. Their day-to-day lives are far too far-ranging to be contained within the narrow alleyways of their home quarters. They are spent in constant movement across the whole city – a tendency particularly noticeable in a metropolitan city like Rabat.<sup>51</sup>

## PREVIOUS STUDIES

Academic study is generally like adding bricks to an existing structure. It is never a complete leap into the unknown: it usually involves recasting a question that has been asked before or reassessing freely available data collated and assessed by other researchers. In our case, there are relatively few studies on young people, particularly studies based on sociological fieldwork. As many scholars have observed, 'there is a paradox in how young people appear in sociological studies in Morocco. In reality, they are a dominant demographic, but in the social sciences they are neglected.'<sup>52</sup>

The oldest field study available is a 1962 monograph on young Moroccans by André Adam, which focuses specifically on primary and secondary school students aged 15-22 in Casablanca (a large, rapidly-developing modern city unburdened by tradition) and Fez (a more traditional environment amenable to comparison with Casablanca).<sup>53</sup> The study included 418 students, 293 (184 boys and 109 girls) from Casablanca (70%) and 125 (72 boys and 53 girls) from Fez (30%), each of whom filled in a questionnaire comprising 90 questions on their studies, family and social life, leisure, tastes and ideas

51 Authier Jean-Yves. Le quartier à l'épreuve des « mobilités métropolitaines ». In : Espace, populations, sociétés, 1999-2. Les mobilités spatiales. pp. 291-306.

52 R. Bourqia et autres, Les jeunes et les valeurs religieuses, éd Eddif-Codesria, Casablanca, 2000. P9.

53 André Adam, une enquête auprès de la jeunesse musulmane au Maroc, Aix-En-Provence, Annales de la Faculté des Lettres, 1962.p.11

on marriage and childrearing; the two sexes received slightly different questionnaires.<sup>54</sup>

In the 1920s, several decades before Adam's work, Robert Montagne's *Révolution au Maroc* also discussed young people. This study sought to establish why young urbanites were so inclined to violently resist the institutions of the French Protectorate and why they were so sympathetic to the pan-Arab ideas coming from the Mashreq.<sup>55</sup> It was commissioned by the French Resident-General, Hubert Lyautey, in an attempt to pre-empt the difficulties that would arise from newly educated Moroccans.<sup>56</sup>

The next major field study on young people was carried out in 1969 by a research team under the supervision of Paul Pascon and Mekki Ben Taher. It focused primarily on villagers, specifically on teenage boys aged 14-18,<sup>57</sup> and sought to draw out their views on various subjects including schools, leisure, friendships, work, sexuality, the government, money, family, women, the past and the future.

With the exception of Mohamed Touzi's 1982-1983 study, in which 400 students participated, there were no significant additional studies until the 1990s, when there was a renewed interest in young people. In 1992, a team of Moroccan sociologists carried out a new quantitative study of around 500 students in Rabat, focusing on their relationship to university and their families and their values.<sup>58</sup>

In 1994, Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi completed an important monograph on young people and protest in Morocco,<sup>59</sup> which in many respects overlaps with this study. Chraïbi's work is particularly significant for its use of participant observation, life stories and consideration of daily life, which allowed her to identify young people's ideas about and responses to the issues under consideration. It is also significant because it focused on educated and socially integrated urban youth who nonetheless found themselves in a difficult socioeconomic and cultural position at odds with their hopes and expectations.

When Chraïbi's study was written, urbanites were approaching 50% of the population – that is, the country's pressures and tensions had begun to move into the cities. Since independence, the monarchy had managed to secure its control over the mountains and the countryside, but the cities were distinguished by regular rebellions against the government, and had become the site of regular protests and uprisings fed by young people (in the 1960s, the early 1980s, the beginning of the 1990s etc).

There were two main reasons for Chraïbi's decision to concentrate on urban students. Firstly, this was an educated group, a group that had acquired social capital affording it access to written culture; this allowed her, as a researcher, to more easily collect data. Secondly, the central problem of post-independence Morocco was that of integrating the youth. This demographic had been raised on the collective 'Moroccan dream', but their hopes and aspirations had been disappointed by the crisis of education, which no longer acted as a vehicle of social mobility thanks to a narrow job market and runaway unemployment (now more of a problem for graduates than their less educated peers).

54 Ibid.p7.

55 Robert Montagne, *Révolution au Maroc*, éd France Empire, Paris, 1953. p301.

56 Hassan Rachik, *Jeunesse et changement social*, in 50 ans de développement humain, Perspectives 2025, Rapports thématiques, Société, Famille et Jeunesse, pp. 193-215.

57 Paul Pascon et autres, *Ce que disent 266 jeunes ruraux*, in *Bulletin Economique et social du Maroc*, Janvier-Juin, 1969, p1-144.

58 Rahma Bourqia, M. El Harras, et D. Bensaid, *Jeunesse estudiantine marocaine, valeurs et stratégies*, publication de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Rabat, 1995.

59 Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi, *Soumis et rebelles, les jeunes au Maroc*, éd CNRS, Paris, 1994.

In 1996, a research team led by Rahma Bourqia, Mukhtar El Harras and Hassan Rachik produced a field study on religious practices and values among young people, focusing on a sample of more than 800 students in Rabat. The team explained their decision to focus on young people by reference to their demographic significance and their role in ongoing social transformations in Moroccan society.<sup>60</sup>

Another significant study on young people was published in 2005 by the anthropologist Hassan Rachik as part of the 'Fifty Year Report' (fifty years of an independent Morocco), titled *Jeunesse et changement social*.<sup>61</sup> This work discusses the theoretical and epistemological issues raised by studying young people in Morocco and provides a critical reading of the existing literature before assessing the important changes that have taken place in young people's relationship to work, politics, religion and the family, highlighting the major developments of the fifty years after independence.

Taken together, these studies have a few notable features. They focus more on urban youth, particularly schoolchildren and students; only Bascon and his team discuss young people in villages. They all adopt a quantitative approach, largely relying on questionnaires and only rarely making use of interviews. The majority do not discuss a single, precisely defined question but a series of different issues, and all present themselves as 'exploratory', which may be attributable to the absence of a long tradition of studies on young people and the resulting desire on the part of researchers to address as many points as possible.<sup>62</sup> Finally, the existing literature is distinguished by a great interest in young people's values and perceptions and a neglect of their relationship with relevant public policy, whether in employment, education, health or housing. This study hopes to overcome these limitations.

Among the various theoretical and empirical obstacles to researching young people is the problem of defining 'youth', a social concept used in many different ways.<sup>63</sup> Broadly speaking, there are two approaches. The first is to define young people as those belonging to a particular age group. We find examples of this in UN reports (UNESCO, UNFPA), where 'young people' are those aged between 15 and 24, or in Arab League documents, where they are defined as those aged between 18 and 30 – a definition also used in much of the academic literature,<sup>64</sup> including this study. Various other age groups have been used elsewhere. The second is to rely on qualitative sociocultural criteria that evoke the major transitions from childhood and adolescence through to adult life: marriage and starting a family, entering the job market, leaving home.<sup>65</sup>

The best approach is to combine the two: to combine the 18-30 age group with these three major milestones of entry into adulthood. A comprehensive approach to young people requires taking into account all the phenomena of social life in this demographic (work, education, migration, conformity/deviance, public policy, family, religion, leisure activities), while recognising the particular importance of work as one of the major milestones of entry into adulthood.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, work is the basic pivot around which life revolves: the relationship with work accounts for almost all the phenomena that affect the lives of young people. Even if it has started to take new forms, work is still the funda-

60 R. Bourqia et autres, *Les jeunes et les valeurs religieuses*, éd Eddif-Codesria, op. cit. p11.

61 Hassan Rachik, *Jeunesse et changement social*, op.cit., pp. 193-215.

62 Ibid, pp. 193-215.

63 Ibid, pp. 193-215.

64 Ibid, pp. 193-215.

65 Ibid, pp. 193-215.

66 Ibid, pp. 193-215.

mental buttress of young people's social lives, the 'great integrator'.<sup>67</sup> Those excluded from work feel excluded from all other spheres of social life.

The social sciences have demonstrated through field studies that there are different ways of being young. There are different 'youths', in the plural, according to the differences between young people (educational, cultural, economic).<sup>68</sup> Youth is not an independent or settled phenomenon but a dynamic and diverse process reflecting diverse and complicated paths into adulthood.<sup>69</sup>

In order to develop a deeper and more precise understanding of young people's reality, we must leave behind our stereotypes and prejudices and take a closer look at their day-to-day lives (in all their diversity), listen to their own specific way of talking, decode their rituals, and understand their frustrations, anxieties and expectations. Young people cannot be understood through broad frameworks of abstract analysis, no matter how tempting they may seem.<sup>70</sup> This is the significance of this study.

#### Young people between dropping out and unemployment/precarious work

We can divide the young people of the Medina who participated in this study into three groups depending on their relationship to work and study:

- Young people who are unemployed and looking for work
- Young people who are unemployed and looking for work but have not given up on their dream of completing their studies
- Young people who work but are not satisfied with their working conditions. This group often describes itself as 'sort-of working': what they do does not deserve, in their view, to be described as 'work'.

Participants described this latter situation in different ways, but all of them agreed that it was difficult to pin down, a mixture of work and non-work, a hybrid condition that had got more difficult and complicated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As one participant put it:

*I am a graduate of the Centre for Professional Theatre Training (CFPTS). Like [another participant], I might describe myself as 'sort-of working', because the education market is so disrupted, especially with Covid...*

This point is borne out by many reports on the situation of young people in Morocco, most recently the report on the new curriculum, which noted that 'young people are the most vulnerable to the repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis, particularly the difficulty of accessing the labour market'.<sup>71</sup> Another participant adds:

67 To be sure, work is merely one of many connections that individuals form with others and with shared institutions: family ties, relationships with friends and peers and the ties woven within civil society or political organisations. But all these ties rely on, and are influenced by, the nature of the relationship that an individual forms with the labour market and the social security system. See: Dominique Schnapper, *Qu'est-ce que l'intégration ?* éd Gallimard, Paris, 2007, p 138.

68 Michel Fize, *Le deuxième homme, réflexions sur la jeunesse et l'inégalité entre génération*, éd Presse de la Renaissance, Paris, 2002, p118.

69 François Dubet « Des jeunesses et des sociologies. Le cas Français » in *Sociologie et sociétés*, vol. 28, n° 1, 1996, p. 23-35.

70 Ouvrage collectif, *Jeunesses arabes, du Maroc au Yémen : loisirs, cultures et politiques*, sous la direction de Laurent Bonnefoy et Myriam Catusse, éd La Découverte, Paris, 2013, p15.

71 *New Curriculum Report: Unleashing Energy and Restoring Confidence to Speed Up Development and Achieve Prosperity For All* (in Arabic), Curriculum Committee, April 2021, p. 108.

*I have a degree in Private Law. Now I 'sort-of work' as a specialised carer with disabled kids.*

And another:

*I don't feel like I can say I really 'work'. Why? Because for you to work there has to be structure. What I do I can't really describe as work. It's bitty, odd jobs, now and again, in private schools or summer camps. I don't have a steady job or a steady income. So I can't say I really 'work'. It's no more than odd jobs – or a lot less than that.*

This characterisation, which was repeated by many participants, can be attributed to the absence of a dignified and fair job: unstable work, a source of stress and anxiety far more than an opportunity for security or a guarantee of rights.

## DROPPING OUT AND JOINING THE WORLD OF WORK

Like young people the world over, the participants in the study had dreamed of achieving particular things in adulthood ever since they were children. The common theme of all these aspirations was professional and social integration, social advancement, security and financial independence. Dreaming of being a doctor, an engineer or a lawyer is ultimately to dream of using education to rise up the social ladder in order to escape family circumstances. But the stereotypical nature of these career dreams – which focus primarily on prestigious and well-remunerated jobs – does not mean that there was no space for enthusiasm, freedom and creativity in many of those dreams:

*I was excited by everything to do with IT. I used to dream that after I got my high school certificate I would join a school and learn it properly. That I'd be like Amine Raghieb,<sup>72</sup> for example.*

*When I was a kid I played a lot of football, just like everyone else in the Medina. So I dreamed of being a professional player at a big club.*

*I'd dreamed of being an artist ever since I was little.*

Although many of the participants still held onto these dreams and ambitions, they were very aware that it would be very difficult to make them a reality, particularly now that they had chosen to follow alternative educational pathways or had dropped out entirely because of family circumstances (a common impediment to continuing education):

*I dropped out of school because of our financial circumstances. My dad died when I was young, and mum worked at a traditional bathhouse, but she had to stop when she got ill. Now I work as an agency cleaner. I clean the offices in some of the government bodies in Rabat.*

*One of the things that stopped me studying was a lack of guidance and attention and the sense of being lost that came as a result – which was made worse by the kind of stuff taught, most of which I thought was a waste of time.*

Many participants felt that finding work was more important than getting a degree, and were willing to abandon their higher education entirely, or at least to work alongside studying, if a job opportunity came along. Degrees have begun to lose their value in the

72 A Moroccan blogger and influencer focusing on IT and digital culture.

job market, and no longer guarantee employment, particularly those from non-selective universities like the ones most participants (who are from limited-income backgrounds) attended.

The recipients' responses show that finding an appropriate job involves several difficulties. There simply are not enough jobs to absorb the huge numbers of graduates, and many employers impose additional conditions (experience, age limits, etc); the COVID-19 pandemic has further reduced the opportunities available. Nepotism, favours and inequality of opportunity act as additional obstacles. The fact that they live in the Medina is itself a problem: the lack of activities, services and firms capable of providing local job opportunities, the remoteness of areas that can offer opportunities of this kind, and the stigma that has attached to all the city's working-class areas (including Sidi Moussa, Hay Al Inbiaat and Hay Al Karia) as a result of their association with crime, antisocial behaviour, violence and harassment.

On this last point, it is worth noting that there are no academic studies on the spread of these phenomena in Salé's working-class districts, whether attempting to explain and understand them or to assess their effect on the community through the feelings of 'unsafeness' that they generate.<sup>73</sup> Many participants referred to this sense of danger, which is common among inhabitants of Salé generally and its working-class districts in particular, and appears regularly in the media – particularly when a particularly shocking crime has just taken place.<sup>74</sup> As one participant put it:

*Yes, your place of residence is an obstacle... It was really difficult for me to finish my training in weaving, because of the daily harassment, the risk of being assaulted or mugged on the street in the neighbourhood. There are always lots of addicts and drug users around. Because of these constant threats, I have to ask my brother, my dad, or some other male relative to walk me to and from the edge of the neighbourhood.*

A report by the National Council for Youth and the Future pointed out in the early 1990s that this kind of discrimination existed in the distribution of graduate unemployment. Job inequality is exacerbated by spatial inequality. Young people who live in marginalised regions and neighbourhoods suffer twice over:<sup>75</sup> both because they are young graduates and because they live on the margins. As one participant says:

*Living in the Medina isn't the same as living in Akdal or Riad in central Rabat. When I was studying it took me an hour and a half to get to university. Today my place of residence is still an obstacle, because it's so far away from all the companies and other workplaces – far away from everything.*

73 Marc Penouil et Gabriel Poulalion, *Sociologie de la criminalité*, in *sociologie pour les sciences sociales*, éd l'Harmattan, Paris, 2008, p 234.

74 Consider, for example, the following media reports (note that they link the spread of criminal behaviour, violence and drug-taking with youth unemployment in these areas):

"Spread of crime terrorises inhabitants of Salé in Morocco" (in Arabic), Alaraby Aljadeed, 25 September 2018, see: [www.alaraby.co.uk](http://www.alaraby.co.uk)

"Huge anti-crime protest in Salé: Inhabitants call for royal intervention", al-Ahad, 23 September 2018, see: [www.hespress.com](http://www.hespress.com)

75 HASSAN RACHIK, *Jeunesse et changement social*, op, cit, pp. 193-215.

## JOBHUNTING

Their difficult socioeconomic circumstances, and those of their families, mean young people are constantly searching for work. This is true even of those who are still studying. Because scholarships are not available to everyone, students from poor or middle-class families often struggle to meet the cost of studying (transport, books, stationery, etc). They are thus obliged to work alongside their studies. But their attempts to find a job rarely meet with success because of a range of obstacles:

- The job market is rife with nepotism.
- Their education and training is not in tune with the requirements of the job market.

Nonetheless, young people continue to look for work, even beyond Salé. In most cases they do not worry about finding a job in their own field but will settle for anything. As participants put it:

*Most jobs that the state offers are not appropriate to my qualifications. And in the private sector, most of the stuff I do has nothing to do with the training I received. I don't work in the legal field, even though I studied law – specifically, public policy analysis and political systems. That's my field, the field I studied in. But in the employment world, I don't work in that field. I work in childcare, or in art, which has allowed me to make a little bit of money.*

*I want to work, but at the same time I can't just accept any old job. It has to be an appropriate job. I did some training at a company that I could have got a job at, but it didn't suit me. It was exhausting – I'd be working from 9 AM to 9 PM. How can you live like that? I don't have some romantic idea of what work is like, but working with the government constrains you. In private sector work you have more freedom. In the private sector, you can change jobs, you can learn new things and have new experiences. In government posts you stay in the same job for years at a time.*

These answers show that there has been a change in some unemployed people's perceptions of their situation and their expectations for the future. They are willing to work in the private sector, even in some cases preferring to be self-employed. In the national study of graduate unemployment carried out by the National Council for Young People and the Future in February–March 1991, 87% of graduates said that they would prefer to work in the public sector, in (to some extent) protected government jobs. As Hassan Rachik notes, this attitude may seem superficially conservative in a society in which government jobs have long been the sole gateway to secure employment, but it is understandable, if not rational, given the precarity of working in the private sector.<sup>76</sup> The national labour market is characterised largely by non-structured day labour, with relatively few long-term positions, most of which do not offer social security coverage. The 'right to work', for graduates, thus means the right to a government job, and there has been little interest in demanding public sector jobs or even in demanding that conditions for the unemployed be improved by expanding social security.<sup>77</sup> But as unemployment has ground on, young people's attitudes to entrepreneurship and private sector work have begun to change.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> HASSAN RACHIK, *Jeunesse et changement social*, op, cit, pp. 193–215.

<sup>77</sup> Frédéric Vairel, *Le Mouvement du 20 février : vitalité et limites des protestations marocaines*, in *Ouvrage Collectif, Soulèvements et recompositions politiques dans le monde arabe*, Sous la direction de Michel Camau et Frédéric Vairel, éd Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2014, p.283.

<sup>78</sup> HASSAN RACHIK, *Jeunesse et changement social*, op, cit, pp. 193–215.



## EDUCATION AND THE JOB MARKET

Traditionally, when the skills required by society were those of the farmer, the shepherd, the tradesperson or the homemaker, young people were educated within the family. With the advent of universal education, however, schools became the site in which skills and knowledge – both general and specialised – were acquired, skills which were supposed to lead to work.<sup>79</sup> But when we asked participants whether what they had learnt at school corresponded to the needs of the job market, the answer was a clear ‘not at all!’

This mismatch between education and the job market is not a new phenomenon. It is not even the product of the educational restructuring of the early 1980s. In 1970, John Waterbury noted that for a long time, neither the government nor the private sector had been able to absorb the large number of new graduates, who had begun to form an ‘intellectual proletariat’ whose skills and qualifications had nothing to do with the requirements of the economy.<sup>80</sup> Today, several decades on, the problem of graduate unemployment (both for those with degrees and those who have a secondary school certificate) is still a major issue. Most responses to this section affirm that there is a mismatch between what is taught in schools and the job market and point to gaps in their knowledge as a result, particularly with respect to the language skills, expression and communication, contracting culture and IT knowledge that you need to get a job. The problem here is twofold. It is not that schools are failing to teach the skills that employers need, but also that they are teaching young people things they will have no need of in the future, either in work or in society, in a traditional, highly theoretical and outdated fashion. As one participant puts it:

*The problem you have is that when you go out into the job market, you will absolutely have to start from scratch. Everyone knows this. When I was doing training and finishing my graduation project, they told us: forget everything you’ve studied and learned. What we’re doing is another kind of education – real education.*

Or, as another participant put it:

*We don’t need what we learn at university... We study things we don’t need at work.*

This, of course, is alongside the lack of effective guidance or follow-up throughout the schooling process, and the absence of education appropriate to the talents and inclinations of young people (drawing, sport etc).

Officials emphasise – and researchers recognise – the great efforts made to improve the education system in Morocco. These efforts have certainly made it very expensive: 23% of the state budget and 5.4% of GDP are spent on education.<sup>81</sup> But going by the official statistics of the Higher Education Ministry and by studies carried out in recent years, the returns are very poor, whether within the system or beyond it. In the 2019-

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, pp. 193-215.

<sup>80</sup> Waterbury, John, *Le commandeur des croyants, La monarchie marocaine et son élite*, Paris, Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1975, pp. 345-347.

<sup>81</sup> Youssef Courbage et Emmanuel Todd, *Révolution culturelle au Maroc : le sens d’une transition démographique*, in *Fondation Res Publica* | vendredi 23 février 2007.

2020 educational year, around 304,545 pupils dropped out before completing their secondary school certificate, and the university wastage rate<sup>82</sup> reached 47.2%. At the same time, unemployment among graduates of non-selective institutions (humanities and law schools, for example) stood at 25%.

Failing to complete their studies or to graduate from university forces young people to accept any job available, without distinction. It also makes them vulnerable to feelings of failure and regret and a sense that they are responsible for the difficult situation they find themselves in, as one participant makes clear:

*I think my job is appropriate. I don't have enough education to work in another field. If I'd managed to get my secondary school certificate, things would have been better than they are now. Work aside, I'd have been better, I'd have developed my mind. Now I really regret not completing my studies.*

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND PRECARIETY

The participants' responses on this topic made it clear that for them, being unemployed is degrading and violates an individual's constitutional right to work. Implicitly, it represents exclusion from all other spheres of social life, since individuals' various social ties are all tied closely to their relationship with the job market and the position that they occupy therein. The impotence and sense of failure that unemployed individuals feel make it a truly abject condition:

*I don't see myself as unemployed. I've only become [employed] recently, and it might take me some time to really feel the need to look for work. But generally, I think of unemployment as a bad thing. It makes you dependent on your family, particularly when the family are of limited means and need you to help make ends meet.*

*Unemployment for me represents degradation (hogra). When I'm incapable of making enough to meet even my most basic needs. Even when I started working as a cleaner, what I earned was only enough to provide the most basic necessities... And my working conditions were really difficult and degrading.*

The terms used to characterise unemployment by participants varied, but they consistently emphasised the dark side of the phenomenon: 'nightmare', 'disaster', 'monstrous'. Their views of unemployment likewise differed according to a range of factors, most importantly the amount of time spent unemployed, their family's socioeconomic status, and their ability to pursue alternative activities, whether to make up for lost income or simply to provide psychological help.

Other young people are not unemployed but face a very similar situation to their unemployed peers because the work that they do is precarious and more closely resembles a sort of 'part-time unemployment' than work in the real sense. Young people are sometimes obliged to accept this sort of 'hidden' unemployment, whether because some kind of income, no matter how small, is better than nothing at all, or because it is a way of exercising a kind of independence. Some female participants' responses showed their willingness to work for almost any wage and under unacceptable conditions if this

<sup>82</sup> UNESCO defines wastage as 'the effects of the associated problems of repetition and dropping out'.

meant escaping home for a while. For these women, work means feeling like they exist and having some kind of link with the outside world. Some male participants, however, maintained that women's entry into the workplace was a driver of unemployment. This shows that women – whether young or old – are fighting not only for work, but also against the discriminatory, patriarchal practices of those who are otherwise in the same position.<sup>83</sup>

On other occasions, unemployed young people will accept precarious work because of the lack of any other option, as one female respondent explains:

*I can't imagine not having a job, despite all the humiliation and the difficult conditions I have to deal with, despite the suffering I go through every day. My dad has passed away, my mum is ill, and all my siblings are unemployed... We all depend on what I earn at the end of each month, even though it's only 1300 dirhams [far less than the minimum wage].*

This confirms the point, made by many studies of work, that the borders between work and non-work (unemployment) have become increasingly blurred thanks to the growing predominance of precarious jobs (temporary, seasonal, part-time employment etc) and the 'flexibility' of the labour market.<sup>84</sup> Ulrich Beck has noted that 'flexible working', which presents itself as a rationalisation of work, has made many full-time jobs part-time, making partial unemployment ubiquitous. It has also replaced open-ended contracts with fixed-term or agency arrangements, and changed the places we work (outsourcing services and replacing visible, centralised firms with invisible organisation of work).<sup>85</sup>

Given these conditions – characteristic of the lives of the focus group participants – we are not talking about precarity in itself so much as about young people in a precarious position. The most important factor we use to define their precarity is how they live (their source of income) in a world based primarily on consumption. Young people in precarity find themselves struggling to get jobs or become financially independent. To be sure, the economic dimension of precarity is very important, in the sense that economic precarity has many opportunities to transform itself into social difficulty. But there are other possible dimensions of precarity, which can in principle put everyone in a given society at risk of precarity. We can thus find people in precarity despite their access to significant financial resources. We can also find people with academic degrees in precarity, as is the case here.

The position of precarity that characterises the participants in this study can thus be characterised as a sort of unsettled zone between integration and exclusion. This zone becomes more and more difficult with the weakening of social ties, social isolation and the deterioration of life skills. If a young person finds themselves living in poverty, with weak social ties, narrow horizons and an unknown future, with unpredictability and uncertainty expanding to every aspect of their lives, unable to overcome the pressures this involves, then they are living in a state of precarity. They are in a position of relative

83 HASSAN RACHIK, *Jeunesse et changement social*, op. cit, pp. 193-215.

84 Mme Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay, économiste "Chômage, flexibilité et précarité d'emploi : aspects sociaux". In *Ouvrage Collectif, Traité des problèmes sociaux*, sous la direction de Fernand Dumont et autres, éd de L'Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, Montréal, 1994, pp. 623-652.

85 Ulrich Beck « la société du risque : sur la voie d'une autre modernité » tr de lauré Barnardi éd Flammarion –Coll champs-2001, p 301-302.

weakness, whether psychological, physical or social,<sup>86</sup> making them easy prey for demagogues and ready recruits for any organisation that will have them, including extremist, violent and illegal groups.

This position of precarity is characteristic of the young working-class men and women of the urban periphery – neighbourhoods like the Salé Medina. It gives their day-to-day experience a special quality, described by Dubet François as *la galère*, ‘the ordeal’: an experience marked by the predominance of survival strategies and long periods of doing nothing interspersed by jobs and petty crime.<sup>87</sup>

## THE EFFECT OF UNEMPLOYMENT ON MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Unemployment has an indisputable negative effect on young people, who search constantly and fruitlessly for work and find themselves sliding steadily into precarity. This effect is not only material, in the sense of a lack of financial independence. Young people also suffer from exclusion, a disturbed relationship with their direct environment. Their mental balance is affected, as is their personal development. They experience a whole range of negative feelings – depression, frustration, hopelessness – which have an effect on their health no less serious than that of their deteriorating financial circumstances. The physiological consequences of these mental effects can include poor brain health, weakening of the immune system, insomnia and reliance on smoking, drinking or drugs.<sup>88</sup> As one respondent put it:

*For one friend of mine, being unemployed was lethal. He got depressed and started to see everything in life negatively. Then he locked himself away at home. He didn't want to see anyone or for anyone to care what had happened to him. And all that took its toll on his health: he started suffering from Vitamin D deficiency and got very thin...*

This is without mentioning the effect that unemployment has on society as a whole by wasting the labour power and productive capabilities of these young people. Quite apart from the demographic opportunity represented by young people in Morocco, with so many of them in unemployment, satisfactory use is not being made of their productive talents. Young people are worse affected by unemployment than their older counterparts.<sup>89</sup> It is also well-established that situations of this kind generate conflict and social protest demanding jobs or improved conditions for the unemployed (financial compensation for lack of work).<sup>90</sup>

Beyond the basic financial effect (a lack of income or financial independence), unemployment has far-reaching effects on the social and psychological life of young people. It leads to the breakdown of their social ties, changes their relationship with time and forces them into a certain self-reliance, a kind of voluntary and deep apathy towards the

<sup>86</sup> See: Ouvrage collectif, *Penser la vulnérabilité : visages de la fragilisation du social*, Sous la direction de Vivianne Chatel et Shirley Roy, éd Presses de l'université du Québec, 2008.

<sup>87</sup> Dubet François, *La Galère : jeunes en survie*, Paris, Fayard, 1987.

<sup>88</sup> Jérôme Gautié, *Le chômage*, éd La Découverte, Paris, 2015. P.4

<sup>89</sup> According to 2012 figures, for example, the unemployment rate for 15–24-year-olds is 18.6% and 12.2% for 25–34-year-olds. See: Faouzi Boukhris, “Irregular Work in Morocco” (Arabic), in *Observer of Economic and Social Rights in Arab Countries: Irregular Work*, Arab Development NGOs Network, Beirut, 2016, pp. 436–470.

<sup>90</sup> Jérôme Gautié, *Le chômage*, éd La Découverte, Paris, 2015. p46.

world around them.<sup>91</sup> They feel excluded, like social pariahs – like a burden on their families and on society. They thus choose to isolate themselves, to withdraw from friends, avoiding the pitying or accusatory looks they would otherwise face by hiding themselves away.

Unemployment involves the loss of a particular social and moral position, an arbitrary exclusion from participation in the production process. It is degrading, especially given the fact that we live in a society where paid work is the primary way of showing your usefulness and social existence and sets the rhythm of the day (work time, leisure time, family time, training time). It is worth noting that young people do not experience unemployment as leisure time but as empty time, with all the boredom, anxiety and guilty that generates.<sup>92</sup>

The negative effects extend to family relationships. A family with an unemployed member is 3.5 times more likely to live in poverty than a family with no unemployed members.<sup>93</sup> In some cases unemployment can be an occasion for family solidarity and strengthen relationships. Participants' responses in the focus groups and individual interviews showed that most of them still lived with their families. While many of them were quite open about their desire to achieve some sort of independence by moving somewhere else, no matter where, their need for financial support prevented this. Even when young people find work, they often find that they are obliged to stay with their families and support their parents and their younger siblings.

The field data allow us to identify two broad groups of young people based on their relationships with their families:

- Young people from poor, precarious families, many of whom have more than one unemployed member. The precarity of their situation leads these young people to abandon their studies and look for work in order to provide for their families. They will accept any job that is available, even those that involve very heavy work or are inappropriate to them. Two of our participants provided good examples of this:

*My dad is always asking me whether I'm looking for work. There's pressure from him, and it gets on my nerves. For me, being unemployed makes no difference, but there's still the problem of family members who pity me.*

*Since secondary school I've been thinking about how to achieve independence from my family... What's stopping me currently is the fact that I'm the oldest, and I have to provide all the support to my family. But when I get the opportunity and the possibilities are there, I'll absolutely do it. And then I'll think about how to sort out my future, by getting married, and the future of my family.*

- Young people from middle-income families. In these families, there may be no pressure, and in fact older members may support younger members as much as they can while they are looking for work. For example:

*Thanks to my family's support, I'm looking for work without having to accept just any old job. I have to have a job that fits my training.*

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p 46.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p 45.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p 46.

These and other comments bear out an observation made by many previous studies on young people: that the family continues to occupy a central place in their lives. For them, their families are a refuge from financial crisis,<sup>94</sup> and – even more importantly – help to smooth out the obstacles facing young people’s integration, whether professionally or socially.<sup>95</sup> Our data also show that unemployed young people tend to stay living with their families, albeit with some variation depending on sex, socioeconomic background and cultural capital.<sup>96</sup>

Beyond the family itself, the negative effects of unemployment extend to all social relationships, because many of these relationships are rooted in work and are quickly disrupted (unless they rely on familial solidarity). As two participants told us:

*Things are very hard. For example, it’s hard for you to buy necessities. So you end up avoiding your friends.*

*When I can’t find work, I don’t have the money to go out and meet my friends. It even affects my relationship with my girlfriend – I don’t have the money to take her out, and it’s better to stay at home. Unemployment affects my romantic relationship.*

Young unemployed people are thus given to voluntarily cutting off or limiting their social relationships. This cutting-off can extend beyond individual relationships to all forms of participation in social life, including civil and political participation, as we will see.<sup>97</sup>

All this is on top of the obvious negative economic effects of unemployment resulting from the financial difficulties faced by the unemployed. This is particularly true when unemployment lasts for a long time or in the absence of family support and solidarity (or institutional support, such as unemployment payments).<sup>98</sup>

## YOUNG PEOPLE IN PRECARIY AND SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

Participants’ responses show the great diversity of strategies they have adopted to resist the various negative effects of unemployment and the alternative activities they have pursued in order to survive.<sup>99</sup>

Young people participate in various activities to limit the effects of unemployment. These activities vary depending on their personal inclinations and interests and sometimes by sex. Some notable examples include sport, voluntary activity, and art (theatre, music).

We also find activities that form part of a framework of routine daily practices, including sleeping for many hours or going for long walks along (or more accurately loitering on) the seafront.

In some participants’ responses, we notice risky behaviours, including drug-taking (cannabis and various kinds of synthetics) and drinking:

94 R. Bourqia et autres, *Les jeunes et les valeurs religieuses*, éd Eddif-Codesria, Casablanca, 2000, p.12.

95 Olivier Galland, *Les jeunes*, éd La Découverte, Paris, 1987, p. 87.

96 *Ibid.* p 88.

97 Jérôme Gautié, *Le chômage*, op. cit. p.46.

98 *Ibid.*, p.46.

99 *Ibid.*

*Honestly, I've occasionally used all sorts of drugs. The first time I did it was with some addicts. Then I started experimenting with it as a dare with my friends. But experimenting quickly turned into addiction. Now I don't take anything, thanks to my mum, who threatened to kick me out and gave me the choice between her and addiction.*

As another participant says:

*In the Medina, not working means taking drugs. Like everyone else has been saying, there's more drugs than bread in the Medina.*

Nonetheless, some participants have managed to deal with unemployment, and have made great efforts to avoid surrendering to it and to look for alternatives. The internet and the digital world represent a major opportunity in this regard, particularly since the 'digital natives' of the young generation are more at home than others with new technologies.<sup>100</sup> Various studies have shown that young people today are more competent in social media and communications than their parents and teachers, often learning digital skills independently or from their peers rather than in school or at home.<sup>101</sup> As one participant puts it:

*I've read and learned a lot of things about making money online – stuff to do with e-commerce, design... The important thing is finding alternatives based on what's available.*

Although the digital revolution offers young people opportunities for personal and professional liberation, however, participants made it clear that these opportunities are still very limited, and cannot make up for real public employment strategies. On the same topic, another participant says:

*I do things I wasn't able to do when I was studying. I'm trying to learn a new language (Spanish), and I'm doing exercise. When I was studying, I didn't have the time – now all I've got is time.*

The most notable alternative to a normal job for young people is unregulated work. The young people of the Medina often engage in unregulated commerce, working as street pedlars, waiters in cafes, mobile phone repairmen or tattoo artists. The unregulated sector in Morocco, which attracts many of the unemployed young people of the Medina, provides the sort of hand-to-mouth opportunities that always flourish in times of economic crisis, commonly characterised by 'unprotected work'. On top of the exploitation and degradation that young people in these jobs face, they are very poorly compensated, with incomes not exceeding the absolute minimum required to pay for food.<sup>102</sup>

*They treat me like garbage.  
I pray to God, please get me out of this job.*

100 Christophe Stener, jeune, in Ouvrage Collectif, Dictionnaire politique d'Internet et du numérique, Les 66 enjeux de la société numérique, coordonné par Christopher Stener, éd La Tribune, 2010. P.P.69- 70.

101 Gilles Pronovost, L'univers du temps libre et des valeurs chez les jeunes, éd Presses de l'université du Québec, 2007.

102 See: Faouzi Boukhris, "Irregular Work in Morocco" (Arabic), in Observer of Economic and Social Rights in Arab Countries: Irregular Work, Arab Development NGOs Network, Beirut, 2016, pp. 436-470.

The reality is that there are economic forces that operate to keep young unemployed people in a sort of permanent adolescence. These forces are irreconcilable with young people's natural desire to become adults in control of their own fate, their aspiration to provide for themselves through dignified, fair and satisfying work.<sup>103</sup>

One of the options to which the young people of the Medina aspire is to migrate, whether illegally by modern or primitive means, often from the waterfront of Salé itself (including the Medina), or (in a few cases) legally, through a contract, family connections or a visa marriage.

In order to understand what the dream of migration means to many unemployed young people, it is important to remember that the number of migrants has risen markedly over the last few decades, now reaching around 5 million people – predominantly young people. Illegal migration, whether northward via the Mediterranean or westward over the Atlas Mountains, is now a possibility for all unemployed young people. It is a dream that many of them share, having given up hope for a better life at home.<sup>104</sup> Many studies have shown that the desire to emigrate 'at any cost' and 'by any means necessary' is now an irrefutable reality for many young Moroccans.<sup>105</sup> Illegal migration is by its nature secret and therefore difficult to measure. While the ILO estimates that it represents around 15% of legal migration, and the Interior Ministry claims that in 2013 some 63 illegal migration networks were broken up and 19,500 attempts to enter Europe illegally prevented, these figures are necessarily partial and imprecise. Nonetheless, all official and unofficial sources agree that in Morocco, illegal migration has become a mass phenomenon.<sup>106</sup>

What is certain is that the lack of fair and dignified work corresponding to young people's qualifications is a major driver of these thoughts of migration.<sup>107</sup> This strong desire, this total willingness to migrate, are thus expressions of their frustration.<sup>108</sup>

It is worth noting that the participants constantly evoked corruption, bribes and clientelism when discussing unemployment and precarity, something also observed by previous researchers.<sup>109</sup> These problems and the network of connections required to get a job are constantly emphasised.<sup>110</sup> This may be why one Economic, Social and Environmental Council's report called for 'respect for the rules of transparency, justice and fairness in employment' as part of its recommendations for improving young people's employment.<sup>111</sup>

Unemployed young people resist. They plan out survival strategies and alternative projects. They enjoy greater success the better trained and qualified they are and the stronger their network of family and social relationships is. Equally, they face a greater

103 Michel Fize, *Le deuxième homme, réflexions sur la jeunesse et l'inégalité entre génération*, éd Presse de la Renaissance, Paris, 2002, p152.

104 Mohamed Jasous, "Young People and Transformations in Moroccan Society" (in Arabic), in *Propositions on the Social Question*, al-Ahdath al-Maghribiyya, Monthly Book Series No. 6, 2003, p. 71-72.

105 Stefano Volpicelli et autres, *L'attitude des jeunes au Maroc à l'égard de la migration*, Rapport de recherche, éd L'Organisation internationale pour les migrations (OIM), 2010.

106 Faouzi Boukhris, "Irregular Work in Morocco" (Arabic), in *Observer of Economic and Social Rights in Arab Countries: Irregular Work*, Arab Development NGOs Network, Beirut, 2016, pp. 436-470.

107 Youssef Courbage et Emmanuel Todd, *Révolution culturelle au Maroc : le sens d'une transition démographique*, in *Fondation Res Publica* | Vendredi 23 Février 2007.

108 HASSAN RACHIK, *Jeunesse et changement social*, op, cit, pp. 193-215

109 Paul Pascon et autres, *ce que disent 296 jeunes ruraux*, in *Bulletin Economique et Social du Maroc*, N 112-113, 1969, p1-144.

110 HASSAN RACHIK, *Jeunesse et changement social*, op, cit, pp. 193-215.

111 Report of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council: Youth Employment, 2011 (see the website: [www.ces.ma](http://www.ces.ma)).



shock the longer they remain unemployed. Young people at the beginning of their lives will not be affected as much as adults with a long professional history.<sup>112</sup>

### **PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT POLICY: STATE SOLUTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVE**

Although there has been growing interest in young people, and particularly in their employment, since the structural adjustment programme of the 1980s, this was not initially translated into effective public policy directed at young people and their problems. In the early 1990s, graduate unemployment began to find its way onto the policy agenda,<sup>113</sup> with various measures adopted, perhaps most notably King Hasan II's creation of the National Council for Youth and the Future on 20 February 1991.<sup>114</sup> But it was only at the end of that decade that policymakers began to think about policy for all young people. The first government elected under the 1996 Constitution announced its intention to improve the day-to-day living conditions of young people, combat their marginalisation, put in place a comprehensive sociocultural strategy, develop a new culture and 'unleash the energies of young people'. In the early 2000s, a new policy began to be articulated, and slowly but surely 'public policy' became a matter for broad public debate, particularly after Morocco saw its own version of the Arab social mobilisations (20 February Movement). Indeed, many political parties, unions and civil society organisations insisted on including public policy demands in their submissions to the constitutional review committee, whether having to do with evaluation, participation or implementation.

In 2014, the Ministry of Youth and Sport announced its '2015-2030 Integrated National Strategy for Young People', which aimed to put young people at the heart of public policy. According to the text, this strategy aims to leave behind the prevailing 'sectoral' model of youth policy and create a targeted reference document coordinating public policy and interventions and the efforts of other actors within the political field, particularly after the new constitution, which has strengthened the legal and institutional framework for young people. As is well-known, the 2011 Constitution affirms that it is necessary to:

- Expand and make universal youth participation in young people's social, economic, cultural and political participation in the country, particularly by creating a Consultative Council for Young People and Voluntary Work;
- Help young people to integrate into the labour market and into voluntary work and help young people who are in a difficult situation, a situation which prevents their educational, social and professional integration;
- Facilitate young people's access to culture, knowledge, technology, art, sport and leisure activities;
- Similarly, to put in place the necessary conditions to allow their creative energies to flourish in all these fields.

In reality, however, the 2015-2030 strategy is still awaiting final ratification and implementation. By drawing out focus groups' opinions on the various initiatives and measures put in place by official bodies to improve their situation, it may be possible to assess how successful some of these initiatives have been.

<sup>112</sup> Jérôme Gautié, *Le chômage*, op. cit. p 47.

<sup>113</sup> The concept of the 'political agenda' comes from Jean-Gustave Padioleau. It covers all problems requiring public political discussion or the intervention of the public authority. For more, see: Pierre Muller, *Les politiques publiques*, éd PUF, coll Que Sais-je? 10e édition, 2013.

<sup>114</sup> HASSAN RACHIK, *Jeunesse et changement social*, op. cit. pp. 193-215.

Theoretically, employment policy includes a range of measures, which can be divided into two main categories: 'active' and 'passive'.<sup>115</sup> Active policies are all those that aim to encourage people into work, including jobhunting help, supporting entrepreneurship and creating subsidised jobs in the private or public sector – these latter measures target those unemployed people who face more difficulties in the labour market or those selected based on specific criteria (age, disability, time spent unemployed) – and finally training and qualification opportunities.<sup>116</sup> Passive or 'income-support' policies, on the other hand, seek to guarantee a minimum income for those who are not in work, for example by providing unemployment payments.

There are various institutional solutions and measures adopted by the state in Morocco to encourage or facilitate jobhunting: the Self-Employment Support Program, the Paid Work Support Program (Idmaj), the Small Business Creation Program, the Small Loans Program, the Intilaka and Fursa programs, the Work and Training Program (Ta'hil), the Professional and Skills Cities program, and the recently announced Awrach program. Participants made various observations on these programs, in particular:

- The 'exploitation' that results from employment in programs of this kind, whether that means low pay or job offers that do not correspond to level of education, especially for graduates and those with postgraduate degrees.
- The failure of programs to encompass all those facing unemployment, since they are primarily aimed at graduates.
- The lack of appropriate institutional and legal follow-up to encourage the creation of small businesses.
- Widespread nepotism and corruption and the lack of transparency, equal opportunities and fair treatment.
- The major mismatch between the training received in universities or professional colleges and the needs of the labour market.
- The failure to diversify or update the content of training courses to focus on language and life skills and increase understanding of economic life and entrepreneurship culture, so as to facilitate young people's integration into the job market – as recommended, for example, by the Economic, Social and Environmental Council's report on youth employment.<sup>117</sup>
- The failure to provide further training for graduates to improve their skills.
- The fact that quantitatively, the results of these programs are still far lower than they need to be to truly address youth unemployment. Only a small number of unemployed young people are currently benefiting from them.

As one participant put it:

*They suggested Intilaka, then Fursa, and now they're talking about Awrach... That's good, but friends of mine who participated in Intilaka have gone bankrupt, and some of them are facing legal proceedings. So I wouldn't be brave enough to step out into that minefield.*

115 For more on this, see: Jérôme Gautié, *Le chômage*, éd La Découverte, Paris, 2015, p 92.

116 Jérôme Gautié, *Le chômage*, op, cit. p 92.

117 Report of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council: Youth Employment, 2011 (see the website: [www.ces.ma](http://www.ces.ma)).

Theoretically at least, measures like the Small Loans Program provide unemployed young people with a means of funding their entrepreneurial projects and improve their standard of living. Morocco is one of the countries that has most enthusiastically pursued microfinance policy and encouraged businesses based on this model. The first program of this kind was launched in 1993-1994, and Morocco provides some 50% of all the small loans available in the MENA area. As of June 2013, the country had 11 small loan issuing bodies with around 820,000 clients, and nine national microfinance strategies aiming at 3.2 million beneficiaries by 2020.<sup>118</sup> But despite this great official commitment to microfinance, close consideration of the reality shows that small loans are not providing people with the opportunity to develop real economic enterprises and improve their living standards and social position. Microfinance is a limited tool. Moreover, it is part of an anti-poverty discourse rooted in a neoliberal approach, linked to the 'new role' of a state retreating from some of its functions. Small loans are supposed to substitute for state or banking interventions. But while microfinance may have helped some young people to escape precarity and exclusion, it has had unexpected results. Some beneficiaries have fallen into the trap of overborrowing, taking out loans from one microfinance body in order to pay off debts to another (more than 40% owe money to more than one institution). The interest rates are high, while the sums themselves are too small to support the creation of real and sustainable projects.<sup>119</sup>

The neoliberal economic policy pursued in Morocco, as in many other Arab countries, is rooted in a critique of the idea of the developmental state that prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s, which led to foreign debt crisis, a loss of macroeconomic stability and spiralling unemployment. The neoliberal approach seeks to move past this by adopting policy based on the vibrancy of the free market, valorising the private sector and individual property, and maintaining macroeconomic balance through strict austerity, reduced public spending, downward pressure on wages and removal of basic product subsidies. According to the architects of these policies, this should unleash growth, improve productivity and competitiveness and encourage exports, creating new job opportunities and pushing unemployment down.<sup>120</sup>

As part of this approach, and similarly to many other Arab countries, Morocco has changed its labour laws in order to increase the flexibility of working relationships, responding to pressure from international financial institutions and from the local private sector. This is supposed to encourage private sector investment and thus job creation.<sup>121</sup> In the neoliberal conception, minimum wage legislation, social security and restrictions on hiring and firing<sup>122</sup> all reduce companies' competitiveness and impede their owners' ability to respond to market fluctuations. 'Flexibility' means reducing labour costs, making it easier to hire or get rid of employees, removes controls on limited-term contracts and gives business owners greater freedom to determine working hours.

118 Rajaa Mejjati Alami, *Le secteur informel au Maroc*, éd Presses Economiques du Maroc, 2006. p 111.

119 Rajaa Mejjati Alami, *Le secteur informel au Maroc*, éd Presses Economiques du Maroc, 2006. p 113.

120 Mohamed Said al-Saadi, "Neoliberal Policy and Unstructured Work in the Arab Region", in *Observer of Economic and Social Rights in Arab Countries: Irregular Work*, Arab Development NGOs Network, Beirut, 2016, pp. 121-129.

121 While the Labour Law originally regulated salaried work, the 'Labour Ordinances' of 2004 provided for various forms of flexible working, including temporary, fixed-contract and part-time work. See: Ahmed Bouharrou « Le droit de l'emploi au Maroc » publication REMALD –collection Manuels et travaux Universitaires –2008. P 46-47.

122 For example, between 1990 and 2010, the percentage of the employed population who worked in the public sector fell from 26% to 11%. See: Mohamed Said al-Saadi, "Neoliberal Policy and Unstructured Work in the Arab Region", in *Observer of Economic and Social Rights in Arab Countries: Irregular Work*, Arab Development NGOs Network, Beirut, 2016, pp. 121-129.

One effect of these neoliberal choices is that precarity is no longer found only on the margin of the state and its regulated institutions or of the regulated private sector but at their heart.<sup>123</sup> Forms of precarious employment are now present at the heart of public administration and private business. For example, ministries and other government bodies at the centre and in the provinces have begun to outsource caretaking and cleaning duties in order to avoid taking on secure workers enjoying full status under the Public Employment Law. These bodies ask few questions about outsourcing companies' own respect for employment law, with the contract generally going to the lowest bidder at the expense of employees' rights. Indeed, some civil servant positions are themselves now being outsourced via 'contract employment',<sup>124</sup> a trend which began in the education sector in 2016 and has since spread to other parts of the government.

With regard to specific support from state institutions (financial help or training), it is notable that none of the participants in our study had benefited from any such support, although some said that they had received consultations or training while jobhunting from ANAPEC (the National Agency for Promotion of Employment and Skills) or other organisations:

*I did a few trainings with ANAPEC. It's a good initiative, but it would be better if you got training and then work afterwards.*

*Some of the job opportunities available through ANAPEC pay badly, not enough to cover fundamental requirements like transport, accommodation and everyday basics – not to mention that ANAPEC takes a cut!*

Participants did not only assess the measures and policies adopted to improve employment. They also provided a diverse range of suggestions and possible solutions to improve these policies, with considerable overlap with the recommendations of governance organisations.<sup>125</sup> Perhaps the most significant of these were:

- Developing a participative democracy that would allow all, including young people of both sexes, to participate in a development process based on a knowledge of the population's actual needs.
- Implementing transparency, fairness and equality of opportunity in employment, and putting an end to nepotism.

But most of the participants asserted that the thing most urgently required by this program – and all programs and policies that aim to improve youth employment – is implementation, specifically implementation according to a participative approach taking into account regional differences (including the specific conditions of the Salé Medina, for example).

123 Dossier, Voyage u cœur de l'informel, in *Economia (revue sociale, économique et managériale)* N 10-11, 2010-2012, pp 33-80.

124 The saga of 'contract employment' in the education sector continues (as of today there are around 100,000 teachers employed on a 'contract' basis). It has produced a protest movement within education, which has taken part in the wave of strikes and sit-ins that has swept the country since 2016. The main demand of this movement is to put an end to the 'contract' system and reintegrate education into public employment.

125 The Economic, Social and Environmental Council's 2011 report on Youth Employment, for example. See the Council's website at [www.ces.ma](http://www.ces.ma).

## Protest and organisational and party-political work

The overall trend among participants was towards non-participation in social movements and protest activity having to do with employment. Most had never taken part in any activity or protest demanding employment, although some had been involved in protests concerning other issues of relevance to their lives as young people: against the age limit for becoming a teacher, for example, or student protests against the time zone change.<sup>126</sup>

It is worth noting that since the end of the 1980s, collective action by unemployed people has largely been limited to one specific demographic: graduates. Many examples from around the world show that the heterogeneity of the 'unemployed' is a real obstacle to action. But this is largely forgotten in Morocco, where unemployed people are generally thought of as graduates. Protests to demand work have only rarely been open to non-graduates, and those that have been have invariably failed.<sup>127</sup>

Protest action on the part of unemployed graduates is legitimised by the common belief among these graduates – particularly the majority who are from working-class backgrounds – that they are excluded on principle from fair competition for jobs. They feel that they are passed over in favour of their peers from wealthier backgrounds, who are able to use their financial resources and connections to find a way into the job market thanks to widespread nepotism.

Unemployed graduates express their demands through mobilisation structures, which constitute the basic unit by which they negotiate with officials in order to secure their rights (primarily public sector jobs but also help to set up new businesses, providing stalls, or giving land to peasants in the urban periphery (which is intended to distribute the fruits of protest)).

Young people's resistance to unemployment in Morocco has developed greatly since unemployed graduates set up the National Association for Unemployed Graduates in Morocco (ANDCM)<sup>128</sup> in 1991. This is the only national body specific to unemployed graduates, and has local branches throughout the country. Since the 1990s, unemployed graduates with postgraduate and doctoral degrees have established various new independent coordination committees for senior jobs, centred on Rabat. These committees are known for the intensity of their protests, which usually end with their members being given public sector jobs and the committee itself being dissolved. Since 1996, some 50 coordination committees for senior jobs have emerged and disappeared or been merged into one another. Not one has been licensed by the Interior Ministry;<sup>129</sup> ANDCM is the only body to have secured some kind of legal status, although even they

126 Morocco has traditionally followed GMT, albeit with a temporary switch to GMT+1 during the summer announced by successive governments. In 2018, however, the government announced a permanent and final switch to GMT+1, citing the public interest. Moroccans responded with hostility both online and in protests on the ground, perhaps most prominently student protests, whose basic demand was to return to GMT (although the demands articulated in the protests also extended to ending injustice and poor treatment and other broader demands).

127 Frédéric Vairel, *Le Mouvement du 20 février : vitalité et limites des protestations marocaines*, in *Ouvrage Collectif, Soulèvements et recompositions politiques dans le monde arabe*, Sous la direction de Michel Camau et Frédéric Vairel, éd Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2014, P 282.

128 The name used by the founders and members in Arabic uses the word *mu'attalin* ('left unemployed', 'caused to be unemployed') rather than *'atilin* 'unemployed'.

129 Montserrat Emperador Badimon, *Les diplômés chômeurs et le Mouvement du 20 février au Maroc*, in *Ouvrage Collectif, Soulèvements et recompositions politiques dans le monde arabe*, Sous la direction de Michel Camau et Frédéric Vairel, éd Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2014.

have not received an explicit official licence. This means that all the street demonstrations by unemployed people, whether standing protests or marches, have taken place outside the legal framework (the 1958 Public Freedoms Law), and that the ANDCM exists *de facto* more than it does *de jure*. Various rights organisations, in particular Human Rights Watch, have pointed out cases of associations who are denied legal recognition by Moroccan authorities, including the ANDCM.<sup>130</sup> These associations are the victims of 'soft repression', in HRW's language, whose purpose is to weaken and marginalise them legally.<sup>131</sup>

As far as political participation is concerned, meanwhile, it is notable that most participants avoided politics. This may seem strange given how immersed we all are in politics,<sup>132</sup> in the sense that we are constantly exposed to political news and carried along by its unstoppable flow. But in fact, these young people's attitude – 'politics has nothing to do with me' – is rooted in a particular conception of politics, and is implicitly an attitude towards politics as it is practised currently in the country, the city, and the neighbourhood.

This cautious attitude to all forms of political participation (party membership, voting in elections) has also been noted by previous studies. For example, participants in one sociological study were asked whether they would like to join a civil society or political organisation (a political party, a union, a cooperative, or four other types of organisation). Only 10% said that they would want to join a political party and 12% a union, while the largest figures recorded were for associations of different kinds (32-41%) and cooperatives (36%). There is thus far less interest in the increasingly unattractive traditional vehicles of political activity (parties and unions) than in the more attractive institutions of civil society.<sup>133</sup> This is somewhat paradoxical, given that it stems from suspicion of the existing political parties and ends with complete avoidance of politics, and given the importance of these entities, which give the political field its vibrancy and represent the most visible form of political participation.<sup>134</sup>

In line with these results, a significant number of our participants affirmed that they would prefer to take part in civil society work – which in their view gives individuals a space to release their energy and express their hopes and aspirations – or else join a firm of football supporters ('ultras') or some other similar urban group. Many, like their peers in the Medina and other areas of Salé, belonged either to the Ultras Askary or the Black Army, supporters of AS FAR (the army football team and the local team of Rabat) or the Pirates, supporters of AS Salé.

What is meant here by 'ultras' are youth protest organisations which encompass a heterogeneous world that cannot easily be represented by a single entity. But although there are differences in the origins and social status of their members, their forms of organisation and their activities, all ultras groups share certain features: young members, an intense loyalty to their clubs, obsession with football and footballing culture,

130 The HRW report details the status of all the relevant organisations. See: Human Rights Watch, *Freedom to Create Associations: A Declarative Regime in Name Only*, October 2009.

131 Among the various kinds of 'soft repression', organisations are denied access to public funds and the right to book public lecture halls, prevented from opening bank accounts and prosecuted for raising funds in their own name or organising protests in public spaces. See: Human Rights Watch, *op. cit.*

132 P. Bourdieu « penser la politique », *Actes de la recherches en sciences sociales*, n 71 /72, mars 1988.

133 See for example Rahma Bourqia et al, "Summary Report of the National Study on Values" (in Arabic), part of the joint volume *A Possible Morocco: 50 Years of Human Development and the Horizons of 2025*, Moroccan Press, Casablanca, 2006.

134 Rahma Bourqia, *Culture politique au Maroc, à l'épreuve des mutations*, éd L'Harmattan, Paris, 2011. P.77.

the use of particular symbols and rituals (clothing, music, slogans, colours) and a great attachment to particular stands or sides of their stadium.<sup>135</sup> The ultras of the Medina, however, show more of an interest in occupying particular areas of their neighbourhood than particular stands in the stadium, which leads to periodic clashes. The supporters of AS Salé will not allow those of AS FAR, who are associated with Rabat, to be active in their city – even though the AS FAR sports centre is in Salé. This is especially sensitive because the AS FAR ultras are expansionist, and have been establishing a presence in every part of 'greater Rabat' (Rabat, Salé, Temara, Skhirat, Tamesna and Ain El Aouda). Much of the struggle between the ultras takes place via the medium of 'tags', giant graffiti intended to mark particular areas as the territory of one or another ultras group.

In both cases – civil society work and joining an ultras group – participants confirm that they are voluntarily seeking broader horizons, a place where they can develop themselves in various directions, unlike in the parties and the political world. Young people generally believe in the idea of activism and trust civil society organisations, as various studies have shown. But their actual participation is generally lower than their stated intention to participate.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, young people are more likely to join those organisations that pursue self-realisation or entertainment (by participating in sporting, cultural or artistic activities) than those that seek to serve others or concern themselves with people in precarious positions (unemployed young people, migrants, battered women, etc).

It is worth noting here that the development of voluntary work in modern societies is linked to the development of free time and transformations within the world of work. Voluntary work, as Jean Viard notes, is part of the 'rich creativity' that has been made possible outside working hours:<sup>137</sup> the evening, the weekend, public holidays. It is no surprise that unemployed young people, excluded from work, also feel like they are excluded from other spheres of social life, and respond by deliberately cutting ties with all other forms of participation in social life, including civil society and political participation – especially given that these forms of participation require not only social stability and financial independence but also cost money (membership fees, contributions, travel costs, financial sacrifice, etc) that is not always available.

Unemployment, as previously noted, does not only affect the mental health and relationships of a young person. It also extends to participation in social life, including participation in civil society and political activities, whether protesting, militancy, union organising or voluntary work.<sup>138</sup>

There is another point that we need to bring up here in order to understand unemployed young people's relationship with civil society work and protest. This point is that we are witnessing a transformation in the forms taken by voluntary activism. Individuals are more and more inclined to free themselves of the social structures and ideological authorities that long dominated militant activity (Marxism, for example).

One of the defining features of the new activism is what some sociologists have de-

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135 This is borne out by comparative socioethnographic studies of the 'ultras' phenomenon. See : Christian Bromberger, *Le match de football, Ethnologie d'une passion partisane...*, éd de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1995 (édition numérique 2015), p.314-

136 Olivier Galland, *Parlons Jeunesse en 30 questions*, éd Direction de l'information légale et administrative, Paris, 2013, p 62.

137 Viard Jean, *le sacre du temps libre :la société des 35 heures*, éd de Laube poche, 2004. P.11.

138 Jérôme Gautié, *Le chômage*, op, cit. p.46.

scribed as 'distanced commitment' to civil society organisations and forms of collective action.<sup>139</sup> This kind of activism is rooted in a framework of collective action toward specific ends rather than a pre-set belief in a particular ideological framework. It is also distinguished by its temporary and unstructured nature, with personal connections replacing membership of large social groups. It is a pragmatic activism, more closely linked to the local,<sup>140</sup> closer to the professional than the militant. Young people both employed and unemployed are no longer willing to sacrifice 'without limit'. They are prepared to sacrifice at a particular time, or in a particular place, under specific conditions and within specific limits, which cannot be crossed.

A significant number of participants continued to be convinced of the value of protest activity in securing employment. Indeed, many believe protest to be 'the only possible and appropriate means of getting demands met, even the most limited sort of demands':

*In my view, in Morocco protesting is worth it, particularly at some specific points, like the 20 February Movement... which managed to get results at the level of constitutional change. But other than those specific points and cases, protest in general doesn't achieve its aims in full... Protests are normally expressions of temporary protest, temporary aspirations. [They have] temporary results. That said, they do at least break the silence and allow you to express your anger and have your voice heard. They represent a sort of influence over public policy, a way to exert pressure on it, even if they don't achieve their aims in practice or in full.*

Or as another participant put it:

*Sometimes I feel like there's no point in protesting. All that happens is the protests are broken up without any real result – the contract teachers' protests, for example. After years of protesting they've gained nothing but violent repression and a few of them being arrested.*

Although the general trend among the participants – this recognition of the significance of protest notwithstanding – was towards poor participation or an unwillingness to take part, this position seems justifiable, if not entirely rational, in light of the reasons that they gave:

- Fear of consequences, including being denied work, fired, or deprived some civil rights (getting official papers, for example) or other 'unpredictable' consequences.
- The belief that protest activity does not secure major gains compared to its aims and its approach.
- A lack of faith in the entities that call for protests (political or civil society organisations etc) and sometimes a lack of clarity around their aims, which do not encourage participation.
- The ambiguity around the rights situation in the country and the predominance of security solutions, which do not encourage participation.

<sup>139</sup> Maud Simonet, *le monde associatif : entre travail et engagement*, in « sociologie du monde du travail », éd. quadrige-PUF, 2006, p.194

<sup>140</sup> Bulletin d'information de la conférence permanente des coordinations associatives, *Etat des lieux de l'engagement associatif*, N3, juillet-août, 2002, pp 2-7.



- A belief that protest is an illegitimate form of expression and that other legal approaches would be better: elected assemblies (parliament, municipal councils) and the tools of participatory democracy (petitions, public consultation bodies, etc).

As one participant puts it:

*The dominance of the security approach over any other kind of approach (social, rights-based, etc) sometimes means that there are more police than protesters. We find ourselves facing formations from the various security forces, including policemen, the Support Forces, and government lackeys.*

Some participants considered protest to be an illegitimate practice. While only endorsed by a minority, this belief represents a way of thinking that maintains that street protests damage more traditional ways of representing interests. Those who think this way argue that all means of expressing an opinion beyond the mechanisms of participatory democracy constitute a breach of the social contract because they are by their nature limited to small groups who do not represent a general consensus and should not be able to impose their views on others. As Giovanni Sartori puts it: 'beyond elections, the voices that are heard are those of elites or minorities, the voices of only a part of the people. Even if millions join the demonstrators, they are not the people (so long as millions of others remain silent)'.<sup>141</sup>

However, the development of our societies – as we see directly or through newspapers and other media – cannot be reduced to elections or political activism within institutionalised bodies (parties, unions etc). Political participation continues to express itself through various kinds of protest activity. Since the closing decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, protests have become a fundamental part of democratic life in our societies.<sup>142</sup>

The relatively diverse views of our participants on this topic show that we are dealing with a somewhat disparate group. Combined with the findings of various other studies, we must conclude here that although all these young people are unemployed, they have different motivations and approaches to this topic, different conceptions and expectations of protest, party-political and voluntary activity.

Nonetheless, activism – or, more accurately, protest activity, voluntary action and party membership – remains an expression of consciousness and of belief in values (freedom, solidarity, sacrifice, justice, non-discrimination, respect for difference). It is also, in itself, a value – one of the new, rising values that are spreading throughout our society today. It is also valuable in terms of the opportunities for self-realisation, integration and social recognition through free and voluntary participation in collective action that it provides young people as a means of exercising rights and duties as a member of society (national or local), of gaining new knowledge and qualifications, of developing themselves and of becoming more independent and creative.<sup>143</sup> We must not forget that forms of collective action are spaces for socialisation and learning. As Gilbert Garibal puts it, we do not join voluntary organisations only to 'give' and to sacrifice, but also to get something back. We sacrifice money, effort, time, energy – and in exchange, invariably, we take, we gain and we learn.<sup>144</sup>

141 Quoted in: Olivier Fillieule, *Stratégies de la Rue, Les manifestations en France*, éd Presses de Sciences Po, 1997, p.16

142 *Ibid*, p.16-17

143 Dan Ferrand-Bechmann, *le Métier de bénévole*, éd Economica, collection Anthropos, 2000, p.15

144 Gérard Mesnil, Introduction, in Gilbert Garibal, *bénévolat : mode d'emploi*, éditions de Vecchi-Paris, 2004, p.9

For this reason, participants maintained that joining protests to demand employment, or taking part in voluntary or party-political work, irrespective of the accompanying difficulties and challenges, is always a useful experience – not only in terms of the opportunities for self-expression, cooperation and sacrifice that it offers (and for being part of change) but also the possibility of trying out new roles, creating broader and more diverse relationships, gaining experience and learning new skills. For example, these experiences had allowed them to:

- Learn how to stand up for their rights and demand that they be respected;
- Learn how to clearly express their opinions on government decisions and policies and other specific ideas;
- Learn the value of responsibility to the self and to others;
- Internalise democratic values and human rights, both in terms of embodying them in discourse and practice and dealing with others;
- Learn, in practical terms, the values of sacrifice, solidarity and altruism;
- Learn how to balance rights and duties.

As one of them put it:

*I learnt to stand up for myself. Rights aren't a gift from anyone – they're taken by force. Especially when you live in a country like Morocco, where it's difficult for you to exercise your basic rights without fighting for them. As we've learned since university: 'a right that is demanded is never lost'.*

*I've learnt to express my opinion clearly on specific policies and against specific ideas. I learnt to fight to embody my opinion, to have a voice and an opinion and a presence on things that I care about and that affect me. That's why I have to stand up and protest in order to secure our right to dignified and fair work, democracy, and tangible human rights.*

The participants' responses here echo those in previous studies.<sup>145</sup> The degree of consciousness and involvement in protest and voluntary/party-political work influences young people's ability to analyse and act. This explains the great difference between those young people who consider unemployment to be the product of personal failure or blind fate (and who suffer from guilt, negativity, frustration and disillusionment as a result) and those who see unemployment as the logical result of a given economic system and a given set of education and training policies, who continue to struggle to change their reality for the better (or at least recognise the importance of doing so), and who continue to hope that they will be able to overcome the difficulties that they face.

145 Jérôme Gautié, *Le chômage*, éd La Découverte, Paris, 2015, p. 47.

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### **International Alert**

Téléphone: +216 71 964 905

Adresse: Rue Lac Victoria, Residence Flamingo, Bloc C,  
Bureau C21, Les Berges du Lac, 1053 Tunis

Email: [tunisia@international-alert.org](mailto:tunisia@international-alert.org)

Site internet : [www.international-alert.org](http://www.international-alert.org)



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