

# The Social Status of Algerian Women in Light of Gender Indicators

## La posición social de las mujeres argelinas a la luz de los indicadores de género

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### Abstract

**Objective:** The present study aimed to examine the empirical reality of the actual social status occupied by Algerian women in society across six core dimensions: the demographic status indicator, educational status indicator, occupational status indicator, legal status indicator, gender indicator, and political participation indicator.

**Methodology:** The study adopted a descriptive research design to monitor the current social standing of Algerian women and provide an accurate, comprehensive assessment of the existing situation in light of these gender-related metrics.

**Results:** Findings of the descriptive analysis demonstrated a positive upward trajectory in the social status of Algerian women, clearly attributable to advancements in educational attainment, labor force participation, and supportive legislative frameworks. However, the study reveals that the attained level remains insufficient; quantitative figures often mask underlying socio-cultural constraints—most notably a deeply rooted cultural heritage that prioritizes men and perpetuates female subordination.

**Conclusion:** While the social status achieved by Algerian women appears highly favorable on a quantitative level across the investigated indicators, it critically requires qualitative validation. Structural and numerical shifts must be accompanied by a parallel socio-cognitive transformation in prevailing societal attitudes, beliefs, and gender role expectations.

**Keywords:** Women, Social Status, Gender Indicators.

### Resumen

#### Resumen

**Objetivo:** El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo examinar la situación empírica de la posición social de las mujeres argelinas a través de seis dimensiones fundamentales: situación demográfica, situación educativa, situación laboral, situación jurídica, género y participación política.

**Metodología:** Se adoptó un diseño de investigación descriptivo para examinar la posición social actual de las mujeres argelinas y ofrecer una evaluación precisa e integral de su situación a partir de estos indicadores relacionados con el género.

**Resultados:** El análisis descriptivo evidenció una evolución positiva de la posición social de las mujeres argelinas, atribuible a los avances en el nivel educativo, la participación en el mercado laboral y los marcos legislativos favorables. Sin embargo, el nivel alcanzado sigue siendo insuficiente: las cifras suelen ocultar limitaciones socioculturales subyacentes, especialmente una herencia cultural profundamente arraigada que privilegia a los hombres y perpetúa la subordinación femenina.

**Conclusión:** Aunque los indicadores analizados reflejan una situación cuantitativamente muy favorable de la posición social de las mujeres argelinas, estos avances requieren una evaluación cualitativa que permita corroborar su alcance real. Las transformaciones estructurales y numéricas deben ir acompañadas de una transformación sociocognitiva de las actitudes, las creencias y las expectativas sociales predominantes sobre los roles de género.

**Palabras clave:** Mujeres, posición social, indicadores de género.

## Introduction

Following national independence, Algeria entered a transformative phase regarding the socio-political status and role of Algerian women. The women's question emerged as a pivotal social, political, and ideological issue intrinsically linked to fundamental rights, structural equality, and civic duties. Official state rhetoric concerning women constituted a core pillar of political will aimed at eradicating underdevelopment and marginalization, striving to construct a modern society responsive to contemporary demands.

Conversely, deeply rooted cultural heritage historically restricted women's lifeworlds to the domestic sphere while according men exclusive access to the public domain. The persistence of these cultural schemas produced a rigid gendered division of labor within the Algerian family structure, creating a structural friction with macro-level transformations in women's roles and the imperative of shared domestic responsibilities. Globally, normative shifts toward gender equality—formalized in international frameworks such as the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action—significantly reshaped national policy outcomes in Algeria. Recognizing women as an indispensable underutilized human resource, the Algerian state initiated structural reforms to facilitate female social mobility, mitigate institutional barriers, and guarantee equal opportunity in educational attainment, labor force participation, and political representation.

While these structural shifts fostered emerging role patterns—manifested in women's heightened visibility in education, employment, and public governance—the overall social status of women relative to men continues to require empirical evaluation and policy intervention, particularly when benchmarked against their demographic representation. Accordingly, this study examines the actual social status of Algerian women through key gender development indicators.

## Context and Conceptual Framework

A comparative statistical and analytical examination of Algerian women's contemporary status against historical baselines demonstrates substantial structural gains resulting from socio-demographic shifts and international normative commitments ratified since the 1970s. Traditionally, patriarchal social structures and gender-role socialisation confined women's societal utility to the private sphere, reinforcing the domestic roles of wife and mother through early gender-typed socialization while depriving females of formal education. Consequently, classical indicators, such as female illiteracy, male-child preference, and normative role expectations, collectively defined women's status as inherently traditional within modernization frameworks.

Tracked through sociological indicators, this structural transformation manifests across three principal dimensions:

### 1. Demographic Status Indicator

Demographic data indicates sustained population growth characterized by declining mortality rates and increasing life expectancy at birth—reaching 76.4 years for males and 77.8 years for females (National Office of Statistics [ONS], 2015). The national female population expanded from 17.09 million in 2008 to 19.72 million in 2015 (representing approximately 49.3% of the total population of 39.96 million).

Demographically constituting half of the population, women represent a critical human resource for sustainable national development. The transition from agrarian/traditional economies to diversified economic systems expanded labor market opportunities, enabling women to penetrate non-traditional, historically male-dominated sectors (such as the military and corporate entrepreneurship). The diversification of economic activities, expansion of the tertiary sector, and evolving cultural norms have collectively facilitated female socio-occupational mobility, shifting societal values to normalize women's economic participation outside the home.

## 2. Educational Status Indicator

Empirical data reveals a major structural shift in female educational attainment, marked by soaring enrollment rates across all educational tiers. Guaranteed by Article 3 of Framework Law No. 08-04 on National Education, the state enforces universal, free access to education without gender-based discrimination. This structural intervention transformed female human capital from underutilized potential into strategic development capacity. Free public education drastically reduced female illiteracy from 85% in 1962 to 22.10% in 2008.

### Student Enrollment Rates in Algeria (2015/2016 Academic Year)

| Educational Level              | Total Enrolled | Female Share (%) |
|--------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Primary Education              | 4,081,546      | 47.69%           |
| Lower Secondary Education      | 2,614,393      | 47.72%           |
| Upper Secondary Education      | 1,378,860      | 56.72%           |
| Undergraduate Higher Education | 1,315,744      | 62.50%           |
| Postgraduate Higher Education  | 76,961         | 52.50%           |
| Vocational Training            | 208,553        | 44.44%           |

*Data Source: National Office of Statistics (ONS), 2016.*

From a sociological perspective, educational attainment serves as a primary driver of female social mobility and structural empowerment. Upward educational mobility enhances agency and institutional power, whereas limited educational access perpetuates marginalization. Globally, human development metrics (such as the UNDP Human Development Reports since 1990 and the Arab Human Development Report 2002) utilize educational indicators, specifically female adult literacy, youth literacy, secondary

gross enrollment, and tertiary gross enrollment ratios, to measure gender parity and social empowerment. Education has thus disrupted traditional domestic role expectations, facilitating women's entry into formal employment.

### 3. Occupational Status Indicator

Occupational attainment represents a fundamental sociological metric for evaluating socioeconomic status (SES), stratified social standing, and gender parity. In sociological theory, occupation serves as the most reliable single index for assessing individual position within complex stratification systems.

In line with international standards set by the UN and OECD, tracking female labor force participation requires analyzing occupational distribution, sectoral allocation, and vertical occupational mobility. Female labor market entry in Algeria, a relatively recent phenomenon, is strongly driven by rising educational capital and supported by evolving legal-institutional frameworks. Notably, Article 40 of the 2020 Constitutional Revision explicitly commits the state to protecting women against all forms of violence across public, professional, and private spheres, while Article 68 mandates the promotion of gender parity in the labor market and equal access to executive leadership positions within public administration and state institutions.

Here is the exact, highly polished academic translation of this excerpt into English, conforming strictly to the stylistic, terminological, and syntactical standards of international sociology journals (such as *Current Sociology*, *British Journal of Sociology*, and *Gender, Work & Organization*):

Labor legislation, including Algerian labor law, guarantees a range of statutory rights for female workers. Most notably, it prohibits their employment in night work except under special authorization from the competent labor inspector, provided that the nature of the activity and the specific requirements of the job position justify such an exception (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, 1990). These legislative frameworks align with the standards established by the Arab Labour Organization (ALO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), chief among which is a woman's right to suitable employment that does not compel her to perform tasks incompatible with her biological and social nature (Arab Labour Organization, 2005, p. 49).

Furthermore, Ordinance No. 06-03, promulgating the General Civil Service Statute, guarantees several specific rights for female public sector employees, taking into account their physical and social roles. Most significantly, it grants fully paid maternity leave during pregnancy and childbirth, alongside the right of a nursing mother to two hours of paid daily absence for one year following the expiration of her maternity leave (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, 2006).

Societal perceptions and cultural attitudes toward female employment remain among the most decisive factors governing the extent to which women benefit from available employment opportunities and legal protections. Social factors fundamentally shape the gendered division of labor. Empirical research in this domain consistently demonstrates that the division of crafts, professions, and labor by gender is not only transhistorical and omnipresent across societies, but also exhibits structural persistence. This stability is relative, as it stems from the cultural stereotyping of gender roles. Nevertheless, contemporary social

reality reflects a more flexible societal stance regarding Algerian women penetrating historically male-dominated occupational fields.

While macro-level transformations in Algerian society have led to a relative shift in the socio-cultural conditions surrounding female employment, data from the National Office of Statistics (ONS) for 2016 indicates that women constitute 18.25% of the employed population, concentrated predominantly in the public administration and services sector (National Office of Statistics, 2016, p. 19). Similarly, a 2017 national report on women published by the Ministry of National Solidarity, Family, and Women's Affairs indicates that women represent 16% of the national labor market (National Office of Statistics, 2016, p. 19).

In her empirical study titled *"Role Strain and Conflict among Married Working Women in Algeria,"* researcher Lamia Boubidi observed that female labor force participation in Algeria did not exceed 12.89% in 2000 (Boubidi, 2014, p. 16). Despite this incremental increase, the rate of women's economic participation remains structural low relative to the female human capital base—which represents half of the total population. Moreover, the occupational sectors accessible to women remain heavily constrained by social conditions, primarily the compatibility of external work with family roles and child-rearing responsibilities. Sociological literature underscores that prevailing social constructs consistently normalize the occupational imperative for men, whereas female employment is often viewed as secondary. Consequently, women are frequently compelled to exit the labor market post-marriage or when familial obligations conflict with professional duties (Feshika, 2007, pp. 131–132).

#### **4. Legal Status Indicator**

The legal status of women serves as a primary determinant of their broader social standing. The significance of legal status is particularly pronounced in traditional societies, where social and cultural structures are characterized by the absence of gender equality concepts, a devaluation of female agency, and a rigid division of gender roles. Consequently, statutory legal frameworks targeted at women can operate as vital channels for socio-occupational and structural mobility.

In this regard, the Algerian legislature has promulgated several statutory texts. Some are general in nature, addressing women's rights within broader legislative frameworks, while others are specialized enactments designed to achieve two primary objectives: first, redressing historical injustices and institutional marginalization experienced by Algerian women; and second, accommodating women's biological nature—particularly in defining obligations—by creating conducive structural conditions that enable them to fulfill their dual social roles.

An examination of the Algerian legal system reveals that statutory discourse establishes formal gender equality in rights and duties across multiple domains, including:

- **Labor Law No. 90-11:** Deems null and void any collective agreements or employment contracts containing gender-based discrimination between female workers and their male counterparts, provided such discrimination adversely impacts employment, remuneration, or working conditions (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, 1990).
- **Civil Service Statute (Ordinance No. 06-03):** Enforces the principle of equal access to public employment, explicitly prohibiting discrimination among public servants on the basis of sex (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, 2006).
- **Family Law (Law No. 84-11):** Mandates that domestic relations be founded on mutual cohesion, solidarity, cohabitation, and free consent. Just as a man exercises the freedom to choose his spouse, the Family Code guarantees a woman's right to select her spouse free from coercion or forced marriage (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, 1984). Furthermore, it guarantees a married woman's independent financial personality (*patrimoine distinct*), safeguarding her financial autonomy—particularly if she is employed—while permitting spouses to enter into agreements regarding joint property acquired during marriage (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, 1984).
- **Framework Law on National Education (Law No. 08-04):** Establishes free public education across all academic levels, alongside compulsory schooling for all children aged 6 to 16 regardless of sex. To ensure parental compliance—particularly regarding female education—Law No. 08-04 establishes statutory fines ranging from 5,000 DA to 50,000 DA for non-compliant guardians (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, 2008).
- **Political Participation (Organic Law No. 21-02 on the Electoral System):** Eliminates gender distinctions regarding the constitutional right to vote and run for office in national and local assemblies, utilizing inclusive statutory phrasing such as "every male and female Algerian citizen" (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, 2021).

This legislative orientation has directly influenced female representation across decision-making levels, yielding increased participation in executive and diplomatic positions. However, the efficacy of these statutory protections in effecting tangible structural changes in women's lived experiences remains bounded by prevailing cultural schemas, traditional social values, and patriarchal role expectations that often contradict the modern gender roles mandated by legal frameworks. Unquestionably, women's legal literacy and rights consciousness remain critical variables governing the degree to which legislation is leveraged for social advancement.

## 5. Gender Indicator

The conceptualization of gender rests on the premise that disparities in social roles between men and women are products of socially constructed norms that shape gender parity. The Gender Development Index (GDI) or gender-disaggregated metrics adapt standard human development indicators by disaggregating data by sex, thereby exposing structural gender gaps (Feshika, 2007, p. 130).

While the application of gender analytical frameworks in social science methodology initially sparked debate, contemporary consensus holds that gender analysis critically evaluates the structural positioning and social roles of men and women within social hierarchies, analyzing how gender relations determine individual and collective social status (Feshika, 2007, p. 131).

A woman's social status and associated roles cannot be examined in isolation from the normative systems that define male and female behavior. Thus, gender metrics serve as key instruments for evaluating institutional commitment to female empowerment and assessing societal gains. Sociologists utilize gender indicators to operationalize the social expectations, roles, and responsibilities assigned to men and women across diverse cultural contexts.

This indicator operationalizes the social basis of gender differentiation across educational attainment, health outcomes, and political and economic participation. Statistical data is interpreted through a socio-cultural lens rather than a purely biological framework. Defining roles solely through biological determinism risks naturalizing male dominance and perpetuating female subordination. Conversely, analyzing roles through a cultural lens exposes the symbolic systems, social representations, and normative beliefs that sustain gender hierarchies.

Consequently, the analytical framework introduced by gender studies has necessitated a comprehensive paradigm shift regarding women's status and their integration into national development strategies (Abu-Bakr & Chokri, 2002, p. 94). The core of this shift lies in decoupling biologically determined roles from socially constructed gender roles.

In Algeria, following the ratification of international conventions on women's empowerment (with reservations subsequently lifted), the state formulated strategic frameworks to advance female social status. This policy direction materialized through institutionalized gender policies and institutional mechanisms...

dedicated to addressing various women's issues and providing an accurate database on the evolution of women's status and their participation across all fields. The National Office of Statistics (ONS) now provides critical, periodic quantitative data comparing women to men. This is complemented by the Ministry of National Solidarity, Family, and Women's Affairs; the National Council for Family and Women; and the National Center for Information and Documentation on Women, Family, and Childhood. Collectively, these bodies constitute institutional mechanisms for promoting women's rights by monitoring their status across all spheres of life and generating precise data on advancements achieved following the implementation of relevant public programs. Through the quantitative data supplied by these institutions, researchers can uncover the true social standing occupied by women in society and formulate targeted mechanisms to elevate and improve this status.

## **6. Political Participation Indicator**

Political participation serves as a key indicator reflecting structural shifts in the status and social role of Algerian women. After decades of total exclusion from public affairs—governed by traditional cultural norms dictating a strict gendered division of labor that relegated politics exclusively to men—Algerian

women have progressively advanced toward political engagement. This participation unfolds within the societal framework of political involvement, defined by attendance at political assemblies, assumption of legislative or executive responsibilities to build popular sovereignty, and leadership roles within various political party structures.

Women's political participation falls within the broader scope of grassroots political expression and public management across all social strata. Under pressure from social and political movements, civil society associations, and advocacy groups, political participation has evolved to encompass diverse manifestations and actors. The scope of universal suffrage has expanded across most political systems and social groups, disseminating political activities, associational demonstrations, and union activism as varied expressions of political participation that presuppose collective mobilization, framing, a sense of commitment, and civic responsibility (Chaker, 2004, p. 16). Consequently, the conditions enabling political participation operate across two distinct levels:

- **Legal Level:** Requires the codification of gender equality, encompassing not only "equality before the law" but also "equality *in* the law," ensuring that both women and men are legally recognized and enabled to enjoy all rights equally. This necessitates safeguarding women's political rights through specialized legal instruments, including: integrating the principle of gender equality into national constitutions and legislation; enacting legal measures that prohibit and penalize all forms of discrimination against women; establishing statutory protections through competent national courts and public institutions against discriminatory acts; and repealing statutory provisions that constitute gender-based discrimination (Chaker, 2004, pp. 18–19).

In Algeria, Organic Law No. 26-08 on Political Parties mandates that founding member lists include a female representation quota of at least 10%, under penalty of party accreditation refusal (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, 2026). This legal provision has generated tangible empirical results, yielding a marked increase in female political representation in Algeria.

- **Political and Social Level:** Involves raising awareness regarding the imperative of engaging both men and women equally in democratic consolidation, and ensuring that female citizens remain free from any public authority (the state or its institutions) or private authority (fathers or family members) that obstructs their political empowerment. Political empowerment entails endowing women with the power, resources, and agency to act as active agents of change by strengthening their participatory capacities through serious and effective involvement in political organizations, professional syndicates, and civil society associations (Beloul, n.d.). It also requires educating women on the benefits of exercising citizenship rights, activating civic engagement, and fostering interest in public affairs to achieve social integration and effective political and social roles (Chaker, 2004, p. 19).

Women's political participation progresses through distinct developmental stages: commencing with an initial interest in public and political affairs, advancing to political affiliation that translates into active political engagement, and culminating in an awareness of the necessity to assume political responsibilities and participate in all forms of political struggle. This process constitutes a fundamental component of societal democratization across all states.

A review of Arab legal systems reveals a division regarding the constitutional entrenchment of women's political rights: the first category comprises states that historically denied women political rights and prohibited their exercise (e.g., Saudi Arabia or Kuwait), while the second category includes states that recognize women's political rights, such as Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan.

In Algeria, despite international ratifications and successive constitutional guarantees explicitly affirming absolute gender equality in citizenship rights, empirical reality demonstrates that statutory guarantees alone have not been fully sufficient for women to realize their political rights. Although electoral laws enshrine the right to vote and run for office, actual opportunities for women to participate as voters and elected officials have remained relatively constrained.

Consequently, the constitutional framer entrenched the political rights of Algerian women, emphasizing the state's commitment to promoting female political rights by expanding opportunities for representation in elected assemblies. Furthermore, in an effort to incentivize women's participation in political life, the now-repealed Organic Law No. 12-03 enabled political parties to receive targeted state financial subsidies proportional to the number of their female candidates elected to municipal popular assemblies, wilaya popular assemblies, and parliament.

These legislative measures effectively elevated female representation in elected bodies—most notably parliament—where female representation did not exceed 3.4% out of 380 total seats in 1997 [i]. Following the implementation of these legislative reforms, this proportion rose to one-third of total seats in the Algerian parliament and other elected assemblies. However, despite this numerical increase, representation has not fully elevated women's social status to the desired level, as such participation frequently remains purely nominal for structural reasons. Thus, legislative measures alone are insufficient to advance women's social standing; rather, they represent an essential milestone in the long trajectory toward achieving elite social status.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, the gains achieved by women in the field—whether in education, politics, or legislative and legal domains, constitute significant milestones that have visibly catalyzed mobility in the social status of Algerian women. However, this does not imply that the trajectory is complete or that gender parity has been achieved. In truth, this mobility has manifested primarily at a quantitative level, necessitating a parallel qualitative transformation. The numerical percentages attained by women on paper have not automatically translated into the societal standing commensurate with their societal weight. Consequently, structural changes in the material domain must be accompanied by a profound

transformation in societal ideas, mentalities, and belief systems to sustainably advance the social status of Algerian women.

### Statements and Declarations

- **Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate:** Not applicable. No human subjects research or data collection requiring ethical approval or participant consent was conducted.
- **Availability of Data and Materials:** This study contains no primary data or shareable materials, relying entirely on the analysis of published, publicly available theoretical sources.
- **Author Contributions:** The sole author conceived the study, gathered and analyzed the sources, and drafted the final text independently.
- **Conflict of Interest:** The author declares no competing financial or personal interests affecting the subject of this study.
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Here is the fully formatted, standardized **APA (7th Edition)** translation of the reference list, organized alphabetically and formatted for submission to international academic journals:

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#### **Declaraciones**

**Conflictos de interés:** La autora declara no tener conflictos de interés relacionados con este estudio.

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