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Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions

Country Brief: Social protection and employment in Algeria: Towards sustainable formalization?

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Summary

Algeria has been implementing a series of measures over the past decade to improve social security coverage and extend it to workers in the informal sector.¹ These include a combination of voluntary incentives and legislative innovations. The present case study sets out to analyse the impact of two key measures aimed at promoting the formalization of employment and micro- and small enterprises in Algeria. First, it looks at the changes introduced by the 2015 Supplementary Finance Act, which provide for voluntary social security affiliation and the elimination of late payment penalties for employers and

the self-employed – provisions designed to encourage enrolment in the National Social Security Fund for the Self-Employed (CASNOS). Secondly, it considers a more recent measure, namely the 2022 law establishing self-employment status, which aims to simplify access to formalization for the self-employed. The impact of the two measures is assessed on the basis of the available data in order to identify successes, challenges and lessons to be learned. They are intended to serve as a reference and a source of inspiration for other countries seeking to promote formalization in their economies.

Relevance to the Global Accelerator

Algeria's experience shows how a combination of incentives, active labour market policies and targeted social protection can produce tangible results. The widespread adoption of self-employment in the country – once its advantages for business growth became clear – demonstrates that integrated approaches can enhance

participation in the formal economy. This underscores the importance of linking social security with economic opportunities in order to expand coverage and inclusion. Other countries seeking to strengthen social protection and employment can also harness such synergies, as long as structural barriers hampering access to finance and

¹ Although formalization measures have been adopted in the country since the 1990s, this case study will focus exclusively on the past decade, from 2015 to 2025.

markets are addressed. In Algeria, unemployment benefits, initially designed to foster labour market integration, also had the effect of increasing women's labour force participation by providing temporary income security that encouraged job-seeking and reduced gender inequalities.

This ties in with global evidence that social policies can promote decent work for women. The Global Accelerator initiative can profitably draw from Algeria's example by promoting adaptable, inclusive systems that empower women and address structural inequalities.

Context

With a population of 46.7 million in 2024 (Algeria, ONS 2024a) and an economy heavily dependent on oil, which accounted for more than 90 per cent of exports in 2023 (World Bank 2024), Algeria faces major socio-economic challenges. Based on the most recent data collected for the Global Economic Diversification Index, Algeria ranks among the 20 least diversified countries (Prasad et al. 2024).

The transition to a diversified and inclusive economy is a priority for the Government. The country is seeking to reduce its dependence on oil, as revenues have been volatile in recent years owing to fluctuations in global prices. According to the national labour force survey from 2024, the active population is estimated at 13.8 million (of whom 3.2 million are female). The labour force participation rate is estimated at 41.7 per cent (63.9 per cent for men and 19.8 per cent for women). Unemployment remains a major challenge, having increased from 11.4 per

cent in May 2019 to 12.7 per cent in October 2024. Unemployment particularly affects young people (aged 16–24 years) and women, whose unemployment rates stood at 29.3 per cent and 25.4 per cent respectively in 2024 (Algeria, ONS 2019; 2024b). The share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) reached 27.6 per cent in 2024, compared with 26.2 per cent in 2019. Women are also the most affected, with a NEET rate of 32.4 per cent versus 23.2 per cent for men in 2024. Informal employment, which represents nearly 39 per cent of total employment (Algeria, ONS 2024b), acts as a structural brake on development, leaving a large proportion of the population without social protection coverage. This leads to lost opportunities for enhancing productivity, health, well-being and, ultimately, the realization of human rights. Informal employment is concentrated in agriculture and the construction and public works sectors (Merouani, Hammouda and El Moudden 2014).

Table 1. Evolution of selected labour market indicators in Algeria, 2019–24

	2019	2024
<i>Unemployment rate¹ (%)</i>	11.4	12.7
<i>Youth unemployment (population aged 16–24 years) (%)</i>	26.9	29.3
<i>Female unemployment rate (%)</i>	20.4	25.4
<i>NEET rate (%)</i>	26.2	27.6
<i>Informal employment² (%)</i>	42	39

NEET = not in employment, education or training.

¹ An unemployed person as defined by the ILO is a person aged 15 years or over who simultaneously meets three conditions: (a) being unemployed in a given week; (b) being available to take a job within two weeks; and (c) having actively sought a job in the last four weeks or having found one starting in less than three months.

² The definition of informal employment used here follows the ILO definition and refers to workers not covered by the social security system.

Source: Algeria, ONS (2019; 2024b).

In Algeria, the contributory social security system comprises five funds protecting workers against various professional and social risks:²

1. The National Social Insurance Fund for Employees (CNAS): It provides coverage for employees in the case of illness, maternity, work accidents, occupational diseases, disability and death.³ Although this fund ensures the collection of workers' and employers' contributions for all branches of social protection,⁴ the payment of employees' old-age pensions is handled by a separate entity, the National Pension Fund.

2. The National Pension Fund (CNR): It manages pensions and retirement benefits for salaried workers in the public and private sectors. The defined-benefit, pay-as-you-go scheme guarantees a maximum replacement rate of 80 per cent, with a minimum pension amount equivalent to 75 per cent of the guaranteed national minimum wage. The CNR also pays survivor's pensions to the beneficiaries of deceased retirees.

3. The National Social Security Fund for the Self-Employed (CASNOS): It manages health insurance and pensions for the self-employed, offering benefits similar to those of CNAS, with the exception of coverage for work accidents and maternity leave.⁵

4. The National Fund for Paid Leave and Weather-Related Layoffs in the Construction, Public Works and Hydraulics Sectors (CACOBATPH): It offers specific benefits to workers in the construction and hydraulics sectors, including paid leave and unemployment benefits in the event of a temporary cessation of activity due to weather conditions.

5. The National Unemployment Insurance Fund (CNAC): It manages unemployment benefits for workers on open-ended (permanent) contracts who have lost their jobs for economic reasons or following the cessation of their company's activity.

Although social security coverage is open to all workers by law, labour force survey data point to a structural lack of social protection coverage for some workers. Indeed, 39 per cent of the workforce were not covered by social security according to the 2024 labour force survey. It is in this context that the Algerian authorities have taken steps to formalize the economy and integrate informal workers into the social security system. The 2015 Supplementary Finance Act marked an important milestone in that it introduced two key measures: voluntary social security coverage and the elimination of late payment penalties and surcharges for employers and the self-employed. The objective was twofold: (a) to broaden the base of contributors with a view to extending social security coverage and strengthening the sustainability of the social protection system; and (b) to provide informal workers with full realization of the right to social security. Subsequently, in 2022, the Government established self-employment status, an initiative aimed at simplifying administrative and tax procedures for the self-employed. This measure, which simplified the process of registration for social security and introduced the option of paying contributions as a lump sum, has been a notable success, with 25,000 self-employed cards issued in 2024.⁶

In Algeria, the design and reform of social protection policies, such as those described above, are rooted in a structured process that involves social dialogue at multiple levels. All proposed legislation in the field of social protection generally follows a standardized pathway: it begins with the identification of needs through the collection and analysis of administrative and field data (including labour force survey data), followed by the preparation of draft legal texts. These drafts are then submitted for intersectoral consultation and dialogue, which serves to align the proposed measures across ministries and sectors, ensuring policy coherence and preventing overlaps or contradictions between laws. This stage provides a critical forum for social dialogue, where stakeholders – including line ministries, the Ministry of

² For more details on the risks covered and the levels of benefits provided, see Act No. 83-11 of 2 July 1983 on social insurance (JORADP 1983).

³ It is worth noting that CNAS has made remarkable progress in digitalizing its services. In 2016, it launched the *El Hanaa* app, which allows social security beneficiaries to track their medication reimbursements and complete several administrative procedures. Furthermore, since 2017, CNAS has provided an online reporting space, allowing employers to register their employees and pay contributions online.

⁴ Contributions are collected on behalf of the National Pension Fund (CNR), the National Unemployment Insurance Fund (CNAC), the National Fund for Paid Leave and Weather-Related Layoffs in the Construction, Public Works and Hydraulics Sectors (CACOBATPH) and the National Fund for the Equalization of Social Services (FNPOS).

⁵ Since 2016, CASNOS has been implementing a "mobile counter" initiative to reach the most isolated areas that do not have a CASNOS branch, and to facilitate access to social security services for the populations of these areas. In particular, the initiative has targeted workers in the agricultural and fisheries sectors, enabling them to take advantage more easily of the benefits and support offered by CASNOS. In terms of digitalization, CASNOS launched an online service in 2021 allowing self-employed workers to carry out several administrative procedures online. Since its launch, CASNOS has continued to enrich this platform with new digital services to facilitate access to social benefits.

⁶ Discussion with an expert at the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security.

Labour, Employment and Social Security and relevant technical bodies – engage in discussion and consensus-building. Once this process is complete, the proposed legislation is submitted to Parliament for approval. Upon adoption, the measures are implemented and

administered by the competent ministry or institution. This institutionalized process of consultation and coordination reflects Algeria's commitment to embedding social dialogue in the governance of social protection.

Description of measures adopted to extend social security and facilitate formalization in Algeria

Several policies have been implemented by Algeria since the 1990s to support the extension of social security and facilitate the transition of informal workers to the formal economy:

1. **The voluntary affiliation of informal workers to the social security system** was enshrined in article 60 of Ordinance No. 15-01 of 23 July 2015 (JORADP 2015). It gives employed persons access to health insurance benefits, more specifically health and maternity insurance (no maternity leave), upon payment of a monthly contribution of 12 per cent of the guaranteed national minimum wage. This is administered by the National Social Insurance Fund for Employees (CNAS). This voluntary affiliation was planned to be valid for a transitional period of three years from 2015 to 2018. From a discussion with the heads of social security funds at the local level it emerged that voluntary affiliation is still in force in 2025. It is also important to note that, once they have obtained formal salaried employment, employees have the option to retroactively pay their pension contributions for the transitional period in which they were working without contributing to a pension scheme. A total of 16,288 informal economy workers had registered in the voluntary scheme by June 2016 (Oumehdhi 2016).
2. **Removal of penalties for late payment of past contributions and introduction of new penalties:**
 - a) To facilitate the payment of contributions, article 57 of Ordinance No. 15-01 of 23 July 2015 allowed employers and self-employed workers who were in arrears with the payment of their social security contributions to benefit from a payment schedule and an exemption from surcharges. This exemption was also extended to employers and self-employed workers who had benefited from a payment schedule during the years preceding the ordinance's promulgation and were supposed to pay penalties (art. 58). However, failure to comply with this schedule results in the loss of the benefits granted.⁷ By June 2016, some 170,266 employers (47 per cent of the total) had taken advantage of these exceptional measures, of whom 83 per cent (that is, 141,166 employers) had paid the full amount of their contributions and benefited from the cancellation of surcharges and late payment penalties (Oumehdhi 2016).
 - b) Article 59 of Ordinance No. 15-01 of 23 July 2015 deals with new penalties moving forward. Employers who fail to comply with the legal deadlines for registering their workers for social security are liable to fines ranging from 100,000 to 200,000 Algerian dinars (US\$755–1,500) per unregistered worker, and also to imprisonment for two to six months. If the offence is repeated, the fines are increased to up to 500,000 dinars (US\$3,800) and the term of imprisonment can be up to 24 months.
3. Another important measure is the **creation of the scheme for the self-employed**, implemented through Act No. 22-23 of 18 December 2022 (JORADP 2022a). It supports informal workers without social security coverage by offering them incentives to formalize their activity and join the National Social Security Fund for the Self-

⁷ Pursuant to article 57 of Interministerial Decree No. 005 of 18 November 2015, workers in the agricultural and fisheries sectors benefit from specific measures and additional facilities for the payment of their contributions. With this in mind, CASNOS counters have been set up at the branch offices of the National Agricultural Mutual Fund (CNMA), which are visited more frequently by farmers. This initiative is aimed at bringing social security services closer to agricultural workers and simplifying the administrative procedures involved.

Employed (CASNOS). This scheme is intended for workers who have reached the legal working age and are carrying out predefined activities,⁸ mainly in the platform economy. Simplified online registration⁹ is offered to eligible young people.¹⁰ The new scheme allows them to obtain a self-employed person card offering several advantages, such as the opening of a commercial bank account, the payment of a reduced tax (0.5 per cent of declared turnover) and a reduced social security contribution of 24,000 dinars (US\$180) per year (compared to 32,400 dinars (US\$250), which is the minimum required for other self-employed workers).

4. The unemployment benefit programme, introduced by Executive Decree No. 22-70 of 10 February 2022 (JORADP 2022b), is designed to support the integration of young people into the labour market. First-time jobseekers aged

between 19 and 40 years, without income and registered with the National Employment Agency (ANEM), are eligible for this benefit. Recipients also benefit from health insurance coverage provided by CNAS, with contributions paid by the State. Payment of the unemployment benefit is conditional on compliance with several requirements, including regularly appearing in person at the local ANEM office, accepting proposed training courses and not turning down two job offers that match the beneficiary's qualifications. The training programmes offered are implemented in coordination with the Ministry of Vocational Training and Education, which monitors labour market needs. In addition, the training programmes must be aligned with the beneficiaries' educational background. They are generally short-term, lasting between three and six months, and are provided at vocational training centres under the jurisdiction of that ministry.

Impact and challenges

The impact of the measures discussed in the previous section has received very little attention in the literature or in policy debates. Although the data required for a comprehensive empirical assessment are not available, this section argues that their impact was limited and temporary, based on available data and discussions with key experts at the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security and local social security funds.

Voluntary affiliation of informal workers to the social security system. CNAS data indicate that the number of insured persons in special categories increased by 31 per cent in 2016, likely due to the introduction of voluntary affiliation for workers under article 60 of Ordinance No. 15-01 of 23 July 2015 (JORADP 2015). The number of workers who had opted for voluntary affiliation was estimated at 3,000 in March 2016 (Djama 2016) and at 16,288 by June 2016 (Oumehdhi 2016). However, the rate of increase quickly dropped to 2 per cent in 2017, suggesting a temporary effect linked to the implementation of this measure. Its fleeting nature was confirmed by an expert at

a local CNAS agency, who emphasized that the limited social security guarantees under this scheme did not provide sufficient incentives for voluntary participation. Indeed, workers affiliated under this arrangement receive only in-kind benefits, including reimbursement for medication, without access to other social benefits (such as a pension or benefits for work-related accidents). An expert from the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security attributed the decline in the affiliation rate to insufficient awareness-raising. Although intensive outreach to promote voluntary affiliation had been conducted in 2015–16 at the time of the scheme's launch, the lack of sustained awareness-raising efforts meant that individuals had tended to forget about the existence of that specific mechanism.

Removal of penalties for late payment of past contributions and introduction of new penalties. The number of active CASNOS members increased significantly in 2016, growing by 30 per cent since 2015. Similarly, the amount of CASNOS contributions collected increased by 57

⁸ For more details on the approximately 1,300 activities eligible for self-employed status, see the website of the National Agency for the Self-Employed (ANAE), <https://activities.anae.dz/>.

⁹ For more details of the online registration process, see the ANAE website, <https://www.anae.dz/user/ae/register>.

¹⁰ For more details on the eligibility criteria, see article 3 of Act No. 22-23 of 18 December 2022 (JORADP 2022).

per cent between 2015 and 2016 (Guefifa 2017). However, these growth rates declined in subsequent years, suggesting that the 2015 Supplementary Finance Act and the abolition of late payment penalties had only a temporary effect on workers' participation in social security.

Creation of the regime for the self-employed. The growth rate in the number of CASNOS-insured persons has started to rise again, reaching 11 per cent in 2022 and 8 per cent in 2023, which is due, at least in part, to the implementation of the scheme for the self-employed. Indeed, this scheme, administered by the National Agency for the Self-Employed (ANAE), issued more than 25,000 micro-entrepreneur cards between 2022 and 2025.¹¹

Unemployment benefit programme. Although detailed statistics are not available, an interview with an official from the Ministry of Labour, Employment, and Social Security highlighted the programme's significant impact on the labour force participation rate, particularly among women. CNAS data indicate that 2 million beneficiaries were affiliated in 2023, a figure that rose to 3 million in 2024. If the impact of this measure on labour market activity is

positive, it could increase the unemployment rate (Souag and Assaad 2024). Indeed, the unemployment rate reached 12.7 per cent in 2024, up from 11.4 per cent in 2019. This increase could be partly attributed to the programme, which encourages individuals who were previously inactive to become active and register in order to benefit from the allowance. Furthermore, a recent report by the Court of Auditors indicates that only 5.8 per cent of beneficiaries found a job thanks to the support of ANEM, raising questions about the programme's effectiveness in terms of sustainable integration into the labour market. That report included recommendations for enhancing the unemployment benefit programme, focusing in particular on a better match between the training offered and labour market needs, and on the development of individualized support for jobseekers. In order to improve the financial sustainability of the programme and reduce its impact on public finances, the Court of Auditors also recommended strengthening the mechanisms for detecting fraud and identifying beneficiaries who were not actually entitled to the benefit, particularly through better coordination between the different institutions involved (Aouadi 2025).

Towards sustainable formalization?

On the basis of the available data it is not possible to conclude that the measures undertaken by the Government to encourage formalization have had a long-term impact. This is in line with the findings of Jessen and Kluve (2021), who note that one-off incentives or policy interventions often lead to an increase in formalization at first, followed by a decline once the measures expire or awareness wanes. The example of Algeria illustrates this phenomenon, as shown by the voluntary affiliation scheme, which saw high uptake in 2015–16 before losing effectiveness owing to the lack of ongoing incentives and awareness-raising efforts. Without continued support, many firms and workers return to informality, often as a result of administrative constraints, financial difficulties or failure to appreciate the long-term benefits of formalization.

To achieve a sustainable increase in formalization, the Government should make the social security system more flexible and attractive by adopting innovative approaches. First, the introduction of a progressive contribution system, inspired by the "Save More Tomorrow" model (Thaler and

Benartzi 2004), would enable young workers to start off paying contributions at a low rate that increases gradually over time. Secondly, it would be essential to make the payment of contributions more flexible for the self-employed, allowing more frequent payments (monthly or even daily) instead of a single annual payment that is often difficult to afford.

Furthermore, sustained awareness-raising campaigns, targeting both employers and workers, are essential to remind people of the benefits of formal employment and provide up-to-date information on existing schemes. A better understanding of workers' preferences and behaviours (ISSA 2021) would make it possible to tailor social benefits to their real needs and make them more attractive. Since social security affiliation is influenced by the change of preferences over time and by risk aversion, it is essential to adapt systems so that they take these factors into account (Merouani, Hammouda and El Moudden 2016).

Institutional capacity in Algeria to foster formalization could be strengthened by simplifying business registration

¹¹ Although the ANAE website indicates that 10,000 cards have been issued, a source within the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security suggested that the number was closer to 25,000.

procedures and improving the mechanisms for monitoring and enforcing compliance with regulations. In that regard, studies have shown that coercive measures (“sticks”) are often more effective than financial incentives (“carrots”) in promoting formalization (Jessen and Kluve 2021). A well-calibrated combination of flexibility, progressive incentives, coercive measures and institutional strengthening could help to sustainably advance the integration of workers into the formal system.

A major challenge is data availability, which remains inadequate for conducting robust evaluations of social policies. It would be essential for the Government to regularly collect suitably disaggregated data and for its labour market and social protection policies to be informed by rigorous data analysis, including evaluations based on experimental and quasi-experimental approaches.

Main takeaways for the Global Accelerator

Algeria’s experience shows that a combination of incentive schemes, active labour market policies and targeted expansion of social protection can effectively move self-employed persons from informal to formal employment, even if the results have been somewhat limited so far in Algeria. The popularity of the scheme for the self-employed – particularly once its benefits for business development became evident – reflects how integrated policies encourage more active participation in the formal economy. This suggests that, as far as certain groups are concerned, establishing a link between social security and economic opportunities is essential to expand social protection coverage and promote inclusion. For other countries seeking to strengthen their social protection system while boosting employment, such synergies could serve as a model, as long as structural barriers hampering access to finance and markets are addressed.

In addition, our case study has highlighted how unemployment protection can enhance women’s

participation in the labour market by encouraging active job-seeking and potentially reducing gender inequalities. The temporary economic security provided by unemployment benefits has enabled more women in Algeria to seek employment, mitigating certain systemic barriers to their labour market participation. This unexpected result is consistent with international findings about the role of social policies in promoting decent work for women. With regard to the Global Accelerator, this underscores the importance of designing flexible systems that can be adapted to different population groups, taking their needs and expectations into account. Social security systems based on a combination of several policies would be able not only to cushion shocks but also to promote women’s empowerment and address structural inequalities.

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