

STATUS OF ALGERIAN WOMEN: BETWEEN PUBLIC POLICIES AND SOCIAL PRACTICES

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Type of manuscript: research paper

Abstract: *For more than fifty years the place and role of women in Algeria have undergone profound changes. The political changes of the 1990s consolidated and strengthened the existing gains, in a new dynamic of women's rights. All the institutional arrangements put in place and the action programs implemented since the beginning of the 2000s have resulted in significant changes in the situation of women, both in the field of education, health and living conditions and in participation in economic and public life. Aware that education favors the integration of women into active life, the enrolment of girls in school appears to be the main factor behind this progress and is the powerful means that has had a positive influence on the development of women's advancement. It should also be noted that, since independence, women have gradually entered all fields of study, particularly scientific and technological ones. In higher education, the female student presence is globally dominant, with girls representing more than 60% of enrolments over several consecutive years. In addition, the labour code has enshrined non-discrimination and eliminated inequalities in all sectors since independence. The methodological tools of the research are the description by statistical tools, in order to describe and explain phenomena through historical data in the form of measurable variables. The results of the analysis show that this process of schooling and access to employment, for both boys and girls, is undoubtedly bringing about social change in Algerian society. The gap between male and female activity has been slowly narrowing in recent years. Moreover, these changes in female employment and in participation in economic activity have not kept pace with the rise in women's level of education. Indeed, despite all these significant changes, the labour market still shows a strong gender division. Statistics on the gender and occupational distribution of the labour force show that women are concentrated in activities that are an extension of their status as mothers and wives, such as education, health, and services (administration). This article will highlight the main indicators of the evolution of Algerian women with regard to the public policies initiated by the state, which have allowed for a slow but present social change. This process of schooling and access to employment, for both boys and girls, is undoubtedly bringing about social change in Algerian society. The gap between male and female activity has been slowly narrowing in recent years. Moreover, these changes in female employment and in participation in economic activity have not kept pace with the rise in women's level of education. Indeed, despite all these significant changes, the labour market still shows a strong gender division. Statistics on the gender and occupational distribution of the labour force show that women are concentrated in activities that are an extension of their status as mothers and wives, such as education, health, and services (administration). This article will highlight the main indicators of the evolution of Algerian women about the public policies initiated by the state, which have led to a social change that is certainly slow but very present.*

Keywords: status of Algerian women, regulatory framework, education, unemployment.

JEL Classification: J81.

Received: 05.08.2022

Accepted: 21.09.2022

Published: 30.09.2022

Funding: There is no funding for this research.

Publisher: Sumy State University, Ukraine.

Cite as: Guedjali, A. (2022). Status of Algerian women: between public policies and social practices. *SocioEconomic Challenges*, 6(3), 114-122. [https://doi.org/10.21272/sec.6\(3\).114-122.2022](https://doi.org/10.21272/sec.6(3).114-122.2022).



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1. Introduction

According to Abdelkader Djeghloul (1984) Algerian society is on the way to an unprecedented modernity dynamic, its originality lies in the fact that it combines "Maghrebian anthropological base" and "modernity", in this sense, for Mezouar (2012) "Algerian society is not traditional, nor is it ambivalent; it is modern with a modernity of local colors".

These local colors are depicted by evolutionary mechanisms at work through fundamental changes that have taken place in society and that have consequences for the social organization of Algerian society. These mechanisms have their ramifications in different areas, namely: legal, demographic, level of training and employment (Addi, 2004).

Are we now witnessing a process of profound restructuring of social relations in which women are becoming the main actors of this change?

This article will attempt to describe the mechanisms of social change of which Algerian women have been the beneficiaries. It will first describe the legislative framework within which Algerian women were able to initiate their change. The various constitutions that have followed one another have constantly reaffirmed the principle of gender equality, which has been promulgated since independence to emancipate women in both the private and public spheres (Ashley Barry, Dina Dandachli, 2020).

We will also see that laws alone are not enough to allow the emergence of women in different socio-economic sectors. Therefore, it is essential to integrate into the analysis of the evolution of the place of women in economic and social life following the spectacular development of their education. Indeed, the interaction of several elements, namely: mass schooling and investment in the labor market (Talahite Fatiha, 2007).

2. Literature review

Following Algeria's independence (1962), women were excluded from all social life and relegated to the domestic sphere. This situation has not lasted over time, since the principle of equal opportunities, as a fundamental human right, is rooted not only in several international conventions and treaties, but also underpins the legitimacy of a series of national laws that guarantee access to all individuals, while at the same time the doors of knowledge were opened to them thanks to a voluntarist policy of the Algerian state, which wished to provide education for all within a logic of economic growth and social progress. Over the past 60 years, Algerian women have caught up, mainly in terms of schooling and, to a lesser extent, in the labor market (Hammouda & all, 2016). Nevertheless, about access to professional activity, its duration and prospects, it is confirmed that, for women, these parameters do not depend solely on the abilities of the job seeker.

Moreover, these changes in women's employment and participation in economic activity have not evolved at the same pace as the rise in women's level of education (Rebah, 2010). Indeed, despite all these significant changes, the labor market still shows a strong gender division. Statistics on the gender and occupational distribution of the labor force show that women are concentrated in activities that are an extension of their status as mothers and wives, such as education, health and services (administration) (Guedjali, 2017). In addition to this horizontal stagnation, there is also evidence of inequalities in access to management and other higher professions. This apparent integration does not always go hand in hand with the opportunities offered by the company, from which men benefit greatly (Guedjali, 2018). The rise in female education has produced what M. Maruani (2004, p.43) calls the bipolarisation of female employment. According to her, "a proportion of women recuperate on the labor market the investment they have made in the training system, while most of them find themselves massed in the salaried workforce".

Although Algerian law prohibits differences in remuneration, these are more obvious when it comes to the access of women graduates to the labor market and to career development and access to positions of power and decision-making. The various obstacles to women's career advancement refer to vertical segregation. This hierarchical

ascension becomes increasingly rare for women as one moves up the hierarchy, and they remain a minority in strategic positions of high responsibility and decision-making (Guedjali, 2018).

Ultimately, the process of change in the status of women operates along the lines of least resistance. The factors of inertia weigh heavily. A change that is still waiting for the decisive radical modality.

3. Regulatory framework: genesis and history

Today, the texts governing Algerian socio-economic life claim equality between men and women in all areas: the labor market, training and access to positions of responsibility are not legally closed to women. Algerian law prohibits discrimination in any form. Therefore, Algerian labor legislation prohibits all forms of gender-based discrimination and establishes equal opportunities and rights in the career of workers by supplementing the Labor Code in this area. Act No. 90 of 21 April 1990, as amended and supplemented, on labor relations, guarantees the right to work regardless of sex and age, stipulating that workers have the same rights; to ensure equal remuneration for workers without any discrimination; and to benefit from training and professional promotion in the context of work. The law guarantees the right to maternity leave and leave of absence. Finally, the legislation in force guarantees trade union practice without discrimination.

In theory, the labor legislation ensures the promotion of gender equality and equity in the workplace. However, the effectiveness of the labor code is criticized in practice for its weak implementation in the workplace. Trade union activity and night work, for example, remain marginal. As for sexual harassment, due to cultural and social considerations, it is difficult to address this issue within an organization.

The social security system in force does not discriminate based on gender; it therefore grants women, in addition to health insurance and work accidents, specific protection measures, in particular in the context of maternity protection and retirement, Act No. 83-12 July 1983.

Algeria has also ratified the majority of conventions relating to the protection of human rights and those relating to women, including

- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965).
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966).
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW 1979)
- The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984)
- The Convention on the Political Rights of Women, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations by decision n°640 (7) of 20 December 1952, was adopted by the Council of Ministers on 8 March 2004
- The Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its three protocols, in particular the one on the prevention and suppression of trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

These texts exclude discrimination based on race, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property or birth. We can also mention the conventions of the International Labor Organisation (ILO), concerning discrimination in employment and occupation (convention n°111 of 1958), equal pay for men and women (convention n°100 E of 1951).

It should be noted that the Algerian constitution has established the principle of the primacy of any ratified international convention over national law, Art.132. Therefore, after its ratification and publication, any convention signed becomes part of national law and acquires an authority superior to that of national laws. And any Algerian citizen can invoke it before the courts. In this context, the national commission for the reform of the justice system recommended bringing domestic legislation into line with the various international conventions ratified by Algeria. The revision undertaken since 2001 of the various codes (civil, criminal, nationality, family, commercial, etc.) is part of this objective of bringing national legislation into line with the various international conventions signed (Talbi, 2014).

4. Generalization of education: girls are the big winners.

Since Algeria's independence in 1962, the Algerian State has not skimped on human and material resources for the generalization and development of the education sector by setting itself the priority of education for all, within the framework of the action plan implemented in the education and training sector, to ensure the success of the country's economic and social development plans through human development.

The policy of democratization of education advocated by the state since independence aims to generalize education and achieve equity by reducing social, geographical and gender inequalities and by providing access to school for all (Benali, 2015). The implementation of this policy is the result of the Algerian Constitution, which guarantees the right to education for all, stipulates that education is free, that basic education lasts nine years and is compulsory until the age of 16, and that the state organizes the education system by guaranteeing equal access to education and vocational training through free education.

Table 1. Evolution of enrolment rates in Algeria (%) from 1966 to 2019

Year	1966	1977	1987	1998	2002	2008	2019
Male	56,80	80,80	87,75	85,28	95,00	92,42	97,8
Female	36,90	59,60	71,56	80,73	92,10	91,67	97,6
All	47.20	70.40	79.86	83.05	93.6	92,05	97,7

Source: Data ONS (national statistics office) statistical yearbook of Algeria 2019, volume n°30.

This proactive policy has resulted in a doubling of the school enrolment rate from 47.2% in 1966 to 93.6% in 2002.

On the other hand, the schooling rate for girls, which was significantly lower than that of boys at the time of independence, has fallen considerably. The schooling of girls, which represents a decisive variable in fertility, has undergone a remarkable expansion. Girls' chances of enrolment have increased by almost two and a half times between 1966 and 2019.

In terms of educational success and whatever the level of education, the observation that girls do better than boys has been confirmed for several years now.

The success rate of girls in the BEM exam (Brevet d'enseignement moyen), for the year 2018 (59.20%) is clearly much higher than that of boys (40.79%). (Data from the Algerian Ministry of National Education).

The results of the baccalaureate test in the 2018 session show a predominance of girls over boys, with a success rate equivalent to 65.29%.

This increased presence of the female element in the education system extends to higher education.

4.1 Women in higher education

As noted above, the success of girls in basic education has been extended to higher education, where girls are now more numerous and their presence at university continues to grow. The CNES report "Women and the labour market" of December 2004 underlined that the number of female students has been multiplied by more than 4 between 1990 and 2018, i.e. an increase equivalent to twice that of boys.

Free higher education has eliminated any distinction between the courses offered to each gender and has greatly benefited girls. In all social categories, we can also see that female students are more involved and interested in their studies, which is reflected in the fact that they spend less time at university (repeating a year) and fewer and fewer drop out.

a.1- Stereotypes in the choice of university courses

Statistics on Algerian higher education shows that the choice of university courses for girls is divided between two main areas: "social and human sciences" and "legal and economic sciences", where there is a very high concentration in the "medical sciences" course. However, for a long time they were under-represented in the technical and engineering sciences until recent years when they have reached parity with boys.

Table 2. Share of girls in university student enrolment and among higher education graduates by field of study from 2004 to 2014

	2004/05	2007/08	2010/11	2013 /14
Enrolled in university	56,9	58,5	58,8	63,3
Enrolled in graduation	57,4	59	59,5	60,9
Exact Sciences	64	61,7	70,5	73
Applied Sciences	48,9	28,4	30,8	37
Technology	37,2	36,6	35,9	40
Medical Sciences Veterinary Sciences	58	61,6	65,3	64
Natural / Earth	52,3	45	44,1	41
Sciences Social / Human Sciences	73,1	73	80	77
Humanities and Languages	60,8	61,4	65	63
	83,7	82,3	82,6	80

Sources: ONS, based on MESR statistics. Years 2004/2005 and 2005/2006 (ONS, Yearbook No. 26); Years 2007/2008 to 2010/2011 (ONS, Yearbook No. 29).

On the other hand, there is a relative increase in the number of students in the 'humanities and social sciences', whose educational profile does not prepare them for working life. Consequently, because of their training profile, women graduates from higher education are more likely to be destined for careers in administration, teaching or health, i.e. essentially feminized jobs with a social vocation and more likely to be in the public sector.

This equality between girls and boys in education has been accompanied by certain inequalities. In this respect, we shall make a brief incursion into the analyses of the French system, which may provide us with analytical tools to better address the Algerian situation. In this respect, C. Baudelot and E. Establet (1992) note that for France, although girls have caught up with boys both in quantitative terms (more female baccalaureate holders, more female students) and in qualitative terms, they are still few in number in the most prestigious training courses, i.e. the scientific and technical courses that prepare for the grandes écoles, in particular the engineering schools. According to the authors (C. Baudelot and E. Establet, 2010, P 110), this bipolarization of choices leads to a pattern where women are destined for careers in 'teaching and health, which extend the domestic role of protecting bodies and weapons. Armed intervention in the material world is left to men". To explain this under-representation of the female gender in the so-called male fields. C. Baudelot and E. Establet (2010, p.110) invoke the differential socialisation of girls and boys.

Of this inequality between girls and boys, the work of M. Durut-Bellat (1990) on the French education system observes that there are 'conscious and rational strategies'. She explains that girls choose their courses of study in anticipation of their situation on the labour market, which must reconcile the family sphere and their role as mothers. "We cannot reduce the differences in educational trajectories to male domination, which young girls would be fooled by. The latter choose orientations according to what seems to them to be the most relevant in terms of choosing a profession and the vision of their family role" (M., Durut-Bellat, 1990). Furthermore, according to the author, women freely anticipate their future prospects and are able to "explain the reasons for their choices" (M., Durut-Bellat, 1990). This analysis is based on R. Boudon's (1979) conception of the 'socialised actor' in the context of methodological individualism. The individual's choices are made "as a function of the situation in which he finds himself and, more generally, as a function of the system of interaction or interdependence in which he is involved at a given moment" (R. Boudon, 1979). In this approach, girls' educational and occupational choices are seen as the result of a calculation in which the investments to be made are compared with the expected benefits.

5. Women's integration and evolution in the labour market

5.1 Evolution of the female activity rate

For a long time, Algeria has been classified internationally as one of the countries with the lowest female activity rates. Its situation seems singular and atypical not only in relation to the activity rates recorded elsewhere in the world - both developed and underdeveloped - but also in relation to neighboring countries (Morocco, Tunisia, etc.), which have long been considered "similar" on many points (sociological, economic and cultural).

Algerian women have always participated in economic activity, through agricultural and craft production, but their work has always been ignored, never considered as an economic value, but more as a free domestic activity.

Nevertheless, paid female labour made its appearance just after independence and evolved slowly. As such, it increased from 109,000 to 1.41 million (ONS, statistical retrospective) between the 1966 and 1998 censuses (last national census). It would have been multiplied by twelve in the space of 22 years, an absolutely remarkable average annual growth rate of 59%. Its rate of growth was four times faster than that of the total active population and therefore even much higher than that recorded for men. The female activity rate, which did not exceed 2% in the 1966 census, and which remained constantly below 10% during the initial decade, is expected to reach 17% in 2019.

Table 3. Evolution of the employed population in Algeria (2001/2019)

Year	Male	%	Female	%	Total
2001	5345223	85,815	883549	14,185	6228772
2011	8038000	65,3	1561000	14,2	9599000
2017	8 764000	66,3	2 005000	17,4	10 769000
2018	9 073000	66,6	1 975000	16,6	11048000
2019	9 219000	66,7	2 062000	17,3	11281000

Source: Office National des Statistiques (2019).

To this end, the number of women in the labour market is growing steadily. However, in April 2019, they represent less than 20% of the total employed population. But this rate varies greatly according to the level of education and the degree.

As a result, 62% of women with a higher education degree are in the labour market, but only 6.7% of those without a degree, as shown in the table below.

Table 4. Female activity rate by education level 2019

Education level	Women	Men
Without	4,1	37,3
Primary	8,0	69,8
Medium	11,3	76,1
Secondary	18,8	65,5
Higher	45,4	64,4
Diploma		
None	6,7	61,4
Vocational training	37,9	83,0
Higher education	62,2	79,2
Total	17,3	66,8

Source: ONS, Employment Survey 2019.

However, it is worth noting the recent willingness of the political authorities to promote women to positions of responsibility at all levels and in sectors where the decision to employ them is not easy.

In order to have a synoptic view of female employment, their distribution by occupation (see table below) is indicative of an evolution in the labour market on different elements.

Table 5. Occupations held by women in thousands

Occupations	Public	%	Private	%	total	%
Intellectual and scientific professions	521	44,7	61	8,3	582	30,6
Intermediate occupations	114	9,8	31	4,2	145	7,6
Administrative employees	334	28,7	44	5,9	377	19,8
Direct service personnel and salespersons and saleswomen	54	4,7	132	17,9	187	9,8

Table 5 (cont.). Occupations held by women in thousands

Occupations	Public	%	Private	%	total	%
Women farmers, skilled workers in agriculture, forestry and fishing	0	0	46	6,3	47	2,5
Skilled industrial and craft trades and crafts	9	0,8	331	44,8	340	17,9
Plant and machine operators and machine operators and assembly workers	1	0,1	8	1,1	9	0,5
Elementary occupations	106	9,1	72	9,7	177	9,3
NA	4	0,4	7	0,9	11	0,6
All	1164	100	740	100	1904	100

Source: ONS, Employment Survey 2019.

In the public sector, intellectual and scientific occupations are the most important occupations for women (44.7%), followed by administrative occupations (28.7%). In the private sector, the occupation of craftswoman dominates (44.8%), followed by services to individuals (17.9%). We are therefore witnessing the emergence of a particular social category of women, composed largely of senior managers and senior professionals, who are particularly active in the largest cities. If we admit, at first sight, that their better level of education and better classification in terms of socio-professional category are indicative of a process of professional ascent, and more broadly of vertical social ascent, accompanied as a general rule (even if this is not always the case) by a better position in decision-making, we can say that we are witnessing such a phenomenon in Algeria. It is of course difficult to go further in the analysis from these figures alone. There is no more detailed and focused study that would allow us to have a better and more realistic view of the situation that currently prevails. It is not surprising in these circumstances that permanent employee status is the rule for women and is the most frequently encountered type of employment. Given the type of job they hold, in an economy, that has also seen a high degree of state employment; they are state employees (42.6%).

5.2 Unemployment and women

We have been able to demonstrate that thanks to legislative measures taken in favor of women, they are increasingly present on the labour market. However, this regulatory framework, which protects their right to work and enshrines the principle of non-discrimination, has not been sufficient to establish gender equality in terms of obtaining employment. Indeed, this feminization of the active population is still marked by female unemployment. According to ONS statistics, at the end of 2019, there were 37,000 unemployed women and 804,000 unemployed men. The number of unemployed women and men is highest between the ages of 20 and 30 (62% of unemployed women and 56% of unemployed men are in this age group). 55% of the unemployed women are graduates of higher education. This unemployment concerns more particularly the number of women graduates in human and social sciences (Hammouda, N & al, P.2). This could simply mean that, apart from graduates, women who do not find a job give up and end up as housewives.

Table 6. Unemployment rate by gender, education level and degree obtained (%)

Level of education	Male	Female	Total
No education	1.8	1.4	1.6
Primary	11.4	3.5	8.5
Middle	51.2	14.8	37.9
Secondary	21.2	22.7	21.7
Higher	14.4	57.6	30.2
Diploma obtained			
Without diploma	59.9	21.2	45.8
Vocational training diploma	28	23.7	26.5
Higher education diploma	12.1	55.1	27.8

Source: ONS, Employment Survey 2019.

More broadly, it can be seen from the above table that at all levels of education, women are more affected by unemployment than men, with 17.2% of the female labour force currently unemployed, compared with 9.2% for men.

Conclusion

Women's participation in economic activity has increased significantly. Their integration into the labour market has increased, particularly as we have just seen, thanks to a legal environment that recognizes their right to work. The progress made by girls in education has greatly contributed to this feminization of employment with qualifications equal to those of men. Indeed, with a higher level of education than men, Algerian women are marking a certain break with the traditional model and are seeking to assert themselves in the public sphere by trying to forge a social identity outside the domestic sphere. Moreover, this movement towards employment has taken place in all sectors of activity, with women now occupying fields of activity that were previously reserved for men.

However, despite the improvement in the level of education of women and their access to the labour market, statistics show that this integration into the labour market has resulted in major inequalities. In view of the progress expected mainly in the field of education, their participation rate in economic activity paradoxically continues to evolve at a slow pace. Moreover, in the labour market, sectors of activity and socio-professional categories show a strong gender division. The segregation and disparities observed in terms of educational guidance and training are largely responsible for the difficulties women have in accessing employment and explain the concentration of female employment, which generates an imbalance in women's occupations and underemployment. Statistics on the unemployed active population show that women are generally the most affected and, on the whole, suffer from precarious forms of employment.

Author Contributions: conceptualization: Assia Guedjali; methodology: Assia Guedjali; software: Assia Guedjali; validation: Assia Guedjali; formal analysis: Assia Guedjali; investigation: Assia Guedjali; resources: Assia Guedjali; writing-original: Assia Guedjali; draft preparation: Assia Guedjali; writing-review and editing: Assia Guedjali; visualization: Assia Guedjali; supervision: Assia Guedjali.

Conflicts of Interest: Author declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

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