



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

Algeria – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 5 January 2011

Information on attitudes to single mothers in Algeria, Is there discrimination? Information on NGOs working with single mothers in Algeria?

A report on a symposium held in Algeria in 2005 published by the Jordan-based media website *Al-Bawaba* states:

“A study presented at this symposium mentioned that 60% of the Algerian families kill their daughters as soon as they find out that they are pregnant illegally. Other women are thrown to the street, where they frequently become prostitutes to survive.” (*Al-Bawaba* (23 June 2005) 3,500 single mothers registered in Algeria annually)

A *Freedom House* report on women’s rights, in a section headed “Social and Cultural Rights”, states:

“Prevailing cultural attitudes continue to cause serious difficulties for single mothers, who face poverty and a lack of housing.” (*Freedom House* (3 March 2010) *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010 – Algeria*)

This section of the report also states:

“Mothers who have children out of wedlock are vulnerable to poverty and social prejudices. In most cases they are rejected by their families, and they do not benefit from any preferential access to subsidized housing. The few organizations that offer single mothers material help and legal counseling often treat them as ‘sinners’ who must be morally reeducated.” (*ibid*)

A report published by the *Country of Return Information Project*, in a section headed “Single women with children born out of wedlock” (paragraph 4.1.5), states:

“The situation of unmarried mothers and abandoned children is a social drama that is unceasingly growing. According to the Centre national d’études et d’analyses pour la population et le développement (National studies and analyses centre for the population and development, Ceneap), more than 5,000 children are born out of wedlock every year. The study’s authors state that, since Algerian mentalities are refractory to this phenomenon, the unmarried mothers are not easily identified and prefer anonymity. A proportion of children could therefore remain unidentified. ‘Nevertheless, the evolution of society and the associations’ mobilization to this phenomenon allowed many of these mothers to express themselves and to seek help and therefore break the taboo that surrounds them’. According to the Association Algérienne Enfance et Famille d’Accueil Bénévoles AAEFAB’s president (Algerian association for Children and Volunteer Foster families), the situation of mothers who abandon their children is terrible. Most of these

women are young, single and come from conservative families that do not accept the single mother status for their daughters. The single mother taboo is still very present in the Algerian society. Being punished by Muslim laws, sexual relations out of wedlock often lead to young and single women hiding their pregnancy in order to avoid disgrace and stigmatization of families. A legal measure allows these young girls to give birth in anonymity in hospitals, giving new-born babies the possibility to be born in fair conditions and to be sent to State nurseries. The solidarity ministry records 3,000 unmarried mothers every year. In a society which still does not accept the existence of unmarried mothers, most of them are tempted to abandon their children to state nurseries or leave them in hospitals or on the street.” (Country of Return Information Project (May 2009) *Country Sheet: Algeria (El Jaza'ir)*, pp.67-68)

In a section headed “Single mothers and their children” (paragraph 40) of a report to the *UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur Yakin Ertürk* states:

“There are also a substantial number of unmarried single mothers, with around 3,000 children born outside marriage annually. A strong stigma is attached to these women and their offspring. Unmarried single mothers are often rejected by their own families and have to endure immense social pressure. In Constantine, for instance, I was informed of the case of Salima, a young woman who committed suicide because her family had forbidden her marriage to a man she had a relationship with. The autopsy found that the woman was three months pregnant.” (UN Human Rights Council (13 February 2008) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Yakin Ertürk – Addendum: Mission to Algeria*, pp.13-14)

In Paragraph 41 of this report the Special Rapporteur states:

“In view of these prospects, women who are pregnant outside marriage will very often opt for an abortion. Since Algerian law only permits abortions under very narrow circumstances, women have to risk dangerous clandestine abortions. Estimates on the number of clandestine abortions vary widely, but the authorities acknowledge that several dozen deaths result from unsafe clandestine abortions every year.” (ibid, p.14)

In Paragraph 42 she states:

“Unmarried women who choose to deliver their babies will usually try to hide their condition. Hospitals make special arrangements allowing single mothers to check in from the seventh month and give birth anonymously. In the past, single mothers were usually encouraged to give up their children into kafala arrangements. Recently, the Ministry of National Solidarity took the decision to actively encourage single mothers to keep their children. While they receive some help, State support for single mothers is overall still insufficient. For instance, single mothers do not receive preferential access to subsidized State housing, even though they can often neither return to their families nor find private housing.” (ibid, p.14)

In a section of the report headed “The situation of street women” (paragraph 71) the Special Rapporteur states:

“These organizations also note an increasing number of girls and unmarried women, who were ejected or fled from their homes and now live on the street. The ejection may

occur to punish women and girls who are perceived to have violated the family honour, including young women, who become pregnant outside marriage or engage in relationships that are not approved by the family.” (ibid, p.20)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

References:

Al-Bawaba (23 June 2005) *3,500 single mothers registered in Algeria annually*
<http://www.lexisnexis.com>
(Accessed 4 January 2011)

Country of Return Information Project (May 2009) *Country Sheet: Algeria (El Jaza'ir)*
http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/470_1258194604_cs-algeria-en.pdf
(Accessed 4 January 2011)

Freedom House (3 March 2010) *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010 – Algeria*
<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=4b99012676>
(Accessed 4 January 2011)

UN Human Rights Council (13 February 2008) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Yakin Ertürk – Addendum: Mission to Algeria*
http://www.siawi.org/IMG/pdf/Algeria_Mission_Report-UN.pdf
(Accessed 4 January 2011)

Sources Consulted:

Amnesty International
Electronic Immigration Network
European Country of Origin Information Network
Freedom House
Google
Lexis Nexis
Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database
Refugee Review Tribunal of Australia
UK Home Office
UNHCR Refworld