



Tunisia: The situation of women who live alone, whether they are single or divorced, particularly in Tunis; incidence of their social status, level of education and financial autonomy on their situation; whether they can access employment and housing; support services available to them (2014-October 2016)

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1. Situation of Women in General

Sources report that measures protecting and promoting equality between men and women are set out in the Constitution of 2014 (Freedom House 14 July 2016; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2016, 25; AI 2016, 12; Human Rights Watch 2016) and in the Code of Personal Status [of 1956] (ibid.; Freedom House 14 July 2016). Freedom House states in particular that the Code asserts the equality between women and men (Freedom House 14 July 2016). The Tunisian Constitution [translation] "guarantees the equality of opportunities between women and men to have access to all levels of responsibility in all domains." (Tunisia 2015, Art. 46).

However, sources note that the Code of Personal Status also contains provisions that discriminate against women (Human Rights Watch 2016; AI 2016, 12; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2016, 25). This includes a provision identifying men as

the head of the family (AI 2016, 12; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2016, 25) and is also apparent in provisions concerning the care of children and inheritance (ibid.). In its Transformation Index 2016, the Bertelsmann Stiftung Foundation [1] states that there are "widely shared conservative social norms [in the country]," noting in particular that "[w]omen are disadvantaged in some areas of the law and its actual implementation by the courts, an in many other areas of social life" (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2016, 12). Similarly, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015* of the United States (US) Department of State reports that there are "societal obstacles to the full economic and political participation of women" (US 13 Apr. 2016, 1). This same source explains that "[s]ocietal and cultural barriers significantly reduced women's participation in the formal labor force, in particular in managerial positions" (ibid., 18).

A report on a mission to Tunisia presented to the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council by the Working Group on the Issue of Discrimination Against Women in Law and in Practice notes, however, that "women have been increasingly working outside the home and hence significantly contributing to the maintenance of the household" (UN 30 May 2013, para. 34). *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015* adds that "[t]he law explicitly requires equal pay for equal work [for women and men], and the government generally enforced it" (US 13 Apr. 2016, 18).

In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, the President of the Women and Leadership Association (Association Femmes & Leadership), an NGO working to improve the participation of women in public and professional life in Tunisia (Jamaity 29 June 2015), stated that

[translation]

Tunisian society has greatly evolved in terms of [women's autonomy] since 1956, but we are also experiencing a setback and conservatism in the attitude that has flared up following the revolution in January 2011. Today, we see phenomena, thankfully isolated, that we would never have thought possible in the past[:] rape, sexual harassment, regression of freedoms of certain women, etc. (Association Femmes & Leadership 1 Nov. 2016)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Situation of Women Who Live Alone

2.1. Women Who Live Alone and Access to Housing

The President of the Women and Leadership Association stated that [translation] "single women (not single mothers) and divorced women live normally in Tunisia" (ibid.). In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, a representative of the Tunisian League for the Defence of Human Rights (Ligue tunisienne de défense des droits de l'homme, LTDH), which has also worked as part of two Tunisian women's associations, also stated that

[translation]

Tunisian women are increasingly living alone. Besides [reasons relating to divorce, being single or a widow], living away from family may now stem from professional life or a training program. (LTDH 24 Oct. 2016)

However, the Representative noted that [translation] "the status of divorced women and widows is still difficult to assume, which is why women tend to fear this situation. Nevertheless, they have the option to divorce when it is deemed necessary" (ibid.). Amnesty International (AI) also reports that divorced women are the victims of [AI English version] "stigma" (AI 25 Nov. 2015, 22). The organization adds that, according to a lawyer that it consulted, who works in the area of domestic violence, [AI English version] "divorced women are, in general, perceived badly by society" (ibid.).

The President of the Women and Leadership Association added that women can access all the services themselves, stating that [translation] "they do not need a guardian if they are adults ([older than] 18 years)" (Women and Leadership Association 1 Nov. 2016). The Representative of the LTDH also explained that

[translation]

the pressure of modern life pushes women (who have degrees and varied know-how) to assume all their responsibilities in private and public life. Thus, they are also called on to manage their own assets and those of the family. They are

expected to open bank accounts and rent spaces without any male help. (LTDH 24 Oct. 2016)

However, the President noted that [translation] "the only hiccup is the owner of the house, for example, who cannot rent to a single woman, which is quite a common occurrence, primarily for young women" (Women and Leadership Association 1 Nov. 2016). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The Representative emphasized that [translation] "the freedoms of women living alone are still under the watchful control of the family and societal perception, particularly in workingclass areas" (LTDH 24 Oct. 2016). According to the President,

[translation]

the situation of single women is still exposed to greater violence, in particular, from neighbours, colleagues, and so on. In some cases, they may be assaulted at home or in front of their homes simply because they invited friends or family over, especially when this includes men. (Association Femmes & Leadership 1 Nov. 2016)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

For information on the situation of women who have had a child out of wedlock, please consult Response to Information Request TUN104988 from December 2014.

2.2 Importance of Social Environment, Level of Education and Financial Autonomy

The Representative reported that [translation] "the situation of single women (single, widowed or divorced) varies depending on her social environment" (LTDH 24 Oct. 2016). She added that there is

[translation]

protection for women based on their level of education, their socioprofessional "upgrade," and their material affluence. Women's economic autonomy guarantees their freedom and invulnerability. This autonomy strengthens the ability of women to assume the status of single women and take on the responsibilities of singleparent families. These are the situations that women are increasingly facing in Tunisia. (ibid.)

In the same vein, the President stated that the statuses of single and divorced women [translation] "vary based on their socioprofessional category. When they are managers and educated and at an appropriate financial level, they generally manage without any issues" (Association Femmes & Leadership 1 Nov. 2016).

2.3 Situation in Big Cities, Particularly in Tunis

According to the President, [translation] "the big cities [like Tunis] are more open and less restrictive" for women who live alone (ibid.). However, the representative stated that [translation] "in inland cities, social relationships are still strongly influenced by 'tradition' and patriarchal culture" (LTDH 24 Oct. 2016). She also adds that there are

[translation]

distinctions between the rural population [...] and the coastal strip, where efforts are concentrated in terms of investments and infrastructure, providing greater job opportunities and, in turn, justifying a progressive rush toward the capital. (ibid.)

She also stated that [translation] "it is relatively easier to forge a path, as a single woman, in the capital" (ibid.). Similarly, the President stated that

[translation]

Greater Tunis is different because it is the largest agglomeration and, as a result, people are less familiar with each other and one can melt into the crowd. However, this also depends on the neighbourhoods and those who live there. Vertical housing in highend neighbourhoods is a lot less restrictive than workingclass neighbourhoods with

semidetached and dense housing. (Association Femmes & Leadership 1 Nov. 2016)

The Representative also gave as an example

[translation]

[that a] wellto do divorced woman living in the rich neighbourhoods of the capital has many layers of protection: cultural tolerance, personal privacy, material affluence protecting against any promiscuousness. (LTDH 24 Oct. 2016)

2.4 Access to Employment and Workplace Harassment

According to the President, [translation] "with regard to employment, there is no discrimination in legislation or in most practices" (Association Femmes & Leadership 1 Nov. 2016). However, the Representative stated that "discrimination in access to employment and career development is a general concern for women. It would be difficult to prove that single women are more likely to fail" (LTDH 24 Oct. 2016). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

However, the Representative added that [translation] "the data show, however, [that single women] are more likely to be subjected to sexual harassment at work and elsewhere" (ibid.). Similarly, the President also stated that

[translation]

when a woman is divorced or a single mother, several forms of harassment or exploitation are apparent. Their work time is not managed in accordance with the limitations [they have]. At this level, one's private life occasionally becomes a source of indiscretion and is not treated with respect. (Association Femmes & Leadership 1 Nov. 2016)

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2015 also states that sexual harassment is "a problem" in the country, but explains that there is no data to measure its extent (US 13 Apr. 2016, 17).

3. Support Services

Information on the support services provided specifically to women living alone was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within time constraints of this Response. However, the Representative of the LTDH stated that

[translation]

the issue of the autonomization of women is a central theme in terms of the current concerns of women's associations working on equality issues relating to inheritance and violence considered major barriers to women fully benefitting from their fundamental human rights. (LTDH 24 Oct. 2016)

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 Bertelsmann Foundation is a private German foundation whose objective is "to promote research and understanding in the areas of religion, public health, [...] international cultural exchange, democracy and government, and civic engagement" (Bertelsmann Stiftung n.d.).

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Internet sites, including: Agence Tunis Afrique Presse; Babnet Tunisie; Baya; Crédif; Directinfo; ecoi.net; L'Économiste maghrébin; Érudit; Factiva; Femmes tunisiennes; France – Cour nationale du droit d'asile; FIDH – Forum tunisien pour les droits économiques et sociaux; HuffPost Tunisie; IRIN; *Journal des femmes*; Kapitalis; *Le Monde*; Mosaïque FM; Nawaat; Overseas Development Institute; *La Presse de Tunisie*; Réalités; RFI; *Le Temps*; Tunisie-Radio; Tuniscope; United Nations – Refworld; Webdo.tn.

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