

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

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6 June 2017

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Djibouti: Treatment of women who are single, divorced or who live alone, including access to housing, employment and social services; support services provided by the government, including the possibility of financial assistance from the state (2014-May 2017)

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1. Overview

In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, a representative of the Association des femmes de Tadjourah (AFT), an association that aims to improve the living conditions of the inhabitants in the Tadjourah region, among other things, providing [translation] "training in sewing and embroidery for women and girls who dropped out of school and literacy programs" (AFT n.d.), stated that women who are 40 years old or older may live alone after divorce (AFT 12 May 2017). According to the same source, women 20 to 35 years old who were married cannot live alone (AFT 12 May 2017). The AFT representative stated that it is [translation] "a taboo" for women who have never been married to leave the family home and live alone (AFT 11 May 2017). Along the same lines, in correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, a senior lecturer at the University of Djibouti, whose work focuses mainly on women and poverty as well as on domesticity in Djibouti, pointed out that widows or divorced women may live alone if they are in an urban area (Senior Lecturer 14 May 2017). According to the same source, [translation] "in rural areas, it is more complicated, because they can be attacked [...] and their livestock stolen if they are not protected by men" (Senior Lecturer 14 May 2017). The Senior Lecturer added that women who live alone in urban areas are not [translation] "negatively perceived" by society "if they have good morals" (Senior Lecturer 14 May 2017). The same source specified that [translation] "widows are positively perceived and often helped [whereas] divorced women are less positively perceived," because society is of the opinion that they "were unable to keep their husband" (Senior Lecturer 14 May 2017). The Senior Lecturer added that women who live alone are [translation] "more positively perceived" in affluent social environments where living alone is more often a woman's choice than in poorer social environments where "being single or divorced is often blamed on the woman" (Senior Lecturer 14 May 2017).

In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, a representative of the Djiboutian League for Human Rights (Ligue djiboutienne des droits de l'homme, LDDH), an NGO in Djibouti that aims to protect and promote human rights in the country (LDDH 3 May 2017), stated that [translation] "Djiboutian girls have no right to live alone, they must live with their parents" (LDDH 8 May 2017). The LDDH representative also stated that married women must live with their husbands and divorced women or widows must return to live with their parents or family members (LDDH 8 May 2017). According to the same source, traditionally, women who live alone are perceived as prostitutes, even if they are not prostitutes, and if a woman wishes to live alone, she will be excluded from her family (LDDH 8 May 2017). According to the LDDH representative, there are not a lot of differences between rural and urban areas regarding the treatment of women who live alone in Djibouti (LDDH 3 May 2017).

2. Access to Housing

According to the LDDH representative, property owners will refuse to rent an apartment to a [translation] "single woman, unaccompanied by a man," for lack of confidence, even if she is able to financially pay the rent (LDDH 8 May 2017). Along the same lines, the Senior Lecturer at the University of Djibouti stated that property owners hesitate to have single women as renters because they [translation] "think that they may not be able to pay their rent without the support of a husband" and they "doubt their morals" (Senior Lecturer 14 May 2017).

3. Access to Employment

According to the LDDH representative, a woman who is unaccompanied by a man and looking for work is [translation] "more exposed to danger (sexual harassment, physical assault, etc.)" (LDDH 8 May 2017). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Based on the statistics published by the World Bank in 2016 in *The Little Data Book on Gender 2016*, in 2013, 36 percent of Djiboutian women 15 years old or older were part of the workforce, compared with 68 percent of men (World Bank 2016, 71). Based on an estimate by the International Labour Organization (ILO), published on the Internet site of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) [1], in 2016, 33.8 percent of Djiboutian women 15 years old or older held a salaried position (US n.d.). Sources state that a high percentage of Djiboutian women work in the informal sector (US 3 Mar. 2017; Farah 22 July 2014).

In the *Rapport national d'évaluation quinquennal sur la mise en œuvre du programme d'action de Beijing (1995) et des textes issus de la vingt troisième session extraordinaire de l'Assemblée générale (2000)*, the Ministry for Women and Families in Djibouti, formerly called the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Family Planning, stated, without providing further details, that private sector employers prefer to recruit men, using as one [translation] "excuse" the fact that women might go on maternity leave (Djibouti July 2014, 26).

4. Access to Social Services

Information on access to social services for women who are single, divorced or living alone was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

In a project paper from 2015, the World Bank states that "[e]mployment programs [in Djibouti] are largely limited to formal and non-formal vocational training for youth or microfinance for women" (World Bank 25 Feb. 2015, 14). According to the same source, "the country is characterized by a serious lack of public or non-public programs to promote employability and self-employment among women and youth" (World Bank 25 Feb. 2015, 14).

On May 25, 2015, the World Bank announced the signing of a "grant for a new employment promotion program for youth and women in Djibouti" (World Bank 25 May 2015). According to the same source, the program aims, among other things, at strengthening the handicraft sector with a particular focus on women (World Bank 25 May 2015).

According to an article published in 2014 by the Djiboutian daily *La Nation*, a training centre for women was established in Tadjourah in 2014 with financial support from the Japanese government (*La Nation* 14 Dec. 2014). The centre aims at offering literacy classes and training in sewing and computers to women (*La Nation* 14 Dec. 2014). In an article published in 2017, *La Nation* also referred to the Balbala Centre for Social Action and Women's Empowerment (Centre d'actions sociales et d'autonomisation de la femme de Balbala), which offers cooking, sewing, hairstyling and audiovisual training programs (*La Nation* 12 Mar. 2017). The same source also mentioned a [translation] "development" program associated with the centre that aims to support some of the centre's former students in starting their careers (*La Nation* 12 Mar. 2017).

Information on assistance provided by the state to women who live alone and who wish to further their education could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

5. Support Provided by the Government and Civil Society

According to the *Cadre de programmation pays (CPF) FAO-Djibouti 2013-2017*, [translation] "a planning and management tool that studies how to best target technical assistance from the FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations] at the country level," women "are the subject of systemic discrimination when it comes to access to services related to credit, extension, the supply of input and the provision of seeds, which generally fit the male stereotype as 'producer and head of the family'." (UN June 2013, 5, 13). In its 2014 report, the Ministry for Women and Families stated that there is a [translation] "real difference in access

to resources for men versus women" (Djibouti July 2014, 26). The source continued by stating that regarding land ownership, [translation] "land title is generally established in the name of the head of the family" (Djibouti July 2014, 26). According to the third Enquête djiboutienne auprès des ménages pour les indicateurs sociaux (EDAM3-IS), conducted in 2012 by the Ministry of the Economy, Finance, Industry and Planning, the Djiboutian population is composed of 50 percent women, but women represent only 22 percent of heads of households (Djibouti Sept. 2012, 10).

The Senior Lecturer at the University of Djibouti noted the following:

[translation]

The state and some NGOs help widows and orphans. Microcredits are often granted to poor women, regardless of whether they are alone, so that they can organize small activities that generate revenue. (Senior Lecturer 14 May 2017)

Along the same lines, the Ministry for Women and Families stated that it is possible to [translation] "talk about positive discrimination by comparing women and men recipients in the microfinance portfolios" (Djibouti July 2014, 27). 88 percent of the recipients of microfinance programs are women and they have received 78 percent of the credits granted (Djibouti 2014, 27).

According to a master's thesis entitled *La microfinance et lutte contre la pauvreté : le cas de Djibouti* submitted in 2012 at the University of Poitiers, the Djibouti Social Development Agency (Agence djiboutienne de développement social, ADDS), [translation] "a public institution that is social in nature, that is administratively and financially autonomous [...] whose mission it is to contribute to the fight against poverty and vulnerability" (Djibouti n.d.), is granting microfinance lines of credit through the Caisse populaire d'épargne et de crédit (CPEC) (Warsama Afasseh 2012, 31). According to the same source, the CPEC is present in several regions of Djibouti and 15,000 of its members benefit from microcredits (Warsama Afasseh 2012, 31). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints.

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] USAID is a United States government agency that "works to end extreme global poverty and enable resilient, democratic societies to realize their potential" (US 3 May 2017).

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Internet sites, including: Africa Presse; Agence France-Presse; Amnesty International; Association djiboutienne pour l'équilibre et la promotion de la famille; Association pour le respect des droits de l'homme à Djibouti; Banque africaine de développement; Djibnet.com; Djibouti – Banque centrale de Djibouti, ministère de l'Éducation, Présidence; eoi.net; European Union – Delegation to Djibouti and Intergovernmental Authority on Development; Factiva; Femmes et contribution au développement; Femmes solidaires; Femmes sous lois musulmanes; Fonds monétaire international; Freedom House; *The Guardian*; Human Rights Watch; Intergovernmental Authority on Development; Islamic Development Bank; *Jeune Afrique*; Make Every Woman Count; *Le Monde*; Organisation pour la démocratie et les droits humains – Djibouti; Pan-African Parliament; Perspective monde, Université de Sherbrooke; United Nations – Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Refworld, UN Women, UNDP-Djibouti, UNESCO, UNICEF; Solidarité féminine Djibouti; Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa; Université de Djibouti.

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