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Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2003/4
Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality

The expansion of access to education and the demography of Algeria

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Mass schooling – not universal access to education

In less than 40 years, school enrolment (basic, secondary and higher education) has significantly risen, with a tenfold increase between 1962 and 2000, during which period the number of pupils rose from 940 thousand to 7.6 million. This progression was much more rapid in secondary and higher education – in which enrolment growth was 166-fold between 1962 and 2000 – than in primary education in which the increase was only sixfold over the same period. In the year 2000, around 8.2 million Algerians out of a population of over 30 million attended primary school (4.7 million) or a secondary or higher education institution. Enrolment ratios for both genders have shown similar growth; the overall ratio increased from slightly over 9% of the population aged 6-14 years in 1948 to 83% in 1998. By 1998, more than 85% of the male population was enrolled, while 20% of girls were still out of school (**Table 1**).

The mass enrolment process was initiated by the colonial authorities on the eve of independence, and considerably accelerated between 1966 and 1977. The slowdown in male enrolment ratios observed in recent years (including a drop-out phenomenon between 1987 and 1998) does not appear to have affected girls; female enrolments have increased very steadily and neither the economic and social nor political crisis appear to have had a negative impact on enrolments. Female enrolment ratios have thus continued their steady rise.

Table 1 : Trends in enrolment ratios in Algeria according to census data

Gender	Population aged 6-14 years					
	1948	1954	1966	1977	1987	1998
Male	13.4	23.5	56.80	80.80	87.75	85.28
Female	4.6	9.5	36.90	59.60	71.56	80.73
Both	9.1	16.6	47.20	70.40	79.86	83.05

Sources : NSO 1999, RGPH results

Statistics concerning enrolment relate to various age groups, most often on the basis of political or legal criteria; such data tend to evolve over time for a particular country. In Algeria, enrolment ratios were initially assessed among 6-13 year olds, and then in the 6-15 year old age group, in accordance with the duration of compulsory education. For the purpose of international comparisons, statistical services also publish ratios relating to the population aged 6 to 14 years. Thus in 2000, the school-age population was estimated to be 4,214,000 and the number of primary schoolchildren was estimated to be 4,721,000. The resulting enrolment ratio would be 112% with a differential in favour of boys (116.4 against 107.4%). This is only possible because the enrolled population includes children under official primary school age or over-aged children.

The former case concerns authorizations granted to teachers and government officials to enrol their children in the first year of primary school before the age of six (legal age for primary school enrolment). The enrolment ratio of 5-year-old children rose from 12.7% to 17.4% between 1992 and 1998. The latter case concerns children who have repeated classes once or more and are not older than 16 (compulsory education from 6 to 15 years of age). Furthermore, enrolment ratios of 6- to 11-year-olds (99.7 % for boys, 96.8% for girls and 98.3% for both genders) cannot be retained. Enrolment figures include 5-year-old children and 12-year-olds who are still in primary school while the school-age population only takes into account 6- to 11-year-old children. The figures provided by the Algerian Ministry of Education (MEN) are inconsistent with the published results; children aged 6 to 11 years at the start of the 2000/2001 school year represent the successive generations which started school between 1995/1996 and 2000/2001, while enrolment ratios for 6-year-old children of these successive generations are between 93.6 and 94.0%. Moreover, the MEN has reported drop-outs and supplied drop-out rates for the various generations; they vary from 0.1 to 5.6% between the first

and sixth year of school. If less than 98% of children attend school every year and if the cumulative drop-out rate exceeds 10%, the published enrolment ratios cannot possibly be accurate. These ratios have been corrected and in our opinion the revised figures are more consistent with population census data (Table 2).

Table 2 : enrolment ratios for 6- to 11-year-old children, estimation and correction

	Boys	Girls	Both
UNESCO estimation	99.7	96.8	98.3
Correction excluding children over 11 years	89.8	90.0	89.6
Correction excluding children over 11 and under 6 years of age	88.0	88.0	87.7

This correction is important, since it shows that illiteracy also affects the new generations:

- 1) the 6% of children who were not enrolled in school in 2000 (4.6% boys and 7.3% girls)
- 2) the 3.7% of enrolled children who drop out of school before the 5th year of primary school.
- 3) an undetermined percentage of children who follow a normal course of education but remain illiterate after they have left school. There is a more or less significant proportion of children in this case in all OECD countries.

According to the 1998 census, there were an estimated 1,134 million out-of-school children aged 6-14. At that stage, it was estimated that 417,000 children aged 6 to 11 years would swell the ranks of the illiterate population (51% of which – i.e. 211,000 – are girls). The substantial proportion of out-of-school children is linked to the socioeconomic context, which places work in competition with education for the children of disadvantaged sections of the population.

Table 3 : Out-of-school population (6-14 years) according to census data

Gender	1954	1966	1977	1987	1998
Male	733,700	667,000	409,600	352,000	502,100
Female	793,000	915,000	822,800	777,000	631,800
Both	1,526,700	1,582,000	1,232,400	1,129,000	1,133,900

Experience at international level shows that a high level of unemployment produces a decline in salaries and encourages the development of "informal activity sectors". As the purchasing power of the family provider's earnings (inflation) becomes insufficient to meet the family's needs, it becomes necessary for other family members – the mother or children – to start working. In Algeria, female illiteracy among the disadvantaged sections of society, the absence of qualifications and sociological features make women's access to the labour market difficult; therefore, the need for an additional income to supplement the family budget is forcing children into the workplace (Kateb, 2002).

These negative aspects must not overshadow the endeavour to expand access to education as the key factor in the spectacular decline in illiteracy; according to the 1998 census, 3 out of 10 Algerians were illiterate, as compared to 9 out of 10 inhabitants fifty years before. Despite the improvement in the level of education and the gradual expansion of access to education, illiteracy affects a significant portion of the population – over 7 million people – concentrated mainly among the elderly, admittedly, but also among the new generations.

Women are affected twice as much as men by illiteracy. Gender inequalities are compounded by inequalities arising from the place of residence. The risk of illiteracy is lower

among people living in a wilaya administrative town. One out of two people living in a remote area is illiterate, as compared to 1 out of 4 people living in wilaya administrative centres. Illiteracy is more prevalent in wilayas located in the high plateaux (8 out of the 10 wilayas with the highest levels of illiteracy) and in the Sahara than in those located on the Mediterranean coast.

The independence of Algeria raised great hopes for justice, equality and solidarity, as was in fact the case in many African countries which gained independence at that time. Such hopes were largely based on the population's perception of school as an instrument for social mobility. The policies adopted and implemented by the successive Algerian governments nurtured these hopes. All Algerian children without distinction should have an equal right to education and culture without any other limitations than those stemming from their own abilities. The "*democratization of education*" had two objectives: enrolling school-age children and keeping them in the education system up to the age of 15. The aim was both to meet quantitative demands and to provide all children with the same chances and opportunities, regardless of gender (same chances for girls as for boys) or place of residence (urban or rural). (National Commission for educational reform, 2nd session, held from 27 to 30 April 1970).

The state had to provide the material conditions for this right to be exercised by each citizen (Articles 4, 5 and 6 of the 1976 order relating to basic education): equal access to education, equal chances throughout their studies, free education for all. To this end, the education system had to be unified and integrated in order to help redress different types of imbalances (social, economic, geographical...). The participation of all users (families, teachers, young people and other people with relevant recognized skills) in the management of the system and at every level of the system was achieved.

This policy coincided with an unprecedented population boom in the history of Algeria (Kateb, 2001). This required a considerable financial effort which, during the first two decades of independence, annually represented approximately 10% of the GDP (gross domestic product) and approximately 25% of the total state budget. The proportion of the budget devoted annually to the development of educational infrastructure represented about a quarter of the budget devoted to education; this provided for the increasing number of children for enrolment. In 1968, a total of 1,773,776 pupils (including all grade levels) used 28,759 primary school classrooms (55 pupils per classroom and the double use of classrooms in order to maintain an effective class size of 30 pupils), 478 lower secondary schools and 56 upper secondary schools.

In 2000, over 30 years later, the total 8.2 million pupils used 122,867 primary school classrooms (37.8 pupils per classroom, which gradually curtailed the double use of classrooms, as the situation gradually evolved to accommodate a single class per classroom), 3,038 lower secondary schools and 1,100 upper secondary schools. With a view to meeting the requirements for universal access to education, an average of 3,000 primary school classes, 85 lower secondary schools and 35 upper secondary schools had to be built each year. The provision of mass education also required a substantial increase in the number of teachers; in 40 years, there was a 13-fold increase in the number of primary school teachers (from 12,696 in 1962 to 169,503 in the year 2000), a 40-fold increase in the number of lower secondary school teachers and a more than 12-fold increase in that of upper secondary school teachers. This progression (particularly at primary school level) occurred at the expense of qualification level. In general, statistics relating to primary school teachers' level of education are difficult to obtain owing to a lack of clearly defined categories placing emphasis on qualifications (instructors, trainers, teachers, or levels 0 to 6). Nevertheless, for the 1983-84 school year, the N.S.O. exceptionally provided data concerning the distribution of teaching staff according to their qualifications. Out of 179,153 basic level teachers (primary and lower secondary school), 18.3% had no qualifications, 3.4% had the *CEP* (primary school leaving certificate), 34.1% had the *brevet d'études élémentaires* (elementary studies certificate) and only 18.8% the

Baccalauréat. Moreover, only 1 out of 6 teachers had received teacher training lasting 1 to 3 years in a technological education institute (I.T.E.).

During his term of office, Mr Lacheraf, Minister of National Education (1977-78), had drawn attention to a fundamental problem underlying the Algerian education system, ever since its inception: the poor qualifications of part of the teaching staff. The system planners had set up a comprehensive teacher training mechanism, but had not foreseen that during the first two decades of Algerian independence, graduates would turn to the more lucrative sectors of the labour market (oil industry, various other industries, government). The lack of executives in the Algerian economy and the strong demand for teaching staff had an unforeseen consequence: the recruitment of teaching staff often lacking the level of education required for the profession. Thus the perpetuation of the system (at least at primary and lower secondary level) and elite training in the first levels of the education system were partly achieved by individuals who had failed in that system.

Nevertheless, the teaching staff and their level of qualification are not the sole cause of the predicament (now widely acknowledged) facing the education system. The runaway population growth shifted the entire focus of effort to the quantitative problems underlying the system, at the expense of qualitative aspects related to improvement in the quality of education. The new educational infrastructure provided annually always fell short of the requirements at the beginning of each school year.

Thus every effort has been made to deal with the increase in enrolments, at the expense of the qualitative management of the education system. The extensive nature of the system has been favoured, as a result of which the existing infrastructure has not benefited from adequate resources for its maintenance, particularly in rural areas and the outskirts of large cities. The education budget has focused on quantitative needs, at the expense of quality improvement initiatives including the enhancement of the teaching profession (raising salaries and drawing up specific statutes with a view to making it more attractive to higher education graduates). Graduate unemployment could overcome these shortcomings in the short term; indeed, for the last 5 years, the Ministry of Education has only recruited teachers who have at least a Bachelor's Degree.

How can this situation be addressed? Taking advantage of the slowdown in population growth

Algeria in the 20th century experienced a radical demographic transformation. The total population increased 7.2-fold, contrasting, for instance, with a 1.9-fold increase in the British population and a 1.6-fold increase in the French population. This population explosion peaked in the mid-1970s and the slowdown in population growth only effectively began at the end of the 1980s. Based on the current population structure, further growth is expected over the next 25 years as the Algerian population should reach 42 million by 2025 according to estimations (Attané & Courbage, 2001).

In the Maghreb as a whole and in particular in Algeria, the last two decades have been characterized by considerable demographic changes, the most spectacular of which has been the declining fertility rate. Even the best-informed observers of Algerian demography have been taken aback by the rapidity of the decline. In slightly less than thirty years, birth and fertility rates have dropped significantly. The crude birth rate which was 50 ‰ and the overall fertility rate of over 7 children per woman (up to 8.1 at the beginning of the 1970s) have dropped to 21.2 ‰ and to less than 3 children per woman, respectively. The number of births has declined considerably, from over 850,000 births per year in the mid-1980s to 600,000 in 2001. These declining rates have produced a radical transformation in the population age

structure. The first resulting consequence is the reduction in school enrolments and subsequently in the number of enrolled and school-age children at primary level (4,835 million in 1999 and 4,639 million at the start of the 2002 school year).

The primary school-age population (**Table 4**) will decrease by 2005, 2010 and 2015. It will fall from slightly less than 4.4 million in the year 2000 to 3.5 million by 2015. If universal access to primary education is achieved by this date, the current educational infrastructure will be sufficient to accommodate all pupils, by providing a single class per classroom (complete discontinuation of the double use of classrooms). With an average of 30 pupils per class, 18,000 existing classrooms could be refurbished for the purpose of lower secondary or pre-primary level education. The resources allocated to primary education will no longer be primarily aimed at meeting the quantitative requirements of the system; part of these resources must be spent on improving the quality of education, laying emphasis on the development of new methods and educational tools. Such development is an essential component in enhancing teachers' qualifications.

Table 4 : Decline in the school-age population

Year	Gender	3-5 years	6-11 years	Enrolled
2000	Males	955,267	2,238,000	2,510,836
	Females	907,733	2,136,000	2,210,114
	Total	1,863,000	4,374,000	4,720,950
2005	Males	863,367	2,018,400	
	Females	818,233	1,915,200	
	Total	1,681 600	3,933,600	
2010	Males	860,367	1,818,800	
	Females	815,433	1,720,400	
	Total	1,675,800	3,539,200	
2015	Males	905,500	1,808,800	
	Females	857,833	1,711,200	
	Total	1,763,333	3,520,000	

Sources : Attané & Courbage, 2001

The second focus of effort will be on school drop-out prevention. In 2000/2001 alone, 84,000 children (33,500 girls and 50,500 boys) officially dropped out of primary school before completing 5 years of schooling. The enrolment effort must not be dissociated from plans for reducing poverty and combating school-age child labour. Poor families lacking adequate resources to meet the costs (both direct and indirect) of their children's education may consider education to be of little interest against the prospect of earning an additional income derived directly from the work of one or several of their children. They may also choose not to enrol their children or to take them out of school. In the case of schools with canteens, extreme poverty may also encourage families to enrol their children in school in order to ease the financial burden of food provision. There are 5,608 school canteens in Algeria (year 2000/2001) for 911,815 beneficiaries, but neither their spatial distribution nor conditions of access are sufficiently specific to demonstrate their role in promoting enrolment. In rural areas, such canteens, together with the judicious provision of school buses, will help prevent school drop-out and will promote enrolment of girls (in rural areas, 10% of pupils live further than 5km away from the nearest school).

The third focus will be on organizing a legal, supervised framework which gives the private sector a role in the Algerian education system. Structural adjustment plans will implement austerity policies aimed at reducing public deficits and at rationalizing public expenditure, one of the consequences of which is the reduction in spending on health and education. In such circumstances, the state should foster private sector development in

education. In Algeria, private sector involvement in education was prohibited in 1976; by that date, less than 1% of primary school pupils and 1.3% of secondary school pupils received a private education. For about 15 years, private education no longer existed in Algeria. For some ten years now, initiatives have been undertaken to open private schools; however, in the absence of legislation governing their operation, they still only have a very low impact. Therefore, they cannot reduce public expenditure through the provision of education for the minority which can afford to finance its children's schooling, with the hope of quality education. Currently, private education plays a supporting role: the sections of society with a sufficient income arrange additional, private lessons for their children attending public school (Kateb, 2001).

The last focus is on combating illiteracy among the population. Forty years after the independence of Algeria, 6.6 million adults are illiterate, 4.2 million of which are women. Initiatives to address the problem are limited; the few associations involved (IKRA) cannot meet such a demand without the involvement of society as a whole. It is possible to overcome illiteracy by enrolling the new generations in school and waiting for generations which did not have universal access to education to die out. But there is another solution.

The effectiveness of the fight against illiteracy depends on the motivation of those involved and the mobilization of human and material resources required for such a significant undertaking. In a country like Algeria and in the current political, economic and social context, total literacy among the population requires the mobilization of resources available for worship (mosques and imams). Promoting peaceful practices and social peace requires the depoliticization of places of Muslim worship, thereby restoring their original purpose – disseminating knowledge and fostering solidarity with the most disadvantaged sections of society.

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