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Responses to Information Requests

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13 August 2015

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Algeria: Situation of single or divorced women living alone, particularly in Algiers; whether they can find work and housing; support services available to them (2012-2015)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Whether it is Common for Women to Live Alone

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Project Director of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (Ligue algérienne pour la défense des droits de l'homme, LADDH), an NGO with headquarters in Algiers that works to [translation] "defend, promote and culturally integrate human rights in Algeria and the rest of the world" (LADDH n.d.), stated that it is not common practice for a single or divorced woman in Algeria to live alone (ibid. 16 July 2015). Similarly, in correspondence with the Research Directorate, the President of the Association of Algerian Women for Development (Association femmes algériennes pour le développement, AFAD), an Algerian NGO located in 18 *wilaya* [prefectures] across the country, including in Algiers, that works to [translation] "help women in vulnerable situations integrate and reintegrate (socially)," stated that single women [translation] "do not often live alone" (4 July 2015).

According to the LADDH Project Director, most single or divorced women live in the [translation] "family home" (LADDH 16 July 2015). Similarly, in correspondence with the Research Directorate, an associate professor in sociology and Middle Eastern studies from the University of Texas in Austin, which is also affiliated with the Middle Eastern Women's Rights Program at Rice University in Houston, stated that "[d]ivorced or single women will typically live with members of their extended family such as their parents or a married sibling" (Associate Professor 24 June 2015). An article in the Algerian daily *Les Débats*, which cites the results of a study conducted by a Dutch radio station on celibacy in the Arab world, notes that [translation] "single women in Algeria generally live with [their] parents or [their] brothers" (19 July 2013). Moreover, according to the President of AFAD, single women [translation] "either live with their parents, on university campus or rent and share housing paid for by their parents most of the time" (4 July 2015). An article published by the Algerian online news journal *Algérie-Focus* (Algérie-Focus n.d.) states that a growing number of women who are employed or in school choose to live with someone [translation] "because of financial concerns or to avoid feeling alone" (ibid. 8 June 2014). However, according to *Les Débats*, groups of single women living together in apartments are limited to big cities like Algiers and Oran (19 July 2013).

According to the Associate Professor, a woman's capacity to live alone is based on her socio-economic status, her level of education and her income (Associate Professor 24 June 2015). The same source stated that only a few women can afford their own housing (ibid.). However, according to the LADDH Project Director, this number is growing (LADDH 16 July 2015).

2. Treatment of Women Who Live Alone by Society

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Chairperson of SOS Women in Distress (SOS femmes en détresse), an NGO with headquarters in Algiers that [translation] "defends the rights of women who are single or have children," states the following:

[translation]

Traditions are such that a woman must live with her family or with a guardian such as her husband, brother [or] son; families are very surprised and shocked when they learn that their single daughters have chosen to live alone or with other women. (11 July 2015)

Moreover, according to the LADDH Project Director, because of the [translation] "conservatism" of Algerian society, "women living alone are generally poorly viewed, especially in ... 'poorer neighbourhoods,'" and a divorced or single woman is likened to a woman with "loose morals," that is, a prostitute (16 July 2015). Similarly, the Associate Professor stated that society frowns upon single women living alone (24 June 2015).

With respect to the treatment of single women trying to resettle in another city, the Chairperson of SOS Women in Distress stated the following:

[translation]

It is difficult for women to move around, to move and resettle in a large city; there may be retaliation from family, and ... the risk of being isolated in poorer neighbourhoods may increase the risks of physical or emotional assault. (11 July 2015)

However, according to the LADDH Project Director, women living alone may move around, move and resettle [translation] "without any safety problems, at least in the big cities in the north" (LADDH 16 July 2015). According to the same source, in those circumstances, women would [translation] "only" face "rude" looks from "some people" (ibid.).

A 2014 report published by Amnesty International (AI) on sexual and genderbased violence in Algeria states that

[AI English version]

there are deeply rooted social attitudes that are hostile to sexual relationships outside marriage. This leads to the stigmatization of single women, including unmarried women with children and women living on their own, making them more vulnerable to sexual violence. (AI Nov. 2014, 15)

According to the LADDH Project Director, single or divorced women are [translation] "more exposed to sexual harassment in their workplace" (LADDH 16 July 2015).

According to the newspaper *Le Matin d'Algérie*, in March 2012, a woman living alone with her daughters in a neighbourhood of Algiers watched a [translation] "group of youths" set her house on fire after they chased her out of her home, for "alleged suspicions of prostitution" (7 Mar. 2012). Further information on this incident could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints.

3. Access to Employment

The Associate Professor stated that "[i]n theory," women do not need to obtain permission from a man to obtain a job (24 June 2015). According to data drawn from the report *Women, Business and the Law 2014: Removing Restrictions to Enhance Gender Equality* by the World Bank, legally, unmarried Algerian women are not subjected to discrimination in relation to men with respect to access to employment and registering a business, opening a bank account, choosing where to live and ownership rights over property (World Bank 24 Sept. 2013, 3, 70). During an interview with the Algerian daily *Liberté-Algérie*, Soumia Salhi, feminist unionist and former president of the Algerian Association for the Emancipation of Women (Association algérienne pour l'émancipation des femmes), stated that the Constitution and Law 90-11 [law on labour relations] both confer equality of employment rights on Algerians (*Liberté-Algérie* 16 Mar. 2015).

The President of AFAD stated that [translation] "discrimination in employment does not exist for a divorced woman if she has all the training and skills required" (4 July 2015). Similarly, according to the LADDH Project Director, a divorced or single woman may easily find employment and is not subject to [translation] "discrimination in employment" (16 July 2015). However, according to the Associate Professor, women in general, regardless of their marital status, "are subject to job discrimination," a common argument being "that with high unemployment the jobs should go to the men first" (24 June 2015). Further corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints. According to the National Office of Statistics (Office national des statistiques, ONS) in Algeria, the participation of women in the workforce is [translation] "strongly" linked to their access to education and, particularly, to higher education (Algeria Dec. 2013b). The data gathered by the ONS indicates that the

employment rate for women was approximately 13 percent in September 2012, 14 percent in September 2013 and a little over 12 percent in September 2014, compared with over 60 percent for men during those same periods (Algeria Dec. 2014, 12). According to that same source, the unemployment rate for women was about 17 percent in September 2012, about 16 percent in September 2013, and about 17 percent in September 2014, compared with less than 10 percent for men for those same periods (ibid.).

The ONS stated that in 2012, 2013 and 2014, women worked mainly in the public sector, with between 61 and 63 percent of working women employed in that sector (Dec. 2013a, 2; ibid. Dec. 2013b, 2; Dec. 2014, 1). Citing ONS statistics regarding employment in 2013, the Information and Documentation Centre for Children's and Women's Rights (Centre d'information et de documentation sur les droits de l'enfant et de la femme, CIDDEF), an NGO based in Algiers that conducts research on and promotes the rights of women and children (CIDDEF n.d.), stated that, in the public sector, women hold mainly intellectual and scientific professions, followed by administrative jobs, while in the private sector, they work mainly in the crafts and services industries (ibid. 2015, 55). CIDDEF also stated that nearly one third of divorced women and 18 percent of single women have a job (ibid., 53). Furthermore, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014* published by the US Department of State indicates that "[w]omen served at all levels in the judicial system, [...]. [They] may own businesses, enter into contracts, and pursue careers similar to those of men" (US 25 June 2015, 28). However, according to that same source, "female access to management positions remained limited to 9 percent" (ibid.). Similarly, Soumia Salhi stated that [translation] "a male monopoly exists in positions of power and responsibility" (*Liberté-Algérie* 16 Mar. 2015).

Moreover, according to *Country Reports 2014*, women have faced challenges with regard to access to credit and businesses (US 25 June 2015, 28). Similarly, the President of AFAD stated that, although not prohibited in theory, [translation] "it is impossible for a female business owner to obtain a bank loan" (AFAD 4 July 2015). According to L'Éconews, an Algerian website on economic news (L'Éconews n.d.) that cites statistics from the National Business Registry (Centre national du registre du commerce), [translation] "despite a positive development recorded in recent years, [female entrepreneurs] represent only 7.4 percent of the overall number of entrepreneurs in the business registry" (ibid. 7 Mar. 2015).

According to *Country Reports 2014*, women face discrimination in their salaries; women's organizations reported that women were more likely to receive lower pay than that of men for equal work and fewer chances of promotion (US 25 June 2015, 27). However, according to Soumia Sahli, women have [translation] "full" equality of pay (*Liberté-Algérie* 16 Mar. 2015).

4. Access to Housing

Sources note the difficulty for single or divorced women to find rental housing (LADDH 16 July 2015; SOS Femmes en détresse 11 July 2015). According to the Chairperson of SOS Women in Distress, [translation] "it is rare for landlords or real estate agencies to rent to a single woman" (ibid.). According to the same source, it is however easier for a single woman to rent housing in big cities than in rural areas, where it is [translation] "simply unthinkable to want to live alone" (ibid.).

According to the LADDH Project Director, landlords consider the [translation] "'morals'" of the women who apply for housing in their own name (LADDH 16 July 2015). According to the same source, women are able to rent [translation] "under the name of a male relative" or by agreeing to pay more than a man to obtain housing (ibid.).

4.1 Access to Social Housing

According to *Algérie-Focus*, single women are [translation] "never priorities" in the allocation list of social housing provided by the Algerian state (8 June 2014). According to the Algerian daily *El Watan*, which cites Cherifa Kheddar, President of the feminist association Djazaïrouna and spokesperson of the Observatory of Violence Against Women (Observatoire des violentes faites aux femmes), [translation] "social housing is given to families with children first" (2 Aug. 2013). Similarly, the President of AFAD states that [translation] "married people have the best chance" in the allocation of housing provided by the state and that single women can have it "if any is left" (4 July 2014).

A report published by the National Advisory Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights (Commission nationale consultative de promotion et de protection des droits de l'homme, CNCPDH) [1] for 2013 reports that because the Algerian state is unable to meet the population's demand for housing, people resort to renting dilapidated housing at excessive prices in violation of the law (Algeria n.d., 119120). Similarly, the President of AFAD states that [translation] "the pressure on housing is very ... strong in Algeria and public authorities often face sporadic rebellion when housing is distributed" (4 July 2015). According to Cherifa Kheddar, [translation] "women executives who can access credit acquire goods more easily in the private sector" (*El Watan* 2 Aug. 2013).

4.2 Divorced Women

An article published by *Jeune Afrique* in March 2015, states the following:

[translation]

The family code of 2005 provides that in the case of divorce, custody of the child is the mother's responsibility (a right that is, however, withdrawn in the case of remarriage). The law requires the husband to provide his ex-wife with "decent housing or, failing that, payment of her rent." The text also states that the woman is to remain in the conjugal home until the judicial decision regarding housing is carried out by the husband. On paper, these provisions are quite favourable for divorced individuals. However, in practice, it is another story. Due to the housing crisis, which is affecting millions of homes, many divorced women find themselves on the street or forced to return to live with their parents. Before the courts, they struggle to obtain judgments in their favour because of bureaucratic delays. (30 Mar. 2015)

According to *Country Reports 2014*, in a divorce, Algerian law provides for the wife to retain the family's home until the children reach age 18 (US 25 June 2015, 27). *Country Reports 2014* then states that "[w]omen were more likely to retain the family's home if they had custody of the children" (ibid.).

According to *El Watan*, [translation] "divorced women are often at a disadvantage" in housing, because, as Cherifa Kheddar states, "they are given a derisory housing allocation by the judge relative to the median price of Algerian housing They are therefore forced to apply for social housing, which is hardly accessible" (2 Aug. 2013).

5. Support Services

According to the Chairperson of SOS Women in Distress, social services do not meet the needs of divorced or single women, as they focus on women who are victims of violence in terms of the access [translation] "to the few [existing] housing structures" (11 July 2015). Similarly, according to the President of AFAD, single women [translation] "are not a priority" because they have equal rights in education and employment (AFAD 6 July 2015).

According to the same source, divorced women responsible for a family [translation] "do receive an allocation in the form of [a] solidarity fund" (ibid.). According to sources, since February 2015, a national child support fund has been available in Algeria to protect the rights of minors and women with children (*Jeune Afrique* 30 Mar. 2015; *El Watan* 5 Feb. 2015). According to *El Watan*, this fund enables divorced women with children to obtain [translation] "child support, in the event of the default of the debtor" (ibid.). This is corroborated by the LADDH Project Director, who stated that the bill related to this fund had not yet been adopted (16 July 2015).

Information on services provided by civil society organizations to single or divorced women living alone could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Note

[1] The National Advisory Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (Commission nationale consultative de promotion et de protection des droits de l'homme, CNCPPDH) is a government institution that holds an advisory role regarding human rights in Algeria (US 25 June 2015, 25).

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: The following organization did not provide information within the time constraints: Centre d'information et de documentation sur les droits de l'enfant et de la femme.

Attempts to contact the following people and organizations within the time constraints were unsuccessful: Algeria – ministère de la Solidarité nationale, de la Famille et de la Condition de la femme; Professor of Sociology, Université d'Alger; Réseau euro-méditerranéen des droits de l'homme.

Internet sites, including: Algeria – Conseil national économique et social, ministère de la Solidarité nationale, de la Famille et de la Condition de la femme, Portail du Premier Ministre; Algeria-Watch; Algérie1.com; *Algérie Confluences*; Algérie Network.com; *Le Courrier d'Algérie*; Djazairress; DZINFOS.com; ecoi.net; Factiva; *Huffington Post Maghreb*; Human Rights Watch; *Le Jour d'Algérie*; MENA-post.com; *Le Monde*; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development; Slate Afrique; United Nations – Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, International Labour Organization, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Development Program, UN Women.

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