

# The fight against unemployment in Algeria: Entrepreneurship as a key lever for the professional integration of young graduates

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**How to Cite:**

The fight against unemployment in Algeria: Entrepreneurship as a key lever for the professional integration of young graduates (M. DJELLAB & A. KHELIFA, Trans.). (2025). *Art Law and Accounting Reporter*, 44(2), 89-116. <https://journalalar.org/index.php/online/article/view/13>

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Submitted: 5 September 2025 | Revised: 10 November 2025 | Accepted: 7 December 2025

**Abstract---**The professional integration of young graduates has, for more than a decade, been one of the major policy challenges for the Algerian state. This is particularly true in a societal context characterized by a predominantly young population—most of whom are under the age of 30—and a persistently high unemployment rate among university graduates (17.7% in September 2016, according to the National Statistics Office). In response, various public ministries have undertaken efforts to combat unemployment and facilitate the integration of young people into the labor market. As a result, several programs such as ANSEJ, ANGEM, CNAC and ANEM have emerged. Along the same lines, Algerian universities have also contributed through different mechanisms they have implemented, including the ME, the BLEU, the CDC and the CRE. This article examines the role of the university in promoting the professional integration of its graduates. It also analyzes a specific project that involved several Algerian and international institutions, including the Ministry of Higher Education and the International Labour Organization: the "Tawdif Project: From University to the World of Work." Particular attention is given to the CLE program, "*Understanding the Enterprise*," which emphasizes the promotion of entrepreneurial culture across all disciplines and fields within Algerian universities.

**Keywords---**Unemployment, Youth, University, Graduates, Employment, Entrepreneurship.

**JEL Classification:** J64, J68, J40, I23, I25

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In its report on global youth employment trends (2017 edition), the International Labour Organization (ILO) presents key indicators showing that between 1997 and 2017 the global youth population increased by 139 million, while the youth labor force decreased by 35 million. The report notes that this dynamic is also reflected in the decline in the proportion of young people within the world's total labor force, which fell from 21.7% to 15.5% (Barsoum, Wahby & Sarkar, 2017).

Thus, youth participation in the labor market has declined significantly over the last two decades, and many young people—both women and men—remain outside the labor market for reasons unrelated to education.

Consequently, youth employment has become a major political concern in many countries, regardless of their level of development. Faced with the complexity of promoting youth employment, states increasingly work in partnership, adopting approaches based on coherence, coordination, and cooperation at both central and local levels, with support from government institutions, private-sector actors, and international organizations such as the UN Youth Employment Network, the World Bank, and the ILO.

Within this context, the professional integration of young graduates has, for more than a decade, constituted a major societal challenge for Algeria, particularly in light of its predominantly young population—most of whom are under 30. Although this demographic structure represents a significant asset for economic development, it requires the country to adopt meaningful measures to promote youth employment and reduce unemployment, which remains high among those aged 16 to 24 (29.7%, compared to the national average of 12.3%).

Given the persistently high unemployment rate among young people—especially young university graduates (17.7% in September 2016 according to the National Statistics Office), with female graduates more affected (24.7%) than males (10.2%)—the Algerian state has been compelled to react by proposing concrete solutions to facilitate the integration of young people into the labor market.

Algeria has therefore invested substantially in several active labor market programs for youth (ANSEJ, ANGEM, CNAC, ANEM). It has also undertaken initiatives in the education and training sector to help young people acquire the skills necessary to enter the workforce (Entrepreneurship Houses, BLEU, CDC).

In this framework, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, six partner universities, the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security, the National Employment Agency, as well as workers' (UGTA) and employers' (CGEA) organizations have jointly worked to provide solutions for the professional insertion of young people. With financial support from the United Kingdom, the project "TAWDIF: From the University to the World of Work," implemented by the International Labour Office, was launched. One component of this project aimed to implement the training program "Understanding the Enterprise (CLE)" across all disciplines and specialties in Algerian universities to promote entrepreneurial culture among students and raise awareness about business creation and self-employment as career options. The objective of this program is to equip students with entrepreneurial skills and provide them with knowledge and practices necessary for launching and operating a new enterprise.

The central problem addressed in this article revolves around two main questions:

1. **What actions and mechanisms have been implemented by the Algerian state—and specifically by the Ministry of Higher Education—to promote the employability of young graduates and respond to rising youth unemployment?**
2. **How could the CLE (ILO) program positively influence, or even act as a catalyst for, the professional integration of Algerian graduates?**

To answer these questions, we advance the following hypothesis:

**Algeria's investment in multiple active labor market programs and the actions undertaken by universities in the field of entrepreneurship education together constitute a necessary—and potentially decisive—ecosystem for enhancing the employability and professional integration of young graduates.**

To confirm or refute this hypothesis, we adopted a qualitative and descriptive-analytical methodology based on documentary research, statistical analysis, and an assessment of the results observed in the pilot implementation of the "Understanding the Enterprise" training program, conducted in six Algerian pilot universities among samples of students and tutors.

The literature review allows us to mobilize theoretical, statistical, and empirical data relevant to our research question and hypothesis.

To address our research problem, we examine three essential areas:

1. **First**, we present an overview of global youth employment trends and highlight the priority now accorded to this issue.
2. **Second**, we analyze the contribution of higher education to the professional integration of graduates, especially through initiatives designed to promote entrepreneurial culture. This section focuses on the actions taken by the Algerian state, its various ministries, and particularly its universities to create an entrepreneurial ecosystem through different mechanisms aimed at improving the employability of graduates.
3. **Third**, we focus on a specific action program implemented by the Algerian Ministry of Higher Education in partnership with the ILO: the "Tawdif Project: From University to the World of Work," with particular emphasis on the "Understanding the Enterprise (CLE)" program, whose objective is to develop entrepreneurial spirit among students from their first year of study.

## **2. YOUTH EMPLOYMENT: A GLOBAL PRIORITY**

### **2.1 A global alliance for youth employment**

In its report on the latest trends and policies in the global labor market (2017), the ILO presents numerous key indicators of youth employment, including data on the youth activity rate, which has deteriorated over the past 20 years, falling from 55.0% to 45.7%. It is estimated that around 70.9 million young people worldwide were unemployed in 2017. Furthermore, the global youth unemployment rate in 2017 was 13.1%.

The sharp increase in youth unemployment and underemployment stems from long-standing structural obstacles that prevent many young people, in OECD countries and emerging economies alike, from making a successful transition from school to working life. The OECD Action Plan for Youth starts from the premise that, in many countries,

the proportion of young people leaving school early (without completing upper secondary education) remains high, which can hinder their integration into the labor market and lead to career paths marked by low-paid jobs—often informal in many emerging economies—and repeated episodes of unemployment (OECD, June 2013).

Today, more than ever, youth employment represents a global challenge, particularly since young people account for more than 18% of the world's population and over 15% of the global labor force (Barsoum, Wahby, & Sarkar, 2017). The challenge is not only quantitative (number of jobs) but also qualitative (quality of jobs). Projections indicate that by 2030, 25.6 million young workers aged 15-29 will enter the labor market and will need to find employment (Barsoum, Wahby, & Sarkar, 2017). Almost all of this increase in the youth labor force will come from Africa.

Building on earlier commitments—particularly the 2005 World Summit objectives to provide young people with full, productive, and decent employment—the United Nations High-level Committee on Programmes selected youth employment, in October 2014, as the prototype for a new initiative intended to mobilize the entire UN system and global stakeholders.

This global initiative is part of the broader effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, especially the goal of giving all young people the opportunity to access decent work. It aims to bring together the UN system over several years to support Member States in implementing comprehensive strategies for the inclusion of young people in productive employment, in particular through the ILO's *Global Jobs Pact*.

A global, coordinated approach to supporting youth in the labor market has thus been put in place. This worldwide initiative acts as a catalyst and focuses on three key actions: building a broad alliance of stakeholders, developing a knowledge platform, and mobilizing resources. Guided by shared objectives, it prioritizes local interventions that are clearly aligned with national development priorities and encourages international collaboration on several thematic areas, namely:

- Green jobs for youth;
- Quality vocational training;
- Digital skills to improve opportunities for decent work in the digital economy;
- Promoting an integrated strategy to support the transition of young people from the informal to the formal economy;
- Encouraging youth participation in the rural economy;
- Improving opportunities for young entrepreneurs and self-employed workers through the Youth and Trade Initiative.

The purpose of this Global Alliance strategy, involving national and regional institutions with the support of UN country teams under ILO leadership, is to strengthen existing efforts and increase impact at the local, regional, and international levels.

One of the strengths of this Global Alliance is the establishment of a broad structure aimed at improving labor market outcomes for young women and men by identifying good practices, promoting innovation, building capacities, and facilitating access to learning opportunities.

Another major strength of this joint and coordinated initiative (Rosas & Giovanna, 2009) lies in the pooling of local and international resources, along with fundraising mechanisms designed to expand activities in support of decent work for young women and men in the most inclusive, effective, and efficient way possible.

Among the mechanisms introduced as part of this integrated and global approach to youth employment—based on the contribution and commitment of multiple actors—is the development of a guide (Rosas & Giovanna, 2009) to support the preparation of National Action Plans for Youth Employment (NAPs). The ILO in collaboration with the UN Secretariat and the World Bank to help governments produced this guide. It serves as a framework to orient their efforts toward productive and decent work for young people. A *sine qua non* condition for the design and implementation of such an action plan is the collective participation and dialogue of all stakeholders involved in the process. All stages of the proposed framework cover the essential aspects of development and lead to the adoption of a youth employment policy and its implementation program (Rosas & Giovanna, 2009). National strategic decisions should flow from the evaluation of different strategic options, based on the findings of the above-mentioned analysis, and thus guide policy decisions to address youth employment challenges in light of each country's specific context.

In the same spirit, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is deeply engaged in providing young people with the skills and support they need to successfully enter working life and progress in their careers.

As part of an Action Plan for Youth, OECD ministers agreed to adopt a comprehensive set of measures. The first objective is to tackle high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment. The second objective is to improve young people's long-term outcomes by equipping them with the required skills and removing barriers to labor market entry. The pillars of this Action Plan can be summarized as follows:

- Stimulate job creation;
- Encourage employers to maintain or expand effective apprenticeship and internship programmes;

- Improve young people's long-term career prospects;
- Strengthen the education system and better prepare all young people for the world of work;
- Facilitate the transition from school to working life;
- Recalibrate labor market policies and institutions to improve access to employment and combat social exclusion;
- Establish youth guarantee schemes;
- Promote youth entrepreneurship and enhance the effectiveness of vocational education and training.

## **2.2 Higher education and entrepreneurship: spearheading youth employment**

Several research studies—such as Barclays (2002), Charles and Benneworth (2002), Florax (1992a, 1992b) and Hill (2004)—show that higher education is a net contributor to the prosperity of modern economies. Its contribution manifests itself through several mechanisms, including job creation, the spending of students and visitors, and, above all, its crucial role in building the “knowledge economy” (Batterbury & Hill, 2004).

Researchers interested in the creation of new enterprises have also sought to define entrepreneurship. The philosophical foundations of the term were laid out in J.S. Mill's treatise on political economy (1848), where risk-taking is identified as a key ingredient of entrepreneurial activity (Shaver & Scott, 1992). Later, Schumpeter (1911-1934) generalized the concept and viewed the entrepreneurial process as a major driver of economic development, with the entrepreneur at the core of economic growth (Schumpeter & Backhaus, 2003). The evolution of new ventures also opens up social perspectives: entrepreneurship is increasingly regarded as a crucial source of job creation, poverty reduction, innovation, societal development, and economic competitiveness (Ahmed, Chandran, Klobas, Liñán, & Kokkalis, 2020).

In prosperous countries such as the United States and several European states, higher education institutions are increasingly seen as key engines of economic development, where establishing a university is considered one of the pillars of development policy (Thanki, 1999). The American university research system, exemplified by institutions like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Stanford University, is widely viewed by policymakers worldwide as a benchmark in terms of responsiveness to economic change and contribution to wealth creation (Kitagawa, 2005).

It is crucial to recall that teaching is one of the core missions of higher education institutions. Through synergies and collaborations linking graduate entrepreneurship and economic development, universities are perceived as vectors for transferring technologies and knowledge produced in academia to industry, including the creation

of spin-off firms derived from university research (Kitagawa, 2005). By training students in entrepreneurship and equipping them with skills needed in the business world, universities can encourage the creation and management of small enterprises. In doing so, they foster an entrepreneurial culture and cultivate entrepreneurial mindsets among students (Viale & Etzkowitz, 2005).

In the same vein, Christophe Schmitt (2008), in his book *Université et entrepreneuriat, une relation en quête de sens*, examines the role of universities in entrepreneurship education. He classifies countries into three categories:

- **Initialization stage:** countries where entrepreneurship education is very recent and still in its early stages, such as Algeria, Albania, and Lebanon. Here, entrepreneurship education focuses mainly on raising awareness about business creation.
- **Institutionalization stage:** where the goal is to sustain existing actions and structures, as in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Poland, Quebec and Brazil. Interest centers on business creation, either to liberalize the economy or to address unemployment.
- **Integration stage:** where there is a clear strategy to contribute to economic development and the relationship between universities and entrepreneurship is driven by explicit political will, as in Luxembourg, the United States, Denmark, Sweden, and Spain. In these countries, the field of entrepreneurship extends beyond the narrow focus on firm creation (Léger-Jarniou, 2009).

The growing literature on entrepreneurship education emphasizes that a different learning approach is required at university level—primarily an action-oriented teaching style that encourages experiential learning, problem-solving, project-based learning, creativity, and peer assessment (Jones & English, 2004).

China, with its rapid economic growth, has clearly recognized the importance of entrepreneurship education and has made it a national priority. Since 2014, the Chinese government has launched a nationwide strategic initiative to stimulate entrepreneurship and innovation as drivers of economic growth (Dou, Zhu, Zhang, & Wang, 2019). Such education seeks to promote entrepreneurial competences among young people and, more importantly, to influence their attitudes and intentions toward entrepreneurship as a career path. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) and Homburg, Jozić, and Kuehnl (2017) show that building an effective university entrepreneurship program requires interventions at key points of interaction and contact that shape the student experience. These can be grouped into three categories of resources: curricular/extracurricular, regulatory, and social.

Other scholars have argued that *intention* is the most important concept for understanding the process of new venture creation and that entrepreneurship is not only intentional but also pre-planned (Kirby & Ibrahim, 2011). Two major models dominate the literature on entrepreneurial intentions: Shapero and Sokol's (1982) entrepreneurial event model and Ajzen's (1988, 1991) theory of planned behavior. Both suggest that intention precedes behavior and identify key antecedents that shape entrepreneurial intention, such as education (Ahmed, Chandran, Klobas, Liñán, & Kokkalis, 2020).

However, other researchers, including Bischoff, Volkmann, and Audretsch (2018), Freeman (2010), and Zimmer (1986), have focused on the importance of applying stakeholder and network theories to explain how the involvement of different actors in a given context influences the success of entrepreneurship education and training programs (Galvão, Marques, Ferreira, & Braga, 2020).

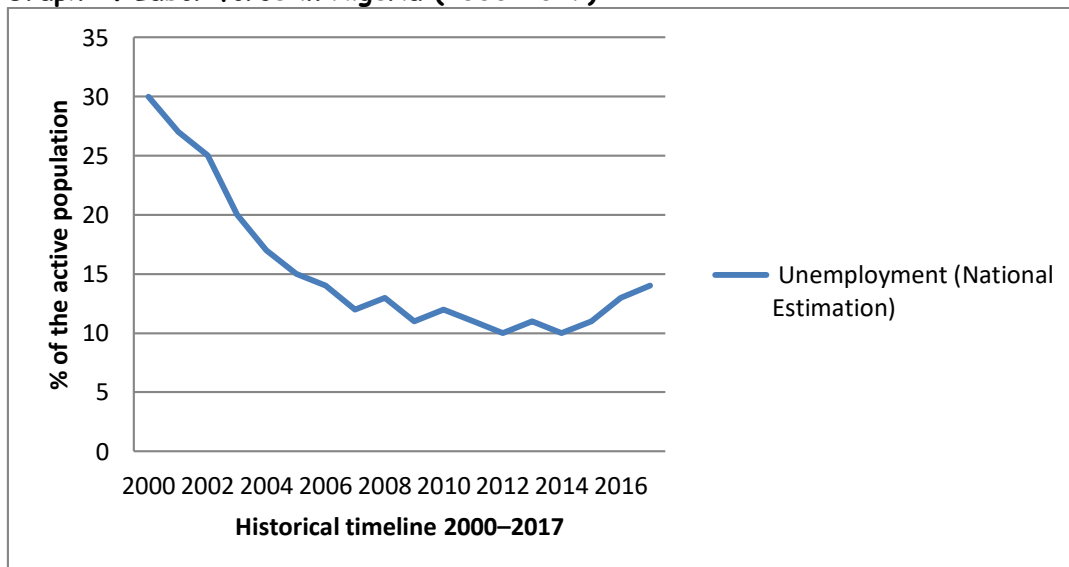
### 3. ALGERIA AT THE HEART OF ACTION FOR YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY

#### 3.1 A snapshot of youth unemployment in Algeria

According to the National Statistics Office (ONS), 55% of Algeria's population is under 30 years old, and 62% is of working age (between 15 and 59).

ILO statistics on global unemployment clearly show a steady decline in Algeria's labor force participation rate (as a percentage) over the last ten years, as illustrated in *Graph 1* below:

**Graph 1. Labor force in Algeria (2000–2017)**



*Source: ILOSTAT: ILO Labor Statistics Database, <http://www.ilo.org/ilostat>.*

We can observe a sharp decline in the active population in Algeria between 2000 and 2006, followed by an apparent stabilization between 2006 and 2017. This decline reflects an increase in the number of people without employment, combined with a growing number of individuals seeking work over the same period. In parallel, the State deepened its withdrawal from the economic sphere by accelerating the privatization of public enterprises, through Law No. 01-04 on the organization, management, and privatization of public enterprises (20 August 2001), which had direct effects on the economy and employment.

In a survey conducted by the ONS in September 2018 on activity, employment, and unemployment, it appears that the unemployment rate in Algeria stands at an average of 9% for non-graduates (men and women), 13.7% for graduates of vocational training, and 18.5% for higher education graduates. The survey also showed that the unemployment rate among men averages 11.7%, compared with 29.1% for unemployed women aged 16 to 24.

Table 1 presents the employment-to-population ratio for persons aged 15 and over over the period 2010-2019. The table shows that the employment rate (or employment-to-population ratio) reaches 36.8% at the national level. Disaggregated by sex, it amounts to 60.1% for men and 13.2% for women. This rate is defined as the ratio of employed persons to the population aged 15 and over.

**Table 1. Employment-to-population ratio for persons aged 15 and over, 2010-2019**

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
38.1	38.2	37.9	39.3	37.2	36.8	37.2	36.4	36.3	36.3

*Source: Mounir Khaled BERRAH. ONS No. 840. Activity, Employment & Unemployment in September 2018. Technical Directorate for Population and Employment Statistics.*

Furthermore, the distribution of the unemployed by educational attainment shows that 668,000 unemployed individuals hold no diploma, representing 45.7% of the total unemployed population. Higher education graduates account for 27.9%, while vocational training graduates constitute 26.4%. On average, more than one in two unemployed persons (56.9%) is long-term unemployed, i.e. they have been seeking employment for a year or more.

Table 2 presents the NEET rate (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) for several years, indicating the proportion of young people who are neither employed, nor in education, nor in training. These NEET rates must be taken very seriously by the Algerian state because inactivity at an early stage in life has a negative impact on long-term employability (Ministry of Labour, Algeria, 2016).

**Table 2. Share of young people who are neither in employment, education, nor training (% of the 15-24 population), 2010-2017**

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
24.5	26.0	22.7	21.5	22.7	21.2	-	20.9

*Source: Mounir Khaled BERRAH. ONS No. 840. Activity, Employment & Unemployment in September 2018. Technical Directorate for Population and Employment Statistics.*

The unemployment indicator for Algeria shows a youth unemployment rate of 20.9% in 2017. This rate is mainly linked to the difficulty young people face in entering the labor market, due to a lack of professional experience on the one hand, and the requirement to regularize their situation with regard to national service on the other (Economic Commission for Africa, North Africa Office Report, 2011). As shown in Table 2, between 2010 and 2011, the share of youth aged 15-24 who are neither in employment, education, nor training increases from 24.5% to 26%, while the unemployment rate for adults aged 25 and over stands at 7.2%. These figures indicate that youth unemployment is three times higher than adult unemployment (Salima, 2019). Studies conducted by the ILO on youth unemployment in Algeria likewise show that the youth unemployment rate is three times that of adults (Mohamed Saïb, 2014).

According to Table 2, from 2012 to 2017, the share of 15-24 year-olds who are NEET fluctuates between 21% and 22%, with a slight decrease recorded in 2017 to 20.9%. Moreover, results from a project on the Empowerment and Employment of Youth in the wilayas of Adrar and Médéa (UNDP, 2015) explain the high youth unemployment rate in Algeria by several factors: insufficient job opportunities relative to demand; mismatch between job offers and job seekers' profiles; a constantly increasing demand for jobs among university graduates, vocational training graduates, and early school leavers; a gap between the skills acquired through education/training and the qualifications required by the socio-economic sector; the concentration of employment in the public sector, perceived as more secure by job seekers; lack of communication about labor market opportunities; and insufficient information and guidance on existing mechanisms for youth entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, a synthesis report produced in 2017 by the International Labour Organization describes a situation in which the labor market is more challenging for youth than for other age groups, in several respects:

- Young people have less stable employment trajectories;
- They are more vulnerable to unfair practices, such as unfair dismissals, excessive working hours, and inequitable remuneration;

- They are more frequently employed in the informal sector and therefore lack protection under labor law (e.g., minimum wages, maximum working hours, social security, safe and secure working conditions).

### **3.2 Entrepreneurship and the dynamics created by Algerian employment policy**

#### **3.2.1 The Algerian entrepreneurial context in figures**

SMEs in Algeria constitute a major component of the economic fabric, with 1,171,945 enterprises at the end of the first half of 2019. The majority operate mainly in services, crafts, and construction and public works (BTPH), while only 8.71% are industrial SMEs.

Moreover, the SME sector suffers from an unequal geographical distribution: around 70% of Algerian SMEs are concentrated in the north of the country (Ministry of Industry and Mines, 2019). Overall, 56% of SMEs are legal entities (including 244 public enterprises), while 44% are sole proprietorships, of which 21% are liberal professions and 23% craft activities.

Regarding SME size, ministry statistics indicate that 97% of all SMEs are very small enterprises (TPE) with fewer than 10 employees: 1,136,787 firms fall into this category and strongly dominate the economic fabric. They are followed by small enterprises (PE), which account for 2.60%, and medium-sized enterprises (ME), which represent 0.40% (Ministry of Industry and Mines, 2019).

It is also important to note that the number of jobs created by SMEs up to the end of the first half of 2019 is 2,818,736, of which only 20,955 come from public SMEs. Given that 97% of SMEs are very small enterprises—many of them created through social schemes such as ANSEJ, CNAC, and ANGEM—and that these have created approximately 1.4 million jobs, this implies that small (2.60%) and medium-sized (0.40%) enterprises, together representing only 3% of SMEs, also generate nearly 1.4 million jobs. This paradox (3% of SMEs generating 50% of jobs) suggests the need to distinguish between entrepreneurship based on social support schemes and family entrepreneurship, which can follow different trajectories (family, political, public, university-based, emigrant-based, open, or opportunistic), as identified by Benachenhou (2007) in his book *Les entrepreneurs algériens*.

A relatively educated youth base characterizes entrepreneurship in Algeria. The Total Early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) rate is 16.7%; more than 60% of identified entrepreneurs are under 35 years old, and more than 91% have secondary or university-level education (Zemirli & Hammache, 2018).

### 3.2.2 Support schemes for business creation by Algerian public ministries

The progressive transition from a state-controlled economy to a market economy, initiated by the Algerian authorities since 1988, has relied largely on reducing the workforce in the public economic sector and promoting private sector development as a means of absorbing surplus labor and diversifying the national economy.

This process began with extensive restructuring and fragmentation of state-owned enterprises. In a very short period, Algeria moved from 50 state-owned companies to 1,500 national-level enterprises and 13,000 regional and local enterprises (Hadj-Nacer, 2011).

During the period 1990-1994, several laws were enacted, making SME development a priority of second-generation reforms—among them, the Law on Money and Credit (1990), the Investment Code (1993), and the Ordinance on Competition (1995). The restructuring and privatization measures that followed resulted in significant workforce reductions (Adair & Bellache, 2008).

With this new configuration of the national economy, several social schemes to support business and job creation were put in place, notably:

- **ANSEJ** (National Agency for Youth Employment Support), created in 1996, is a public body with legal personality and financial autonomy under the supervision of the Minister of Employment. ANSEJ supports project holders in creating and expanding micro-enterprises producing goods and services. It has a network of 51 local offices across all wilayas, as well as branches in major localities. Its objectives are to promote the creation and expansion of productive activities by young promoters and to encourage all actions aimed at promoting entrepreneurship. ANSEJ's mission is to support, advise, and accompany young project holders in the creation and expansion of their activities, while providing economic, technical, legal, and regulatory information relevant to their projects. The scheme targets primarily young people aged 18 to 35 and aims to promote entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial spirit (ANSEJ, 2020).
- **CNAC** (National Unemployment Insurance Fund), created in 1994 as a public social security institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, was initially tasked with mitigating the social consequences of massive layoffs of salaried workers in the economic sector following the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). Over time, CNAC has taken on successive missions assigned by public authorities (CNEC, 2016):
  - Unemployment compensation: since 1994, CNAC has implemented a legal unemployment insurance scheme for salaried workers who involuntarily lost their jobs for economic reasons;

- Active measures: from 1998 to 2004, CNAC implemented active labor market measures for unemployment benefit recipients, including job search assistance and support for self-employment;
- Support for business creation by unemployed promoters aged 35 to 50, as part of strategies to foster economic growth;
- Support for the creation and expansion of activities by unemployed promoters aged 30 to 50, with new provisions and incentives introduced from 2010;
- Additional measures to promote employment, including reductions in employer social contributions, exemptions from employer charges, and monthly employment subsidies.

Overall, this scheme closely resembles ANSEJ in terms of procedures, mechanisms, and practices, differing mainly in its historical context and the age categories it targets.

- **ANGEM** (National Agency for Microcredit Management), created in 2004, reflects Algeria's decision to adopt microcredit as a tool for combating poverty. ANGEM complements existing public mechanisms aimed at the economic integration of populations excluded from banking services. Its creation forms part of the national strategy to fight poverty and precariousness. The agency was designed to address identified shortcomings, decentralize credit allocation, simplify eligibility conditions, and respond to strong demand from housewives, productive families, artisans, and small farmers and breeders (ANGEM, 2020).

In addition, other public bodies seek to encourage and boost SME creation and expansion, such as guarantee funds (FGCM-ANSEJ, FGAR-PME, CGCI-PME) for eligible promoters who lack collateral, and agencies like ANDI and ANIREF that provide fiscal, parafiscal, and land-related advantages respectively.

### **3.2.3 Focus on the ANSEJ scheme: entrepreneurship among young graduates**

Given its specific objectives and missions, the ANSEJ scheme primarily targets young people aged 18 to 35 and aims to promote entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial spirit.

The table below presents the number of projects financed under the ANSEJ scheme by education level and the share of women beneficiaries.

**Table 3. Projects financed by education level**

Period	Vocational training	%	University	%	Total projects financed	Share of women
From creation to 31/12/2010	33,561	24%	14,747	10%	140,503	13%
2011	6,920	16%	2,906	7%	42,832	7%
2012	10,469	16%	3,371	5%	65,812	7%
2013	10,675	25%	2,964	7%	43,039	8%
2014	13,737	34%	3,539	9%	40,856	9%
2015	11,979	51%	3,024	13%	23,676	11%
2016	7,451	66%	2,001	18%	11,262	14%
From creation to 31/12/2016	94,792	26%	32,552	9%	367,980	10%

*Source* : <http://www.ansej.org.dz>, (2020).

This table highlights several trends:

- The share of projects promoted by beneficiaries from vocational training rose from 25% in 2014 to 43% in 2015 and 66% in 2016;
- From 2014 onwards, there is a clear entrepreneurial dynamic among university graduates: the share of university promoters increased from 8% in 2014 to 13% in 2015 and 18% in 2016;
- The proportion of projects financed in favor of women increased significantly, from an average of 7% over the period 2011–2013 to 14% in 2016.

It is important to stress that these figures are not sufficient to fully assess the entrepreneurial trajectories of university graduates or to draw definitive conclusions about the effectiveness of this policy. Additional information is needed, such as the failure/mortality rate of projects created by graduates, the growth and development of these enterprises, repayment rates of allocated loans, the nature and specificity of projects, and the extent to which promoters honor their commitments to various stakeholders.

Given the specific role of universities in the socio-economic sphere, a significant responsibility falls on university graduates in terms of entrepreneurship and their contribution to meeting the challenges of a knowledge-based society, particularly in light of students' specific characteristics: academic knowledge, research skills, access to information, and awareness of social values.

### **3.3 The university ecosystem in support of youth entrepreneurship**

Today's university students represent a powerful vector of change and transformation. A large and growing share of young people is enrolled in higher education, with an enrollment rate of 43%, exceeding the global average of 37%, and more than 1.7 million students currently (Meyer, 2019). Each year, around 350,000 students graduate, of whom only about 2,000 are in technical specialties (Chitour, 2020).

According to Chitour, adapting the university to ongoing transformations, improving teaching quality, and creating a bridge between academia and the economic world requires a "cleaning and pruning" of programs that appear less relevant to societal, social, and industrial demand. The vision of the "new university" is based on separating pedagogical activities from administrative management, with the aim of training wealth creators who are able to demonstrate imagination, create their own enterprises, and innovate—moving from incubation to start-up and then to micro-enterprise. Expecting everything from the State is no longer possible.

In response, public authorities, decision-makers in higher education, and researchers have turned their attention to entrepreneurship education and training for university students. To address graduate unemployment and meet the challenges of the new millennium, a series of structures and mechanisms have been established—both as top-down orientations from the supervisory ministry and as bottom-up initiatives by some universities—to promote entrepreneurship education and training among young university students.

#### **3.3.1 The Entrepreneurship House (ME)**

The Entrepreneurship House is defined as a reception, information, guidance, and support structure for students who have project ideas. It is a unit responsible for promoting an entrepreneurial mindset and awakening in future entrepreneurs the intrinsic values and the skills necessary to ensure the sustainability and success of their enterprises (Kouraiiche, 2018).

Entrepreneurship Houses currently operating within several Algerian universities were created through partnerships with ANSEJ. However, they do not yet have a formal status within the university's organizational structure.

#### **3.3.2 The University-Enterprise Liaison Office (BLUE)**

The University-Enterprise Liaison Office (Bureau de Liaison Université-Environnement économique) is a highly strategic tool that higher education institutions must establish or strengthen rapidly. Perfectly embodying the concept of an "interface," the Liaison Office serves as the university's preferred contact point for all economic and public actors in its environment (Terranova, 2017).

The BLUEs were first created in Quebec in 1986, inspired by the model of Technology Transfer Offices (TTO), to serve as university-enterprise interfaces. They manage intellectual property, negotiate service and research contracts with companies, promote academic researchers' expertise to firms, public and semi-public organizations, and provide advisory support to researchers (Mailhot & Schaeffer, 2009).

In Algeria, the first BLUE was created in November 2010 at the University of Tlemcen, following an internal decision. It was one of the deliverables of the European Tempus project "DEFI-AVERROES," focused on developing employability in engineering programs, in which the University of Tlemcen participated alongside other partner institutions such as the University of Bejaia, the National Polytechnic School of Algiers, and the Ministry of Higher Education.

### **3.3.3 The Career Development Center (CDC) and Job Search Club (CRE)**

A Career Development Center is a specialized structure within a university that provides specific services to help students bridge the gap between university and the world of work. Its core mission is to equip students with the skills, knowledge, and connections they need to access and succeed in professional life (Bitat).

The National School of Computer Science (ESI) in Algiers offers a good example of how a university's alumni can effectively leverage their networks to facilitate students' access to the professional world and enhance the institution's reputation.

In 2013, with the encouragement and support of the administration, several ESI students decided to organize themselves to share job opportunities. Through this network, which has grown and strengthened over time, ESI alumni regularly inform current students about job vacancies and internship offers in their companies.

Through these existing structures, Algerian universities aim not only to demonstrate strong commitment and effective involvement in supporting graduates' skills development, but above all to address the employability challenge in a strategic way.

## **4. THE ILO-ALGERIAN UNIVERSITY EXCHANGE PROGRAMME FOR EMPLOYABILITY**

Faced with the challenges that Algeria has set itself in terms of improving employment opportunities for young Algerians, and in line with the implementation of national policies to promote employment, the project "TAWDIF: From University to the World of Work" was launched in partnership with the International Labour Office (ILO).

This is an innovative programme, funded by the United Kingdom with a budget of USD 3.1 million and implemented by the ILO Office for the Maghreb over a period of 34 months, from September 2016 to June 2019, in partnership with the National Employment Agency (ANEM). Its aim is to improve the employment prospects of university graduates in Algeria and to facilitate the transition of young graduates from university to the labour market.

One of the main pillars of the Algerian government's action plan is to improve university performance and strengthen its openness to its environment. Thus, one of the current priorities of higher education is the employability of university graduates.

The project was designed in three phases, based on a participatory approach involving institutional and social partners through a steering committee bringing together the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, as well as ANEM and ANSEJ (under its authority), and the social partners: UGTA for workers and CGEA for employers.

The objectives of the TAWDIF project are structured around three levels of intervention (ILO Algeria, 2019): strengthening students' skills in job search techniques and entrepreneurship; improving the alignment between university training and labour market needs; and building the capacities of institutional structures involved in youth insertion.

The project aims to have a lasting impact on the unemployment rate by introducing students to entrepreneurship through a new course content focused on the business world and by offering them support in job search techniques and tools.

To this end, new tools and mechanisms were tested, adapted, and validated. Three wilayas took part in the pilot project: Béjaïa, Biskra and Tlemcen, with the involvement of their respective universities and local ANEM and ANSEJ agencies in charge of employment and micro-enterprises. These actors benefited from training enabling them to acquire skills and know-how useful for finding a job or embarking on entrepreneurship.

Within this framework, ANEM acted as a liaison and intermediary with companies to collect their needs and expectations, as the TAWDIF project aimed to move beyond the university to address the wider socio-economic environment and ecosystem. The ultimate goal was to co-construct training programmes jointly with universities and enterprises.

#### **4.1 Main pillars of a strategic partnership for promoting employment and entrepreneurship in Algeria**

The objectives and expected results of the TAWDIF project revolve around three main strategic axes and several complementary actions.

##### **3.1.1 First axis: job search and entrepreneurship**

As its title suggests, this first axis seeks to improve the employability of university students and strengthen their skills in job search techniques and entrepreneurship. Several actions were undertaken with three main objectives:

- Prepare students and unemployed graduates by equipping them with job search techniques (TRE - Techniques de Recherche d'Emploi);
- Organise Job Search Clubs (CRE - Clubs de Recherche d'Emploi) for long-term unemployed graduates;
- Introduce entrepreneurship to university students and develop their entrepreneurial mindset and related skills through the programme **"Comprendre l'Entreprise" (CLE - Know About Business)**.

To achieve these goals, several pedagogical tools were used: a toolkit on job search techniques for young people (guides, games, online courses); job search clubs (CRE) - including the opening of four CREs and an animation guide; and a transversal university programme on entrepreneurship, namely the CLE programme.

##### **4.1.2 Second axis: matching training and employment**

With a view to effectively combating the mismatch between university training and labour market requirements, this axis focused on deepening knowledge of local labour markets in the pilot wilayas to collect and analyse as much information as possible. This information was intended upstream for students and universities (to inform them about future opportunities) and for employers (to clarify training needs). Feedback from firms and alumni was essential to identify obstacles and barriers to insertion at graduation, to pinpoint occupations in demand, and to determine the knowledge, skills, and soft skills required for employability.

Within this axis, ten (10) surveys and studies were conducted in the six pilot wilayas. These tools addressed several dimensions:

- a survey on the insertion of university graduates, supported by the Research Centre in Applied Economics for Development (CREAD) in 2017, involving 1,300 graduates;
- a survey on firms' needs in terms of skills (analysis and forecast of local labour markets in 2017-2018);
- a study on the effective practice of internships and university alumni;
- organisation of multi-stakeholder round tables;
- training-insertion programmes and guidance tools for youth;

- the establishment, in 2018, of a Human Resources Academy within the General Confederation of Algerian Enterprises (CGEA), aimed at strengthening knowledge and improving human resource management practices in line with national regulations and international principles of decent work.

#### **4.1.3 Third axis: capacity building for public actors**

Among the objectives of the TAWDIF project was the strengthening of public institutional structures responsible for professional insertion, as well as the capacities of staff in charge of training, support, and the insertion of young graduates into the labour market.

Actions carried out under this axis included: an external review of the ANSEJ and CNAC public schemes supporting business creation and of the DAIP scheme for the insertion of first-time job seekers; support to employability structures such as Career Centres and Entrepreneurship Houses; support to the Ministry of Labour and ANEM in analysing and publishing labour market information; and support to the wilaya-level employment promotion committees (CWPE).

## **4.2 The “Comprendre l’Entreprise” (CLE) Programme**

### **4.2.1 Definition and objectives**

The CLE project, “Comprendre l’Entreprise - KAB: Know About Business,” launched by the ILO, is an educational programme on entrepreneurship with specific adaptations for vocational education, secondary education, and higher education. It is designed as an 80- to 120-hour course for students aged 15 to 25.

For the implementation of this project, the ILO in Geneva and the ILO International Training Centre in Turin (SME Service) provided funding. A working group was set up in Turin with the participation of G. Manu (CIFOIT), J. Thiongo (consultant, Kenya) and Prof. R. Nelson (University of Illinois, USA) to develop the didactic materials for the CLE programme, aimed at teachers in technical and vocational training institutions. The material was tested in Kenya, refined, printed, and then distributed. To “understand business” means: understanding the role of business in society, grasping its contribution to a nation’s wealth and its social responsibility, understanding entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviours, and knowing how a business operates.

The objectives of the CLE programme are multiple: to contribute to building an enterprise culture in a country or society; to raise young people’s awareness of the opportunities and challenges of entrepreneurship and self-employment; and to make pupils and students aware of the role they play in shaping their own future and in the socio-economic development of their country.

More specific objectives of the programme include: developing positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship and self-employment; raising young people's awareness of business creation and self-employment as attractive career options; reducing youth unemployment by improving employability; developing qualities and/or transferable skills in business creation and management; identifying the challenges that must be addressed for a business to prosper; supporting the transition to the world of work, especially by familiarising students with how firms operate; and increasing the number of businesses created by young people.

#### **4.2.2 The CLE programme in Algeria: thinking differently**

Initially, the project targeted three countries: Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt. It began in January 2008 with the objective of conducting pilot tests of entrepreneurship training in secondary, vocational, and higher education. The aim was to build a national pool of CLE trainers and teachers, to deliver CLE courses in various schools, training centres, and universities, to train at least 8,000 pupils and students, and to create a regional network of CLE users.

In this respect, the programme sought to act on the way of thinking and, consequently, on the way of doing. It aimed to equip students with transversal skills and competences needed to embark on entrepreneurship and integrate into the business world.

This is a university-level entrepreneurship education programme designed to involve university students more actively and to strengthen their role in the economic and social development of the country by promoting business creation as a viable career option.

The objectives of the CLE programme are closely aligned with those of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRS), which seeks to integrate a transversal entrepreneurship programme at university level (ILO Algeria, 2019). These objectives include: raising students' awareness of the world of entrepreneurship and familiarising them with its opportunities, challenges, attitudes, and required competences; strengthening the employability of university students by developing their entrepreneurial skills to prepare them either to create a business or, at least, to better understand how businesses operate and how to work within them; helping students form a clear professional vision (creating a business versus being employed); and making them aware of the role they play in shaping their own future and in the socio-economic development of their country through entrepreneurial mindsets and related skills (public speaking, basic project management, creativity, time management, teamwork, leadership, negotiation, resilience).

The publication of the CLE-2019 edition is the result of a collective, cross-sectoral effort involving MESRS (through ministry representatives and university teachers from Béjaïa, Biskra and Tlemcen) and the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security (MTESS), represented by the entrepreneurship officers of ANSEJ's Entrepreneurship Houses in the three wilayas, with the support of national and international ILO experts. Together, they formed the CLE Algeria Working Group (GT-CLE Algérie) (Sarton & Bedjaoui-Chaouche, 2019).

#### 4.2.3 Content of the CLE programme

- **9 modules:** the module titles are phrased as questions that participants should be able to answer by the end of each module (Manu, Nelson, Thiongo, & Haftendon, 2000):
  1. **Module 1: What does it mean to be enterprising?**  
The objective is to enable students to recognise that everyone can demonstrate an enterprising spirit and to understand that an individual's enterprising capacity influences their way of life.
  2. **Module 2: What is the purpose of enterprise?**  
The objective is to help students understand that entrepreneurial spirit adds value in all situations—business-related or not, in both private and public spheres.
  3. **Module 3: What is the profile of an entrepreneur?**  
The objective is to help students appreciate the personality traits required to succeed as an entrepreneur.
  4. **Module 4: How does one become an entrepreneur?**  
The objective is to convey the essential skills and key factors for success in creating and managing a small business.
  5. **Module 5: How can you find a viable business idea?**  
The objective is to provide students with techniques to generate business ideas and to recognise and assess business opportunities.
  6. **Module 6: How do you start a business?**  
The objective is to familiarise students with the various tasks involved in setting up a business.
  7. **Module 7: How do you run a business?**  
The objective is to introduce students to the main techniques of business management.
  8. **Module 8: What are the next steps to becoming an entrepreneur?**  
The objective is to help students understand the step-by-step process of starting a business.
  9. **Module 9: How do you develop your own business plan?**  
The objective is to enable students to apply CLE knowledge in a real market situation and to assess a business idea in the context of self-employment or a micro-enterprise.

- Each module represents an important domain in business life and is subdivided into several themes, each corresponding to a number of teaching hours;
- 3 educational games;
- Total course duration: between 80 and 120 hours;
- A learner's manual with exercises and a glossary of economic terms;
- Teaching methodology: lectures, group discussions, small-group work, case studies, individual assignments, mini-projects, brainstorming sessions, role plays, guest speakers, and games (e.g., a **risk game** to highlight factors linked to risk-taking; an **apple game** simulating a local market to understand negotiation rules; and a **business game** simulating company operations so that learners can experience business life as if in real conditions);
- Mode of delivery: hybrid (face-to-face and online).

### 4.3 Implementation of the pilot experience in Algeria

#### 4.3.1 CLE content testing phase

The pilot experience was based on the French version of CLE. It began with a discovery phase, involving several training sessions for the CLE Algeria Working Group (GT-CLE Algérie) on the content, both face-to-face and via the CLE e-learning platform. Following this, a field experimentation phase began, during which the CLE programme was tested with students from the three pilot universities (Béjaïa, Biskra, Tlemcen).

A total of 496 students (55% women, 45% men) from various faculties were selected between November 2017 and April 2018. Twenty university lecturers and ANSEJ facilitators, trained in CLE content, delivered this experimental phase. The trainers' profiles were diverse (economics, sciences and technology, foreign languages, biology, mathematics, etc.), and this interdisciplinarity was intended to facilitate the smooth integration of CLE across all curricula and disciplines in Algerian universities.

First, a call for applications was launched to obtain a representative sample. Several criteria were considered: gender parity, heterogeneity in fields of study, and predisposition to an entrepreneurial mindset, assessed via a CLE questionnaire. The sample included students at different levels (L1, L2, M1, M2, PhD), with an average of 35 students per group and per trainer. The testing phase covered all CLE modules.

#### 4.3.2 Post-test evaluation phase

Feedback from the pilot phase helped identify areas for improvement and adaptation of CLE content after testing with students in the three pilot universities. The main strength of the CLE programme was undoubtedly its playful, participatory, and active methodology, adopted in almost all the modules. This teaching approach produced very satisfactory results in terms of student engagement and receptiveness.

The aspects to be revised concerned, above all, the adaptation of content to the target audience (students) and the Algerian context (local case studies), as well as updating the material, since the original CLE content dated back to 2008 and was therefore somewhat outdated.

#### **4.3.3 Revision and adaptation phase**

In this phase, the aim was to update, simplify, and adapt the content of the nine CLE modules, as well as the Facilitator's Guide and the Learner's Manual, to the Algerian context. This required redesigning certain pedagogical tools and activities in the original CLE version (simplifying and clarifying concepts, shortening reading notes, removing redundancies); creating new examples and case studies that are attractive and illustrative of the Algerian economic context; adapting the methodological sequence within and between modules; and introducing new, innovative activities (participatory methods, discovery of the economic environment, project creation, etc.).

It was also necessary to design a three-year course plan (from the first to the third year of the licence) and to define a coherent assessment system for each academic year concerned by the programme.

The revision of the CLE programme led to a redefinition of certain themes and a stronger focus on entrepreneurial competences, the introduction of new tools and role plays, the inclusion of field surveys to be conducted in sub-groups, adaptation to the Algerian context with local success stories and the integration of Algerian legal aspects, and a better articulation between activities, readings, exercises, and teaching materials.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

At the beginning of this study, we formulated two guiding questions that shaped our reflection. Our analysis focused on the issue of unemployment and the employability of young people, a challenge that today affects the entire world more than ever before. We also examined the employment-support schemes introduced by the Algerian state and the Ministry of Higher Education to curb the already high unemployment rate among graduates of Algerian universities.

From the outset, we put forward the hypothesis that the dynamics generated by Algeria's employment policy and the actions undertaken by several public ministries, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Higher Education, could form a necessary—and potentially decisive—vector for the professional insertion and employability of young graduates. The measures adopted by these various actors, concerned with addressing youth employment through concrete programmes, could, in principle, have a positive impact on the labour market in Algeria.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that this issue is structural, multidimensional, and related to governance. It is therefore complex to resolve, even through short-term, trend-based mechanisms or through training and information tools. The numerous schemes introduced since 1996 have clearly not achieved the expected results: **3% of SMEs create 50% of jobs (around 1.4 million), and almost all of these SMEs are family businesses**, while the remaining 97% are very small enterprises (TPE) that suffer from a wide range of difficulties. This situation already calls into question the relevance and effectiveness of the mechanisms implemented to date.

In reality, an employment policy must be anchored in an action plan that is inclusive, comprehensive, and coherent. It should rest on investment that generates jobs, but also on a system of incentives encouraging firms to recruit a qualified workforce, and on an information system that serves as a bridge between training and occupations. Another measure seems necessary—even indispensable—namely, the development of guidance and orientation mechanisms linking higher education, secondary education, and vocational training, in a way that is aligned with the society's potential and long-term objectives.

Our research also shows that there is no universal model: each country has its own economic model and must draw on its own resources to address the types of problems highlighted in this article. In the case of Algeria, the number of businesses or jobs created cannot assess the success of entrepreneurial action only—nor superficially—. It is, in our view, essential to go further and consider other parameters that allow us to measure the **durability and quality** of the jobs created. Additional factors must also be taken into account, in particular issues related to the diversification and independence of the national economy. In other words, it is necessary to move beyond the traditional deficit-ridden, rent-distribution model towards an entrepreneurial model that is aligned with Algeria's realities and future challenges.

As a key stakeholder in the issue of youth employability, the Algerian university has become involved in exchange programmes and partnerships aimed at supporting the professional insertion of graduates, particularly through initiatives that raise students' awareness of entrepreneurial culture. It is precisely with this objective that the **TAWDIF project** was launched in Algeria, beginning with a pilot phase designed to test, in several universities, a training programme—**"Comprendre l'Entreprise" (CLE)**—focused on entrepreneurial culture.

However, this experience showed that the success of such a project does not depend solely on the transmission or acquisition of purely theoretical knowledge in entrepreneurship, nor simply on the involvement of the project's leaders and trainers. The success of a project of this scale necessarily requires its **contextualisation** in

relation to the local legal, sociocultural, and socio-economic environment. At the same time, it appears indispensable to invest fully in the **training of trainers**, in order to maximise the impact of initiatives aimed at promoting entrepreneurial culture and developing skills and know-how in this area.

Moreover, the success that Algerian universities seek through the establishment of an entrepreneurial ecosystem within their walls, in favour of youth employability, is in our view conditional upon another key action. This consists in conducting **in-depth field research**—in collaboration with other institutions and bodies—on the actual needs of Algeria's socio-economic sectors. Only by better understanding these needs can universities refine their training offers, strengthen their partnerships, and make entrepreneurship and employability policies more effective and sustainable.

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