Algeria in Figures: A Demographic Profile and Structural Transitions

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Abstract:
This study examines demographic change in Algeria through a set of core demographic indicators, including population growth, the rate of population increase, life expectancy, births, mortality, sex distribution, and age structure, as represented by the population pyramid. It also analyses family and social dynamics, notably age at first marriage, educational attainment, and patterns of residence. By offering a detailed account of the Algerian population, this study highlights the gradual process of demographic aging and evolving fertility trends.
Keywords: demographic dynamics; life expectancy; age structure; natural population change.

Introduction

The analysis of demographic dynamics has always constituted a fundamental discourse within the social sciences. It provides a detailed explanation of the continuous and profound changes that societies undergo over time. Demographic figures are valuable tools for observing development across various economic, social, and even territorial dimensions. They also provide material that enables a better understanding of the transition mechanisms associated with countries' development. In Algeria, since independence, particular attention has been given to demographic studies of the country, which have experienced changes in its population that may be described as substantial through the adoption of a new pattern of birth rates, mortality, fertility, and, consequently, age structure. Algerian society has undergone a process of major transformation in terms of demographic behaviour. It was marked by a high rate of increase, mainly because of a birth regime regarded as high, alongside a declining pattern of mortality, owing to the considerable progress achieved in the health sector. Over the past few decades, society has witnessed a decline in fertility rates, a situation that reflects a change in traditions, reproductive behaviours, family structures, and even lifestyles in Algeria. Significant improvement has been observed as life expectancy at birth has also increased. This has led to a transformation in the age structure of the Algerian population. There are fewer young people and more working-age adults and elderly people. These changes generate new challenges for economic and social planning in Algeria.

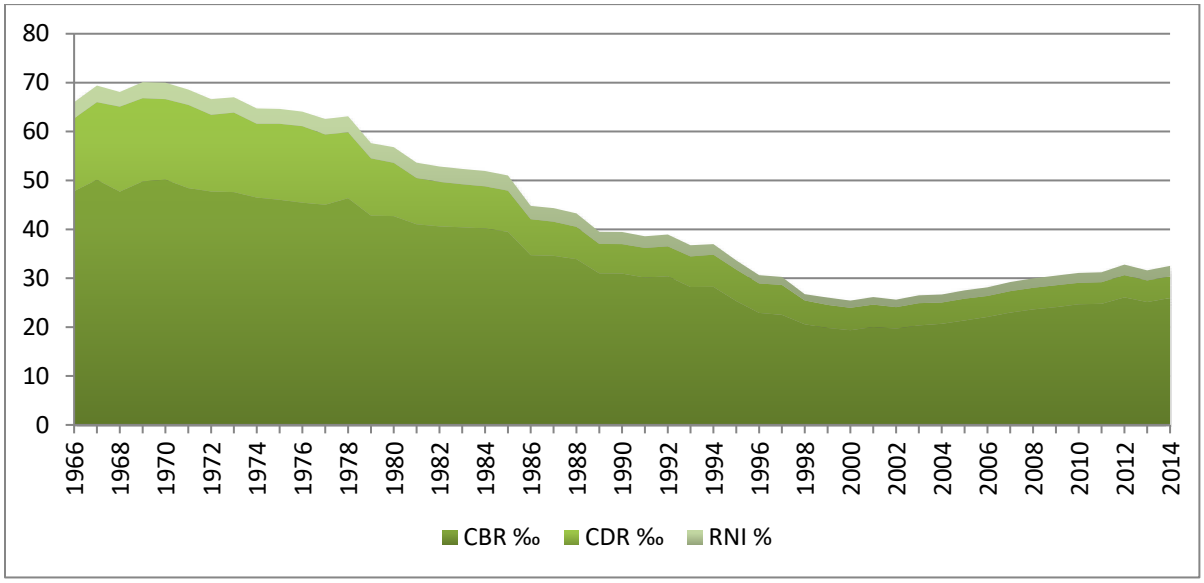
1. Analysis of Natural Movement and Nuptiality in Algeria

1.1. The Evolution of Natural Movement in Algeria

In accordance with Roland Pressat's definition, the crude death rate refers to the ratio of deaths in a given year to the average population of the year under consideration. In contrast, the crude birth rate is the ratio of live births in a given year to the average population of the same year. The ratio of the natural increase to the average population of that year represents the rate of natural increase (Pressat, 1979). Notably, Algeria conducted its first general population and housing census after independence in 1966, when the

population was estimated at approximately 12 million inhabitants. Two decades later, the population doubled, reaching approximately 22.8 million in 1987. The most recent general population and housing census (2008) recorded a population of approximately 34.8 million people.

Figure 1. *Evolution of Natural Movement in Algeria, 1966–2015*



Note. Source: ONS, *Statistical Retrospective* (1962-2011), 2013; ONS, *Statistical Data: Algerian Demography 2015*, No. 740.

Since independence, Algeria has entered a phase of intensive demographic dynamics characterised by a positive evolution in live births, reflected by a high crude birth rate, rising from 47.8‰ in 1966 and reaching its peak of 50.16‰ in 1970, when the average number of children per woman exceeded eight (Hemal & Haffad, 1999). Thereafter, the crude birth rate entered a phase of continuous decline, decreasing from 45.02% in 1977, with 727,532 live births, to 34.6% in 1987, when the number of live births was estimated at 782,336. This downwards trend continued, as the crude birth rates were 20.58‰, 19.82‰, and 19.36‰ in 1998, 1999, and 2000, respectively. This sustained decline in birth rates may be explained by the marked decrease in the average number of children per woman, which fell from 7.4 to 2.69 between 1977 and 1998. The period 2001–2015 was marked by a renewed increase in the crude birth rate, which rose from 20.03‰ in 2001 to 26.03‰ in 2015, representing an increase of six points. This recovery in birth rates may be explained by the considerable increase in the nuptiality rate, estimated at 3.4 points over the same period, as well as by the improvement in the country's general socioeconomic situation. In the same context, it should be noted that compared with 2001, 2002 experienced a slight decrease of 0.4‰, which decreased from 20.03‰ in 2001 to 19.68‰ in 2002, indicating that the latter year recorded the lowest rate during this period.

Mortality in Algeria was stable during the first intercensal period, with a crude death rate estimated at 14.9‰ in 1966 and 14.36‰ in 1977. In the same context, from 1978 onwards, when the crude death rate stood at 13.48‰, this demographic phenomenon entered a period of continuous decline, described as slow at first and then more rapid (Louadi, 2012), decreasing from 6.97‰ in 1987 to 4.87‰ in 1998. This notable improvement in mortality may be attributed in particular to the program aimed at combating infant mortality, through which urgent priority was given to vaccination (Fodil Issad, 2017). Similarly,

the period of 2000–2015 experienced minor fluctuations, with increases and decreases from one year to another, with a crude death rate ranging between 5.46‰ in 2000 and 4.57‰ in 2015. Notably, the overall trend for the period 1966–2015 indicates an improvement of 10 points, which is attributable mainly to the development of the health sector, improvements in living standards, and the progress achieved in modernising the social security system, such as the introduction of the CHIFA card.

Algeria reached a natural increase equal to or greater than 3% during the period 1966–1985, particularly in 1967, when the rate stood at 3.42%, which is ranked among the highest rates of natural increase in the world (Fodil & Delenda, 2006). This situation may be explained by several factors, including the compensatory effect of births prevented by the war, the size of the female population of childbearing age, the culture of early marriage, and, subsequently, large family size. In addition, the prevalence of contraceptives was low, as, according to a survey conducted by the Algerian Association for Demographic and Social Research, the proportion of women using a contraceptive method was only 8% at the end of the 1960s. This proportion reached 51% in 1992, according to data from the Algerian Survey on Maternal and Child Health; 57% in 2002, according to the results published in the report of the Algerian Family Health Survey; and 62% in 2006, according to data from the Algerian Association for Family Planning (Louadi, 2012).

The rate of natural increase recorded during the period 2000–2015 increased continuously, from 1.5% in 2000 to 2.15% in 2015. This may be explained by improvements in citizens' health through the implementation of major programs in both the private and public sectors, particularly those targeting children, as reflected in the decline in the infant mortality rate from 36.9‰ to 22.3‰ over the same period. This may also be attributed to the socioeconomic changes experienced by Algerian society, which contributed to improving living standards and housing conditions.

The history of population policy in Algeria passed through three major phases, in the following chronological order. The first phase, from 1962 to 1969, was characterised by a political will to promote birth control. In 1968, the report of the Directorate-General for Planning and Economic Studies recommended the establishment of a family planning policy to address the housing deficit caused mainly by the effects of the demographic explosion. The same year witnessed the creation of the National Commission for the Development of a Birth Policy, with the aim of defining a population policy as a means of combating intense demographic growth in relation to unemployment (Louadi, 2012). The second phase, from 1970 to 1980, began in the early 1970s, when Algeria encouraged pronatalist thinking. Algerian leaders at that time considered that Algeria was facing a problem of an economic rather than demographic nature, under the well-known slogan "the best pill is development" (Hemal & Haffad, 1999, p. 64), expressed in 1974 at the World Population Conference held in Bucharest. Towards the end of the 1970s, however, Algerian leaders became aware of the issue and changed their position on demographic policy. They decided to move from a system that favoured birth rates to one that discouraged them and encouraged a reduction in births, without prejudice to the principles and customs specific to the Algerian people (Louadi, 2012). At that time, Algerian demographic growth was considered far greater than the country's capacity, constituting a genuine obstacle to the socioeconomic development of the country (Hemal & Haffad, 1999). The third phase, beginning in 1980, involved recourse to a population policy aimed at reducing births, which was considered an appropriate solution for improving the country's socioeconomic conditions. In 1983, an intersectoral action programme was

adopted to control population growth. This program was revised in 1991, with its fundamental objective clearly defined as achieving a lower rate of natural increase through the implementation of the following measures:

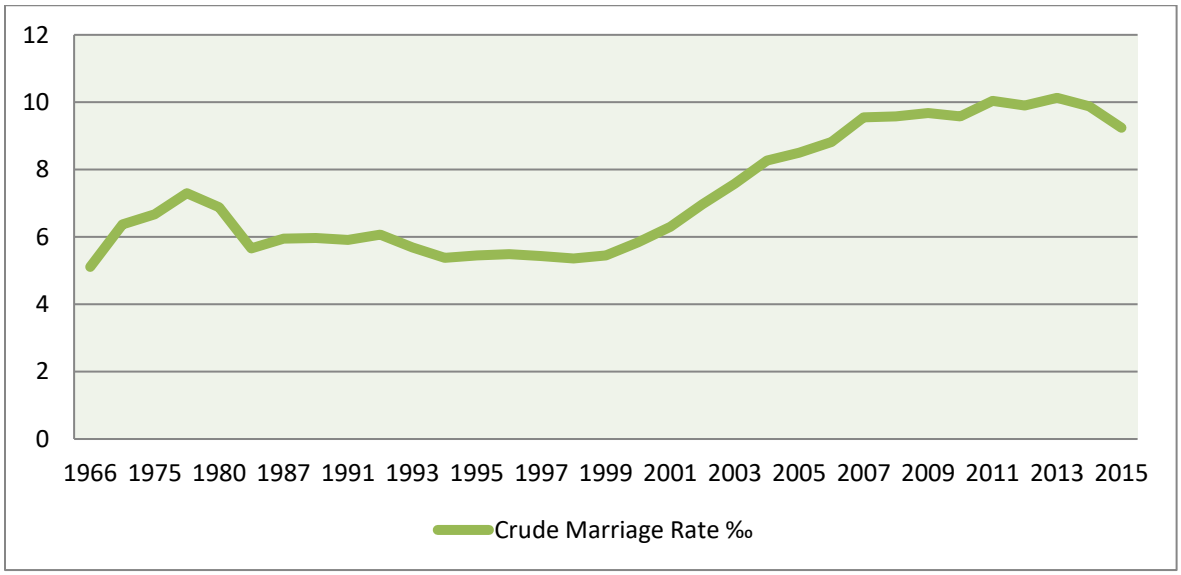
- Improving and modernising reception structures to support and strengthen the quality of services established within the framework of birth spacing, with the implementation of approximately 340 maternal and child protection centres, in addition to the launch of 199 health units whose main task was the regular distribution of oral contraceptive products (Lakrouf, 2014).
- Organising awareness-raising and information campaigns for the population on the importance of family planning by the Ministry of Information.
- Encouraging training and research in the demographic field.

Furthermore, in July 1992, Algeria witnessed the establishment of the Ministry of Health and Population, which may reflect the level of concern among the country's leaders regarding demographic growth (Louadi, 2012).

1.2. Evolution of the Crude Nuptiality Rate in Algeria

In Roland Pressat's demographic dictionary, the crude nuptiality rate refers to the ratio of marriages in a given year to the average population of that year (Pressat, 1979).

Figure 2. *Evolution of the Crude Nuptiality Rate in Algeria, 1966–2015*



Note. Source: Delenda Aissa, *Proceedings of the National Seminar on the Demographic Situation of Algeria*, University of Oran, May 2012, p. 14; ONS, *Statistical Data: Algerian Demography 1999*, No. 305-2015, No. 740.

The observations in the figure above confirm that the crude nuptiality rate recorded a positive evolution estimated at approximately two points during the first intercensal period, rising from 5.11 per 1,000 in 1966 to 7.3 per 1,000 in 1977. In 1980, this indicator was estimated at approximately 6.88 per 1,000 and entered a fluctuating phase, alternating between increases and decreases, which were 5.66‰, 5.95‰, and 5.36‰ in 1985, 1987, and 1998, respectively. With respect to the period 2000–2011, a continuous increase in the crude nuptiality rate may first be observed, as it rose from 5.84‰ in 2000 to 10.04‰ in 2011. This situation was followed by a slight decrease observed in 2010, when the rate was estimated at

9.58‰. This indicator subsequently experienced a renewed increase, reaching approximately 10.04‰ in 2011, followed by fluctuations between increasing and decreasing, decreasing from 9.9‰ in 2012 to 9.24‰ in 2015. Overall, an increase of four points was observed during the period 2000–2015. In general, this situation may be explained by the numerous changes experienced by Algerian society, whether at the demographic, socioeconomic, or even political level. This has certainly led to changes in individuals' behaviour with respect to marriage, such as the rise in the mean age at first marriage among both sexes across the different intercensal periods.

Table 1. *Evolution of the mean age at marriage by sex in Algeria*

Sex	1966	1977	1987	1998	2008
Female	18.3	20.9	23.7	27.6	29.1
Male	23.8	25.3	27.7	31.3	32.9

Note. Source: ONS, *Statistical Retrospective* (1962-2011), 2013.

The mean age at first marriage increased continuously for both sexes, increasing from 18 to 24 years among women and from 24 to 28 years among men between 1966 and 1987, respectively. This indicator continued its upwards trajectory at the same pace, as the most recent intercensal period recorded a gap of 1.2 years among women, rising from 27.6 to 29 years, while the gap among men was estimated at approximately 1.6 years, rising from 31.3 to 33 years between 1998 and 2008. This delay in entering unions may be explained by the continuation of higher education, particularly among women, as well as by certain socioeconomic obstacles, such as the difficulty of obtaining stable employment or housing (Louadi, 2012). The difference between women and men has continued to decrease since 1966, decreasing from 5.5 years to 3.8 years between 1966 and 2008. This situation may be a consequence of the reduction in disparities between the two sexes, particularly at the socioeconomic level, the increasing presence of women in the education sector, and their significant participation in professional activity (Delenda, 2012).

Table 2. *Evolution of Residential Occupancy Structures in Algeria, 1966–2012*

	1966	1977	1987	1998	2008	2012
Average size	5.96	6.7	7.1	6.58	5.85	5.4
Number of households	2,031,167	2,333,553	3,183,137	4,425,521	5,815,158	

Note. Source: Rachdi, 2012/2013; Ministry of Health, Population and Hospital Reform, United Nations Children's Fund, and United Nations Population Fund, 2015.

The average household size in Algeria tended to increase between 1966 and 1987, increasing from 5.96 to 7.1 persons per household. This may be interpreted in relation to parents' insistence that their sons remain with them after marriage, regardless of their financial circumstances. At that time, the decision to leave the parental home was regarded as behaviour that was inappropriate according to the customs and traditions of Algerian society. After 1987, the average size of Algerian households tended to decrease, from 6.58 in 1998 to 5.85 in 2008 and reaching 5.4 in 2012. This change in the size of the Algerian household may be attributed mainly to changing mentalities, as newly married couples prefer independence and living alone, especially when the wife is employed. This situation has led to an increase in nuclear households and, consequently, a decline in extended households. The number of Algerian households experienced progressive growth between 1966 and 2008, estimated at approximately 3,783,991 households, increasing from 2,031,167 to 5,815,158 households during the period under

consideration. This situation is directly related to population growth, as the population rose from 12 million inhabitants in 1966 to approximately 34 million inhabitants, reaching approximately 37 million inhabitants in 2012. Notably, the distribution of households at the national level showed considerable disparity according to place of residence in favour of the rural stratum during the period 1966–1977. The number of rural Algerian households stood at 1,217,895 in 1966 and 1,379,063 in 1977. In contrast, the number of urban households increased from 661,063 to 954,490 over the same period. This inequality may be attributed to the concentration of the Algerian population in the rural sector, with proportions estimated at approximately 68.6% and 60% in 1966 and 1977, respectively. From 1987 onwards, the distribution of households by residential sector followed the opposite trend. The number of urban households increased substantially, from 1,688,367 in 1987 to 3,971,045 in 2008. This pattern of development is consistent with the growth of the urban population, which increased from 49.7%, corresponding to 11,444,249 people in 1987, to 65.9%, corresponding to 22,471,179 people in 2008. This situation may be explained by the rural exodus experienced by Algerian society, as well as by the transformation of certain rural areas into urban areas (Rachdi, 2012/2013).

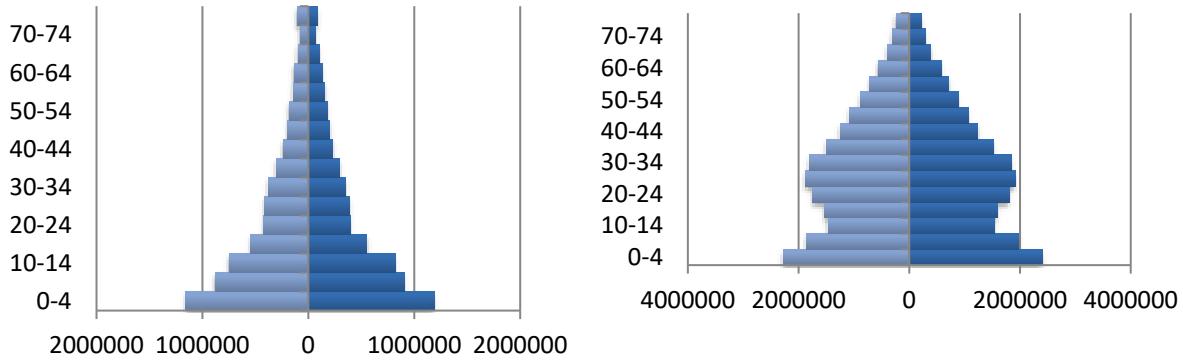
2. Demographic Structure and Life Expectancy in Algeria

2.1. Algerian Demographic Structure by Age and Sex, 1966–2015

The general shape of an age pyramid reflects several meanings: it represents the structure of a population by age and sex, while it also illustrates the past, present, and future of that population.

Through the age pyramids of the five general population censuses of Algeria (1966, 1977, 1987, 1998, and 2008), as well as that of 2015, it may be observed that the Algerian population is young. This observation is demonstrated by the broad base of the pyramid, represented by the 0–4 age group. This is explained by the large number of births recorded at the national level, despite the decline observed in the crude birth rate during this period. According to data published by the National Office of Statistics, the latter fell from 34.6‰ in 1987 to 26.03 per thousand in 2015, representing an overall decrease of approximately nine points over a period of 28 years. This gradual decline in the crude birth rate continued until 2002, when it reached 19.68‰. Beyond this date, the crude birth rate began to rise gradually, leading to an imbalance in the population between the two sexes. This may be observed in these age pyramids, where the male ratio is higher than that of females in the youngest age groups. This observation is consistent with the sex ratio at birth, namely, 105 male births for every 100 female births. The opposite is observed in the other age groups, where there are more women than men. This may be explained by excess male mortality resulting from occupational accidents as well as by male emigration. Finally, the apex of the pyramid, which represents the elderly population, is generally narrow in comparison with the broad base. However, a particular feature may be observed in the pyramid of the General Population and Housing Census of 2008. This feature is the beginning of the widening of the apex of the pyramid, which may represent the onset of population aging, since the proportion of elderly people increased from approximately 6.68% to 7.43% between 1987 and 2008, respectively.

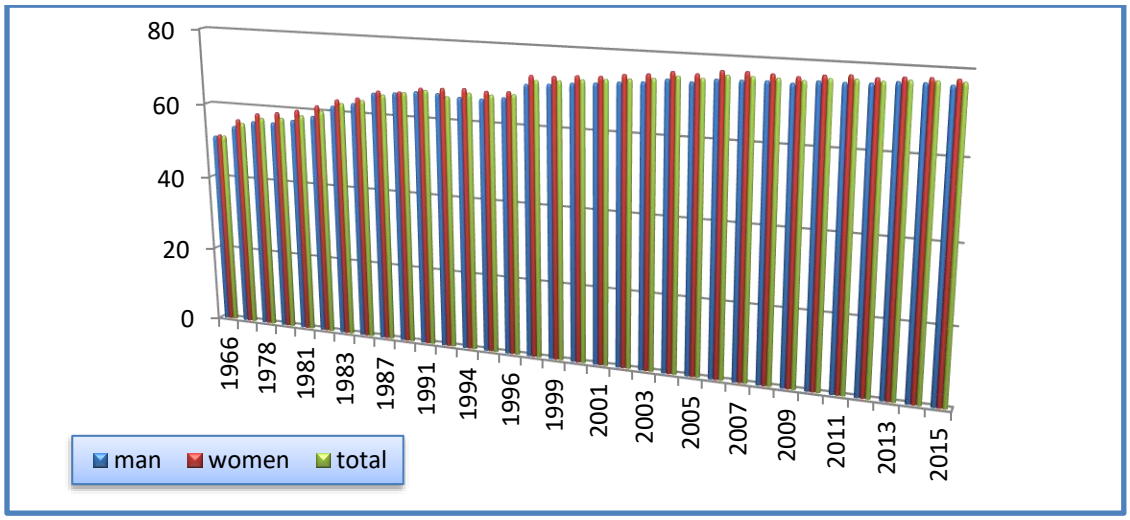
Figure 3. *Age Pyramids in 1966 and 2015*



Note. Source: ONS, *Statistical Retrospective* (1962-2011), 2013; ONS, *Statistical Data: Algerian Demography 2015*, No. 740.

2.2. The Evolution of Life Expectancy at Birth in Algeria, 1966–2015

Figure 4. *Evolution of life expectancy at birth in Algeria, 1966–2015*



Note. Source: ONS, *Statistical Data: Algerian Demography 2001*, No. 353-2015, No. 740.

Life expectancy at birth has increased markedly over several years for both sexes, reaching higher levels and recording an improvement estimated at 26 years between 1966 and 2015. Among women, this indicator rose from 51 years to 66 years between 1966 and 1987, reached 77 years in 2008, and then stood at 77.8 years in 2015. The evolution of life expectancy at birth among males recorded a gain of 25 years over an interval of 49 years, standing at 51 years in 1966, 66 years in 1987, and 75 years in 2008, before reaching 76.4 years in 2015. This may be justified by the significant advancement and modernisation experienced by the Algerian health sector, owing to the considerable progress achieved and the priority given to free access to health care. This was accompanied by a growing share of the state's budget allocated to this sector, as the decade 2000–2010 witnessed a fourfold increase in budgetary allocations devoted to health-sector operations and equipment, rising from DZD 60.149 billion in 2000 to DZD 196.744 billion in 2007, then to DZD 222 billion in 2009, and reaching DZD 233 billion in 2010. In the same context, the health sector benefited from a financial allocation of approximately DZD 224 billion within the framework of public investment for the construction of approximately 800 hospital and local health-care infrastructures at the national level (Chachoua, 2014).

In terms of human resources, the country's health sector has experienced highly positive development in terms of medical personnel. In 1966, there were 1,356 physicians, including 364 Algerians and 992 foreigners, corresponding to one physician per 8,738 inhabitants (Abbou & Brahmia, 2017). In contrast, in 1977, the medical coverage index was estimated at approximately 3,948 inhabitants per physician, 18,828 inhabitants per pharmacist, and 18,283 inhabitants per dental surgeon (ONS, 2013).

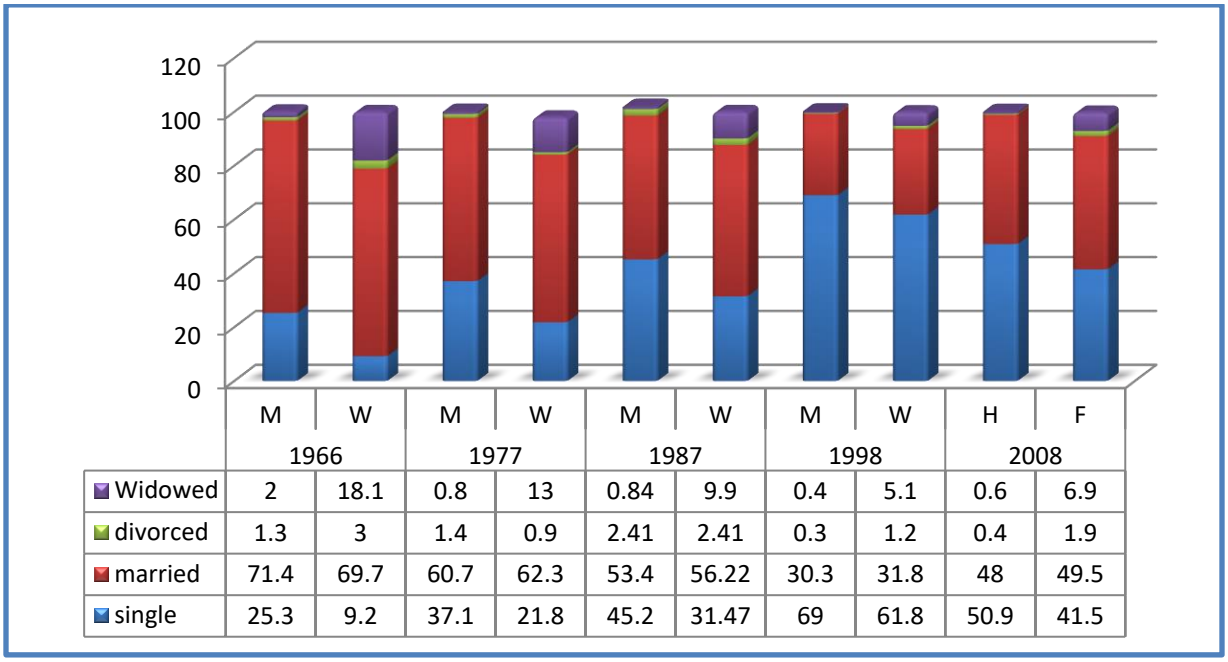
In the same context, the most recent intercensal period recorded an increase of 18,025 physicians, with the number rising from 29,970 to 47,995 physicians and, consequently, from 985 to 721 inhabitants per physician. Similarly, statistics for 2010 estimate a medical coverage index of approximately 640 inhabitants per physician, 3,093 inhabitants per dental surgeon, and 3,962 inhabitants per pharmacist.

With regard to existing health infrastructure at the national level, in 2010, there were 194 public hospital establishments, 13 university hospital centres, and 64 specialised hospital establishments. In contrast, the private health infrastructure included 6,208 specialist practices, 6,315 general practitioner practices, 5,105 dental practices, and 376 group practices (ONS, 2013).

3. Indicators of Social Structuring: Marital Status, Educational Attainment, and Housing Occupancy Conditions in Algeria

3.1. The Evolution of Marital Status in Algeria by Sex

Figure 5. *Evolution of Marital Status in Algeria by Sex and Year of the General Population and Housing Census*



	1966		1977		1987		1998		2008	
Widowed	2	18.1	0.8	13	0.84	9.9	0.4	5.1	0.6	6.9
divorced	1.3	3	1.4	0.9	2.41	2.41	0.3	1.2	0.4	1.9
married	71.4	69.7	60.7	62.3	53.4	56.22	30.3	31.8	48	49.5
single	25.3	9.2	37.1	21.8	45.2	31.47	69	61.8	50.9	41.5

Note. Source: Delenda, A., 2012, p. 18; ONS, *RGPH 1998, Statistical Collections*, No. 80, Results Series No. 1; ONS, *Statistical Yearbook of Algeria*, No. 30, 2010-2012 Results, 2014 edition.

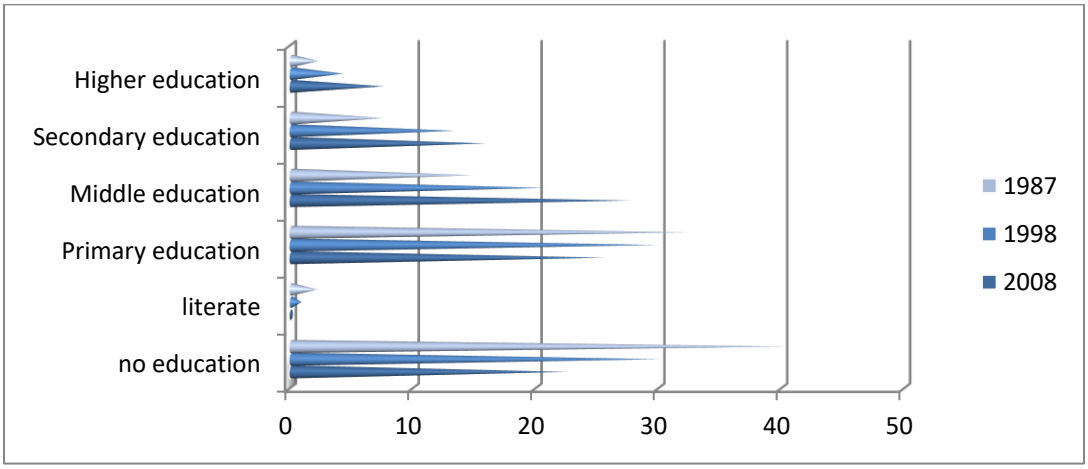
With respect to the evolution of marital status in Algeria, the proportion of unmarried persons has continued to increase across the different intercensal periods, with higher rates among males than among females.

Over a period of 20 years, the category of unmarried persons recorded a positive evolution estimated at approximately 20 points among men, rising from 25.3% in 1966 to 37% in 1977 and reaching 45% in 1987. This increase was approximately 22 points among women, standing at 9.2% in 1966, 22% in 1977, and 31.47% in 1987. In the same context, the most recent General Population and Housing Census reported a proportion of unmarried persons estimated at approximately 51% among men and 41.5% among women. In contrast, the population of married persons decreased by 23 points among men, decreasing over a 40-year period from 71% in 1966 to 53% in 1987, reaching 30.3% in 1998 and then 48% in 2008. Among women, the decrease was estimated at approximately 20 points, with rates of 70%, 56%, and 49.5% recorded in 1966, 1987, and 2008, respectively. This situation may be explained first by the increase in the mean age at first marriage for both sexes, which reached 33 years among men and 29 years among women in 2008, as well as by other cultural, socioeconomic, demographic, and even historical factors. Divorce declined overall for both sexes, decreasing from 1.3% to 0.4% between 1966 and 2008 among men and from 3% to 1.9% among women. During the same period, widowhood remained relatively low among men, falling from 2% to 0.6%, and decreased among women from 18% to 7% between the first and the most recent General Population and Housing Census.

3.2. The Evolution of Educational Attainment in Algeria

Educational attainment in Algeria improved markedly between the last three censuses, as reflected in a considerable decline in the proportions of persons with no schooling and literate persons without formal education. The percentage of the population with no education declined from 40.5% to 30.08% between 1987 and 1998, reaching 22.5% in 2008. In contrast, the literate population without formal schooling decreased from 2.2% to 0.9% between 1987 and 1998, reaching 0.2% in 2008. The percentage of Algerians with primary-level education also experienced a substantial decline, from 32.5% in 1987 to 29.9% in 1998 and reaching 25.6% in 2008. The category with middle-level education recorded an overall increase estimated at 13 points, rising from 14.8% in 1987 to 20.7% in 1998 and reaching 27.87% in 2008. The percentage of the Algerian population with secondary-level education increased overall by eight points, from 7.6% in 1987 to 13.4% in 1998 and reaching 15.9% in 2008. An overall increase of five points over a 21-year period was recorded for higher education, increasing from 2.3% in 1987 to 4.3% in 1998 and reaching 7.6% at the end of the period in 2008.

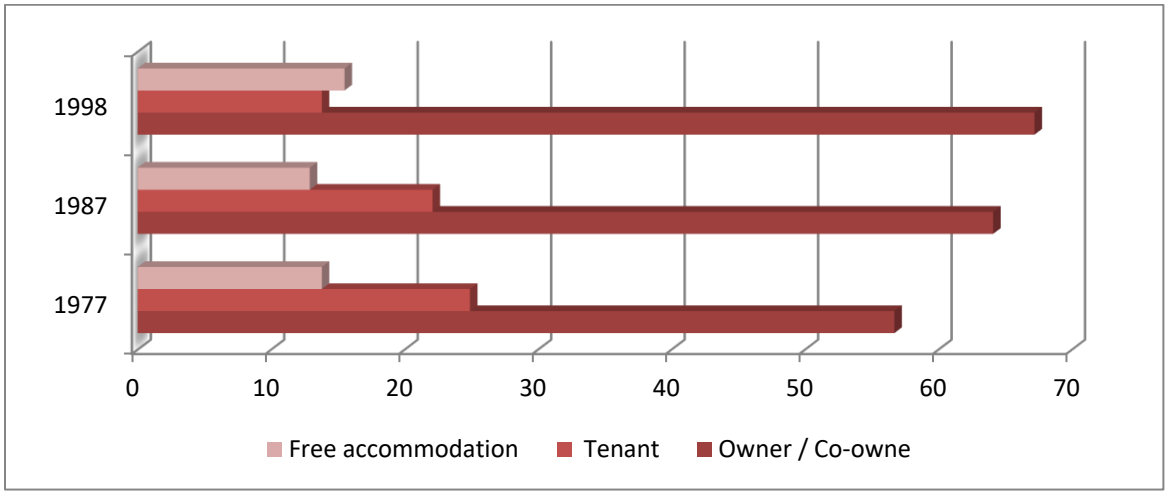
Figure 6. *Evolution of Educational Attainment in Algeria According to the General Population and Housing Censuses*



Note. Source: ONS, *Statistical Collections: Synthetic Data, Analysis Series*, Vol. 1, June 1989; ONS, *RGPH 1998, Statistical Collections*, No. 80, Results Series No. 1; ONS, *Statistical Yearbook of Algeria*, No. 30, 2010-2012 Results, 2014 edition.

3.3. The Evolution of Housing Occupancy Status in Algeria

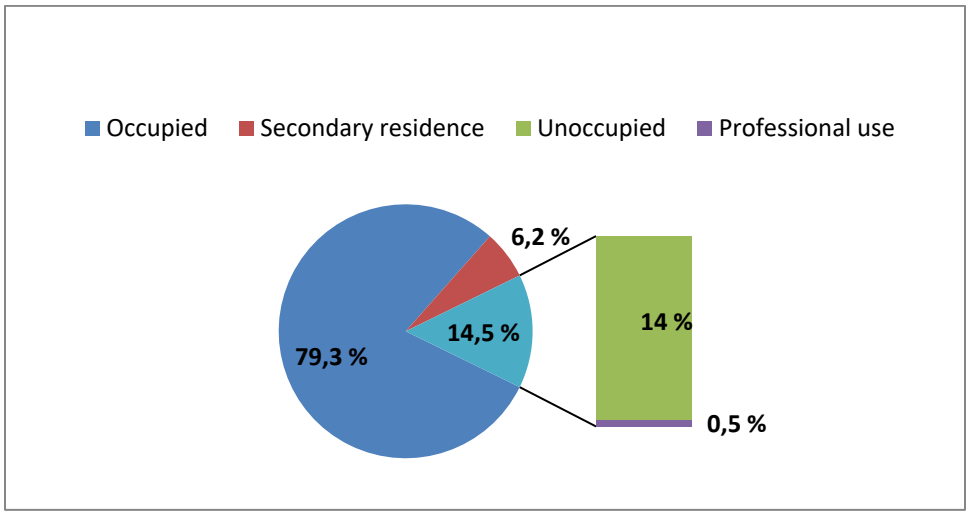
Figure 7. *Evolution of Housing Occupancy Status According to the General Population and Housing Censuses*



Note. Source: ONS, *Statistical Collections: Synthetic Data, Analysis Series*, Vol. 1, June 1989; ONS, *RGPH 1998, Statistical Collections*, No. 80, Results Series No. 1.

According to the data represented graphically above, the category of owners or co-owners consistently ranked first, increasing by seven points from 56.7% to 64.1% between 1977 and 1987, respectively. The same category recorded a positive increase estimated at approximately three points between 1987 and 1998, increasing from 64.1% to 67.2%. In contrast, tenants experienced a substantial overall decline of approximately 11 points, decreasing from 24.9% in 1977 to 22.1% in 1987 and reaching 13.8% in 1998. Moreover, the type of occupancy referred to as free housing slightly decreased, which may be considered negligible, between the 1977 and 1987 General Population and Housing Censuses, decreasing from 13.8% to 12.9%, respectively. This was followed by an increase in 1998, when it reached 15.5%. Overall, this situation may be explained by the various state programs in the housing sector implemented during this period.

Figure 8. *Evolution of Housing Occupancy Status in Algeria in the 2008 General Population and Housing Census*



Note. Source: ONS, *Statistical Yearbook of Algeria*, No. 30, 2010-2012 Results, 2014 edition.

The results of the 2008 General Population and Housing Census, with regard to housing occupancy status, show that the category of occupied dwellings ranked first, with 79.3%. The category of unoccupied dwellings ranked second, accounting for 14%. In the same context, the percentage of secondary dwellings and dwellings used for professional purposes was 6.2% and 0.5%, respectively.

Conclusion

Overall, the statistical findings presented in this section further demonstrate that Algerian society has undergone significant sociodemographic transformations, which may be summarised as follows.

The rate of natural increase followed a downwards trend, declining by approximately 1.14 points between 1966 and 2015. The mean age at first marriage increased substantially between the first and the most recent General Population and Housing Census, by approximately 11 years among women and nine years among men. The crude nuptiality rate also increased overall by nearly four points over a period of 49 years, increasing from 5.11‰ to 9.24‰.

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