

Morocco's Job Market Policy Over the Last Fifteen Years: Graduate Recruitment in the Public Sector

JAOUAD RADOUANI¹

Abstract

This paper's aim is to discuss Morocco's last fifteen years' job market policy and youth recruitment in the public sector. It is a known fact that there are youths who struggled before being recruited in the public sector, this paper will attend to the effects of three successive governments' policies on the Moroccan labour market. Knowing that the rates of unemployment, especially among graduates, is doubling the overall unemployment rate that is currently at ten percent (10), Morocco, in spite of the number of schemes it has investigated to assist graduates to find work, still faces a growing wave of demonstrations regularly organised by frustrated protesters calling for their right for a job opportunity. The three last ruling Moroccan governments, namely the ones led by The Socialist Union of Popular Forces Party, The Independence Party, and The Justice and Development Party, contributed through different political plans to solve the problem of unemployment among graduates, or at least to reduce their numbers and temporarily absorb their anger; however, in despite those efforts, nothing is forthcoming on the ground. The objective here is to highlight the policies of previous governments and show pitfalls of the current one, whose policy are proving to be a total failure in comparison to previous ones.

Keywords: morocco, economy, job market, university graduates and politics

Sumário

Objectivo deste artigo é discutir a política de mercado de trabalho em Marrocos nos últimos quinze anos e o recrutamento de jovens no sector público. É sabido que existem jovens que, arduamente se esforçam para serem recrutados no sector público. Este artigo irá discutir os efeitos das três sucessivas políticas dos governos no mercado de trabalho marroquino. Sabe-se que a taxa do desemprego, em particular entre os graduados, onde o desemprego geral é de cerca de dez por cento (10%) o país, mesmo com diferentes abordagens adoptadas para ajudarem os jovens a engranar no mercado do emprego, existe uma crescente onda de manifestações

1 Jaouad Radouani is a Moroccan researcher who has a PhD in Cultural Studies. He is an active member of The International Centre for Performance Arts in Tangier/Morocco, organising the yearly Performing Tangier Conference. He organised and participated in many conferences and workshops inside and outside Morocco (Europe, the Maghreb, and the Middle East) and published articles and research papers addressing questions related to performance arts/studies, culture, identity, politics, and discourse analysis.



e protestos organizados por aqueles que não conseguem aceder ao emprego e clamam pelos seus direito de oportunidade a um emprego. Os três últimos governos marroquinos, ou seja, os liderados pela The Socialist Union of Popular Forces Party, The Independence Party, and The Justice and Development Party contribuíram através de diferentes planos políticos para resolver o problema do desemprego entre os licenciados, ou pelo menos para reduzir seus números e absorver temporariamente a sua raiva; no entanto, apesar desse esforço, nada mudou a realidade. O objectivo aqui é destacar as políticas de governos anteriores e mostrar armadilhas do actual governo, cujas políticas estão provando ser um fracasso total, em comparação com os anteriores.

Palavras-chave: Marrocos, economia, mercado de trabalho, graduados da universidade e políticas.

Introduction

Graduate Recruitment Policies in Morocco: A General View

Morocco has an unusual problem – the more educated you are, the harder it seems to be to get a job, James Copnall from BBC News in Rabat writes.² All who hold a diploma or degree from an ineffective tertiary school system in Morocco cannot easily get a job and have to join graduates located in Rabat to fight for an opportunity of work that may or may not come. An engineer, an MA or PhD holder in Morocco are the least able to be recruited for a job. Tertiary education skills, it seems, are useless for a country that does not give much importance to degrees and its educational system produces ill-fit graduates for a paralysed and disorganized labour market. As Kamal Hafid, the head of the State-run *Moukawalati* scheme, argues: “Morocco’s school system is out of sync with today’s job market”³ and “the private sector often feels Moroccan graduates are poorly suited to the modern economy.”⁴

The school system has not been set up in a way that is conducive to the present labour market. In fact, today’s unsettled labour market situation and the problematic case of graduate Moroccans who are pressing the government for the right to a secure job are an accumulation of a half century of social, cultural, economic and political mismanagement. A review of the last fifteen years of labour market policy uncovers much of the random and improvisational decisions and policies adopted in the field by different governments giving pre-eminence to political struggle/disputation over the social-economic one. *Al-Akhbar*, a local newspaper, published an interesting article

- 2 James Copnall, BBC News in Rabat. Morocco has an Unusual Problem – The more Educated you are, the Harder it seems to be to get a Job. Net article found at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7910056.stm> When was this accessed?
- 3 Kamal Hafidi, referred to by James Copnall, in *Morocco has an Unusual Problem*.
- 4 Ibid., (James Copnall BBC News, Rabat)

about the subject Government versus jobless graduates 26 March 2014. The article was entitled: “Jobless Graduates Refuse Lahcen Daoudi’s⁵ Statements and accuse Benkirane of renouncing his electoral plan which considered labour for Graduates a right at the top of his agenda.”⁶

According to the article, the Minister of Higher Education says: “it is impossible to put an end to something called unemployment in the current time, and he who says other than this is a liar.” Jobless graduates saw this as the Government’s attempted escape from its responsibilities and obligations toward the jobless and their need to find jobs. They, as the article analyses,⁷ accuse Daoudi of trying to devalue the case of jobless graduates in Morocco by claiming that the impossibility of finding jobs for graduates is due to their theoretical educational background that is not fit for the labour market. On the reverse side, El Hussein Mezouari, a member of The Moroccan Association of Jobless Graduates, answers the Minister by saying: “Daoudi forgets, intentionally, that many of the jobless graduates are holding high diplomas in engineering and many other different fields of study that are purely practical.” He went on to say that “the problem does not lie in types of training and educational program[me]s one studies at the university and other high schools as much as it is a problem of absence of a true political will and decision to deal with the problem of unemployment.” “The jobless,” he continues, “are a victim of various policies of different governments that, with a different agenda, lead the country each time.”

By the year 2000, The Socialist Union Party was leading the government in Morocco. This modernist party, which governed the country in a time when Moroccan King Hassan II was still alive, had plans to help save the future of the country and guarantee a certain level of sustainable social, economic, and political development. Hence, it devised many socio-economic plans able to absorb the number of the jobless and find them jobs that would help many youths carry on the fight against poverty, social insecurity, crime, drugs, immigration and idleness that are costing the country more than if it invested in creating.⁸ One of the solutions it opted for is the attempt to absorb a number of Moroccan graduates yearly and offer them a stable job within the public or semi-private sectors.⁹ Therefore, it launched a direct recruitment campaign of jobless youths holding MAs and PhDs in the public sector and at the same time offered others willing to set up their own businesses and small enterprises the opportunity to become an active social agent to lead a personal project. Hence financial programmes like *Idmaj*, *Taahil*, and *Moukawalati* were activated, but after ten years, they seem to have not reached the awaited results, nor did they realise half of the objectives they were intended to accomplish.

- 5 Lahcen Daoudi is the current Minister of Higher Education.
- 6 See the political page in *Al-Akhbar* newspaper (Arabic), issue number 419, (26/03/2014).
- 7 Article by Noaman El-Yaalaoui, a journalist in *Al-Akhbar* newspaper (Morocco).
- 8 As James Copnall argues, “The government is worried about the problem, and has set up a number of schemes to help graduates to find work.”
- 9 It should be noted, as Kamal Hafidi explains, that “many of the unemployed graduates marching up and down outside parliament have turned down work in the private sector. They want the security of a State job.” Quoted in “Morocco has an Unusual Problem” by James Copnall.

At the very beginning, the strategy of absorbing young graduates by the labour market worked very well and after five years or more, thousands of graduates were being absorbed by the public and semi-private sectors in their thousands annually. These youths underwent short or no training sessions at all before being fully integrated in the institutions they were recruited to. Inhouse training was to be carried out throughout their careers. This strategy seemed to be a temporal solution that didn't solve the problem as much as it consumed, to some extent, a degree of anger expressed by families and the whole Moroccan society who daily watched their educated sons, daughters, family members, neighbours, etc., being severely punished by the State in the capital Rabat while peacefully holding demonstrations and marches. The protestors were chased away by riot police wielding truncheons¹⁰ when they asked for the right to have a stable job based on their qualifications as educated people and build a life, as everybody is supposed to do in a country that values and respects its citizens and educated sons.

In this way, the socialist-led government proved to be practical to some extent in its approach to solving some of the Moroccan labour market's problems. After parliamentary elections, The Independence Party led the government and tried to continue bringing some reforms to the labour market beneficial to graduates who filled the streets of the capital, raising slogans calling for the right to a dignified job and future. On the same track of the previous party, the new political body of the time continued to offer thousands of job opportunities to graduated youths annually, and it did, to some extent, succeed in reducing the level of anger expressed in different parts of the country as thousands of idlers finally found their way to bureaus and offices of different public and semi-private institutions, while others were optimistically expected their opportunity to come soon. In this manner, the said government offered promising solutions to the thousands of graduates that daily roamed the streets of Rabat despairingly holding copies of their diplomas in hands and blaming their idleness on a government that could not save the future of the country's educated generations.

In 2012, thanks to Arab Spring revolutions that hit many Arab countries, Morocco had an Islamic-led government imposed upon it to get the country through the boiling social and political revolution that toppled many heads of States and changed many governments.¹¹ *The Justice and Development Party* came to rule the government with a bunch of promises. Yet, since the first year of this government, nothing of the future it promised seemed possible. Amidst fighting between rival

10 Ibid.

11 According to many political interpretations and figures, the Islamist party did not win the elections as much as its instalment as leading party in the newly elected government constituted an orchestrated solution that the Moroccan State resorted to as a witty solution, saving the country much of the troubles that may be caused by an Arab Spring sweeping the Arab peninsula and leading to fearful, unstable, and unknown futures. One of the decisions this party took against graduates in Morocco is the elimination of a decision taken by the ex-government to recruit about two thousand graduates without sitting through entrance exams. The case is known as 'Jobless Graduates of 20th July Procés Verbal'.

political parties referred to as *Jinns and Crocodiles*¹² by the Prime Minister, the labour market statistics and the future of many young graduates in Morocco seemed to go in a downward spiral again.

One of the new measures taken by this government was to stop recruiting graduates directly¹³ and impose on them an entry test containing both a written and an oral exam. This unexpected initiative opened the door for all graduates in Morocco that were less than 45 years old to pass the entry exam. It highlighted the fact that thousands of people, who were yet established as active workers in many different domains, would try to take the exam and change their field of work. Hence, fighting graduates filling the streets of the capital to actively demonstrate in most other Moroccan cities, towns, and villages found themselves obliged to take an entry test next to graduates who had a job or had never thought of fighting for a job and making their case public through continued organised action. Because most of the active demonstrators belonged to the left wing, the ruling government decided it could not offer them jobs. Therefore, for political reasons, the criteria of an entry test were put in place and all applicants had to take the test, and this opened the door for many right wing agents in the labour market and thus constituted a powerbase to defend the Islamist party in the coming future. In general, and according to very recent statistics, the latter government proved to be a failure.

Some Statistics/Facts about the Moroccan Job Market and Graduates' Recruitment

Creation of The Moroccan Association of Jobless Graduates

The establishment of The Moroccan Association of Jobless Graduates came about as a reaction to the widespread joblessness among youths in Morocco, especially graduates. Many graduates claim that Moroccan governments tried since the 1980s to apply a capitalist reform to different social, economic, and political sectors that overlooked jobless youths' requirements. Numerous youths found themselves unable to find a placement in the job market as the private sector suffered on all fronts and thus could not provide more jobs for thousands of graduates, and the

12 PM Benkirane has introduced the terms to the Moroccan political arena, they have never been used before in such a way (see his talks in the Parliament on YouTube). In an attempt to avoid naming those against his government-led plans, he uses these traditional words when referring to them whenever he talks about his enemies. The words are deeply rooted in traditional Moroccan culture. Besides, Benkirane keeps renewing his political language and may give jobless graduates a name too in the near future, as their protests grow in action, their numbers grow year after year, and his government grows more hostile towards them.

13 This is a Morocco-specific case and it needs explanation. Before the rule of the Justice and Development Party in Morocco, the previous government decided that all who possessed a university degree, mainly MAs and PhDs, could get access to a job vacancy without having to pass an entrance exam. All they needed (graduated youths), was to submit a complete dossier containing specific documents related to their identity and university degrees. The JDP party stopped working with this strategy and put new rules for graduates recruitment in place.

public sector was getting privatised and only a few posts were allowed to be filled each year.¹⁴

The Association of Jobless Graduates appeared on 26 October 1991 in Casablanca under the slogan 'A Job is a Right not a Privilege'. Since then, the Association organised regular meetings, conferences, and led street demonstrations and public marches and campaigns that called attention to the right of every graduate to get a job. Today, after 25 years of fieldwork, the Association is still leading angered graduates in the streets of the capital to make their case public; to voice their agony and misery to local and global audiences; to ask the current government to lawfully and constitutionally find them jobs; and to block ministers' cars to make officials recognise some of the effects of their failing policies like they did recently to the Prime Minister. As Aida Alami writes:

Thousands of unemployed graduates regularly protest in front of Morocco's Parliament in Rabat, demanding help from the government in finding work in a job market that has become increasingly hostile to new graduates. They say that their education has left them ill equipped for the workplace. This month, riot police dispersed protesters blocking the car of Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane.¹⁵

A visit to the Association's archive gives us an idea on the number of jobless graduates who joined it since its establishment, as well as the number of jobs created by the government. If more than 30 000 graduates get degrees each year and expect to be enrolled in the job market, "the State can only hope to create 15 000 new jobs a year, in a good year."¹⁶ Facts reveal a big gap between what the State can offer its educated youths and the number of graduates who yearly queue behind jobless predecessors in the list of lost and waiting generations (the joblessness rate is 74% among graduates.).

Official Statistics versus Latent Realities

The High Commission for Planning declares that the overall number of jobless people oscillate between 9% and 11% annually. However, these rates are relative and can by no means be viewed as the real statistics. For, the criteria relied on by the High Commission for Planning exclude many types from the category of jobless people and lacks both sufficient material and practical theory for a precise and reliable outcome. As Copnall declares:

14 I personally was one of the founders of a branch of the Moroccan Association of Graduates in the region I come from (Nador), but I disagree with the idea that capitalist reform is the one responsible for third world economic crisis as even the best of other approaches, including Marxism, cannot be guaranteed (in fact failed in the past) to solve the same problems the third world is suffering from at present. The economic dilemma, in my view, needs international cooperation that is based on the results of scientific studies and advanced research, not an ideological approach.

15 Aida Alami, *Gaps in Graduates' Skills Confound Morocco*, article in the *New York Times Magazine*. Found at: <http://www.nytimes.com/http://www.nytimes.com/>

16 *Morocco's Job Market for Graduates*, net article retrieved from www.AfricaEcon.org at: http://africaecon.org/index.php/africa_business_reports/read/40.

The overall unemployment rate is officially less than 10% – but the rate for graduates soars above this, and has sometimes been double. Every day frustrated and highly educated young people gather outside parliament in the capital Rabat to shout out their frustration.¹⁷

Official statistics never, according to all sectors of Moroccan society, declare the right number of jobless graduates in the country. For economic and political reasons, reality is avoided and some uninspiring figures appear on The High Commission for Planning's website and in its trimestral and annual reports. Contrary to what official discourse always claims,

One shocking statistic, for one of the most developed nations in Africa, is that only roughly half of Moroccans are illiterate. Adding to the problem, it is guessed that more than 250 000 young adults shall enter into the job market per annum.¹⁸

The jobless in Morocco are many. Yet, since the category targeted here are graduates, there are many things to be brought forth concerning this section of society. The educated youths who hold diplomas and certificates from various national institutions are most of the time misestimated by the government. At a time when about 30 000 graduated youth achieve certificates and diplomas annually, which allows them to directly get involved in the national production system, the government treats them with unjustified disregard. It never declares the right numbers of jobless graduated youths and announces very promising facts that don't reflect the reality on the ground. While thousands of graduated youths keep being produced inside various public and private institutions, yet they end up being sent to oblivion and their formative years are laid to waste. The declared numbers, generally 10%, are not real figures and the graduated, apart from other types, make up more than the 10% declared. The rate of joblessness is growing and the government is doing its best to hide the correct statistics, for it knows the problem cannot be solved now that generations of jobless graduates have accumulated in their thousands and constitute a force of its own that may disrupt the country if they join together and decide to demand jobs. Actually, Morocco's labour market dilemma and graduates' predicament may be summarised in the following words:

Statistically, in many countries, graduates are more likely to find employment than those of lesser educational standards. This, however, is not the case in Morocco. According to sources, the more education a Moroccan has obtained the more difficult it is to find a job. Despite slim job prospects at the moment, this unusual trend has plagued Morocco for a period of time. The overall unemployment rate is 10 percent, but the unemployment rate for graduates is often way above the national unemployment rate, sometimes double the national unemployment rate.¹⁹

17 James, *Morocco has an Unusual Problem*.

18 *Morocco's Job Market for Graduates*.

19 Ibid.

Successive governments promised, through different plans, that they would guarantee safe and sustainable solutions to the problem of graduates. However, none of the governments proved capable of finding a solution. Temporary plans and schemes were suggested, propagated, and implemented, but aspired goals remained far-fetched and various partisan politicians and decision-makers quickly proved their incapacity and incompetence and disregarded or forgot about their pledges to the jobless graduate masses and their families and to society in general, and most of the time spent their government term on other less loaded and more personally beneficial issues. A columnist specialising in African economy, writes:

Despite government initiatives and the keen awareness of the daily protesters outside parliament, many graduates are pessimistic. The government, however, is said to be committed to working on this pressing issue but in a cautious manner because of how costly creating job opportunities can be.²⁰

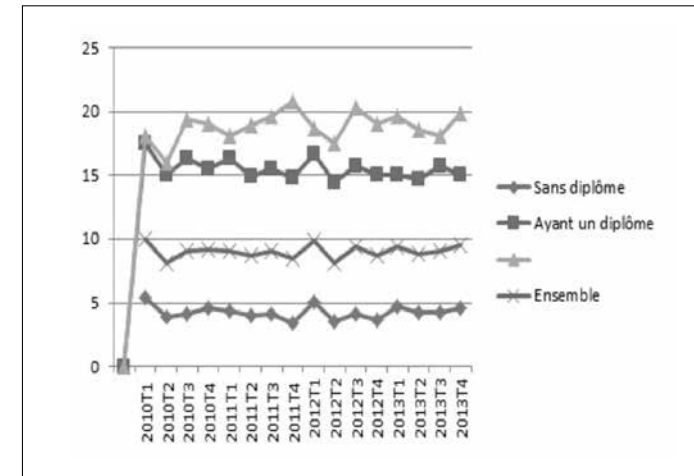
Creation of jobs may be costly, yet, as many specialists see it, creating job opportunities is not a matter of costs as much as it is a true will to think of the future of a country. Governments, politicians and decision-makers at the highest level always try to avoid engagement in such a pressing and urgent problem, and so a practical solution will never be found. Competing political parties and their representative ministers who are responsible for budgets provide few solutions that are most of the time used as a kind of political pawn whose benefits are to be reaped in ballot boxes. No serious measures are taken nor are there any reasonable debates that truly consider graduates' matters in a country that seems to be not in need of its educated workforce.

Statistics of the Moroccan High Commission for Planning: A Comparative Look

This section takes a look at real statistics recently published by the Moroccan High Commission for Planning on its website. The two first diagrams show the rate of unemployment among graduates at the national level both trimestral and annually. Although these statistics cannot be that reliable as thousands of graduates are not included (since they have informal jobs such as selling articles, newspapers, ice, and sweets on street pavements or even polishing shoes), they could reflect, to some extent, existing schisms fracturing the Moroccan labour market and the State's unwillingness to find a final solution to educated holders of diplomas in different fields of study. The third diagram gives a general view of the percentage of the Moroccan working population, which allows a clear comparison between the number of unemployed graduates and fields available for work.

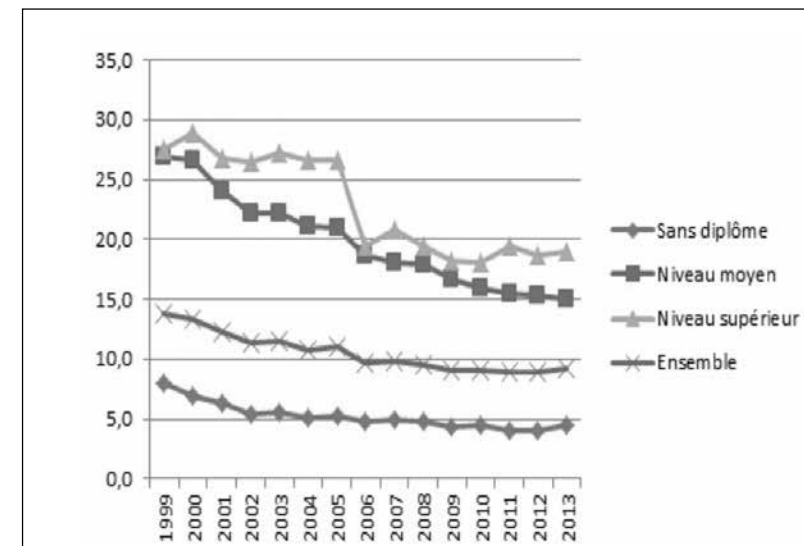
²⁰ Ibid.

Taux de Chômage National (Trimestriel) Selon le Diplôme²¹



Source: Enquête nationale sur l'emploi, Haut Commissariat au Plan (Direction de la Statistique).

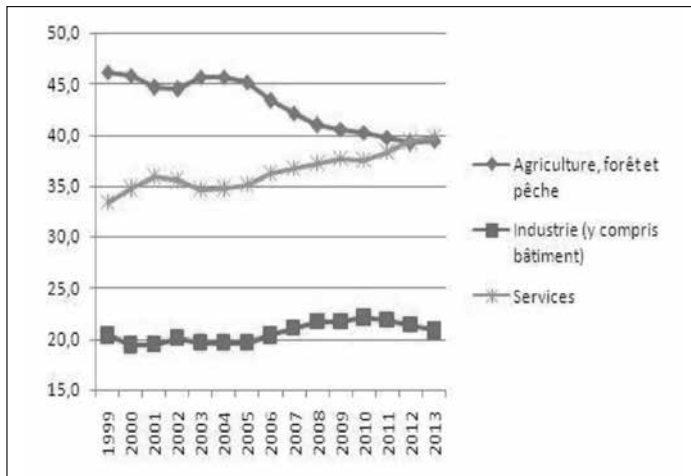
Taux de Chômage National (Annuel) Selon le Diplôme



Source: Enquête nationale sur l'emploi, Haut Commissariat au Plan (Direction de la Statistique).

²¹ These statistics were taken from the HCP's website on the 26/03/2014. The website can be reached here: http://www.hcp.ma/Taux-de-chomage-national-selon-le-diplome_a267.html

Emploi par Branche d'Activité de la Population Active Occupée au Niveau National: Annuel



Source: Enquête nationale sur l'emploi, Haut Commissariat au Plan (Direction de la Statistique).

One of the salient features characterising the Moroccan job market is that university graduates have less chances of finding a job than any other category. The number of yearly recruits is very limited if compared to population figures and job market demands. The lucky few who annually land jobs in the public sector leave behind thousands of unlucky ones. The private sector is more limited if compared to the public sector, and the laws regulating it are not well defined. The private sector worker feels threatened and insecure. To sum up, according to statistics, the Moroccan education system produces jobless graduates and still has a long way to go before becoming a fair and democratic social sector and fulfilling its main intended role in society as a lever to the national economy, and supporting other fields such as culture and politics.

Conclusion

This article's focus is focused on Moroccan graduated youths and how their job dilemma has been handled by three different governments in Morocco in the last fifteen years.²² A look back to the Moroccan political scene makes clear the fact that three political parties of different political agendas were leading the government in the last fourteen years and were dealing with graduates' issues differently. These parties are: The Socialist Union Party *الحزب الاشتراكي الموحد*, the Justice and Development Party *الطريق الديمقراطي*, led by El Youssefi as Prime Minister, The Independence Party *الطريق الديمقراطي*, led by Abbas El Fassi as Prime Minister, and the current Justice and Development Party *الطريق الديمقراطي*, led by Benkirane.

led, in its first version, by El Youssefi as Prime Minister, The Independence Party *الطريق الديمقراطي*, led by Abbas El Fassi as Prime Minister, and the current Justice and Development Party *الطريق الديمقراطي*, led by Benkirane.

The effect of these governments on the Moroccan graduates, although imbalanced and unsatisfactory, is of importance to understand the failure of the labour market policy in Morocco. Thanks to varied and random political plans, Moroccan graduates have had to deal with a different reality each time a new political party leads the government. Therefore, the effects of each government on Moroccan graduates from before the year 2000 have been very negative and it worsens each year. The graduate dilemma will not be solved unless the State willingly decides to provide sufficient funding and plans that will save them, which is indeed the future of the country itself.

References

- Copnall, James. BBC News in Rabat. *Morocco has an Unusual Problem - The More Educated you are, the Harder it Seems to be to get a Job*. Net article found at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7910056.stm>
- Alami, Aida. "Gaps in Graduates' Skills Confound Morocco," article in the New York Times Magazine. Found at: <http://www.nytimes.com/http://www.nytimes.com/Hafidi, Kamal. referred to by James Copnall, in Morocco has an Unusual Problem.>
- Al-Akhbar* newspaper (Arabic), Issue number 419, (26/03/2014).
- El-Yaalaoui, Noaman. *Al-Akhbar* Newspaper, Issue number 419 (Morocco).
- Jobless Graduates of 20th July Procés Verbal », Ministerial document published on the net. Retrieved (30/03/2014). A copy found here: <http://www.hespress.com/societe/79868.html> (see his talks in the parliament on youtube website). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McZHsWfX58E>
- "Morocco's Job Market for Graduates," net article retrieved from: (www.AfricaEcon.org) at: http://africaecon.org/index.php/africa_business_reports/read/40
- Statistics published on Le Haut Commissariat au Plan (HCP) website (26/03/2014) <http://www.hcp.ma/>
- King Mohamed VI Speech: <http://www.morocoworldnews.com/2015/07/164318/full-text-of-king-mohammed-vis-speech-on-throne-day/>

²² It should be noted that the last fifteen years has also been King Mohamed VI's rule. During this era, although many substantial changes were brought to different social, economic and political sectors, the labour market problem still seems to be the same. One of the facets that reflect the crisis is the increasing number of jobless youths, including graduates, whose number is doubling annually.