



Algeria Lifts CEDAW Reservation: Advancing Equality

by Kahina Bouagache

*On 4 August 2025, Algeria officially lifted its reservation on article 15(4) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), stating "States Parties shall accord to men and women the same rights with regard to the law relating to the movement of persons and the freedom to choose their residence and domicile." This decision was formalized through Presidential Decree N° 25-218 and published in the official "journal" *Gazette N°55* on 17 August 2025, which reflects Algeria's commitment to aligning its domestic laws with international human rights standards – another step in Algeria's ongoing process to align its domestic laws with international laws, following the earlier lifting of the article 9(2) reservation in 2009, which granted women the right to transmit Algerian nationality to their children. Algeria already ratified CEDAW on June 21, 1996, but with several reservations due to perceived conflicts with domestic laws: article 2 (general obligation to eliminate discrimination), article 9(2), article 15(4), article 16 (equality in marriage and family relations), and article 29(1) (dispute settlement under the convention). The recent lift of its reservation on article 15(4) marks a further step toward advancing women's rights and legal equality in the country.*

Why does it matter?

Algeria's move to lift the reservation addresses a longstanding legal inconsistency. The country's 1984 Family Code, which previously restricted women's freedom of movement and choice of residence, was reformed in 2005, rendering the reservation obsolete. By removing this reservation, Algeria not only complies with its constitutional obligations but also reaffirms its dedication to women's rights and equality, and hence guarantees women equality with men in civil matters, including the freedom to choose their domicile and residence. This decision has sparked debates within the country. Conservative groups, such as the Movement of Society for Peace (MSP), a political party with Islamist roots founded in 1990, composed mainly of members advocating for the integration of Islamic principals in governance and legislation, promoting patriarchal and traditional family norms and social conservatism, has expressed concerns. They argue that the move could destabilize traditional approaches, meaning it challenges long-standing societal norms and family structures that have historically guided women's roles in Algeria, toward empowering women and promoting individual freedom by suggesting that the step is "inconsistent with natural legislative principles."

What is the big picture?

Algeria's decision is part of a broader trend in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where countries such as Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, or the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are finally recognizing the importance of women's rights and equality, which means a crucial shift, especially

in the light of global funding cuts to women's empowerment programs. Investing in women's education, health, welfare, security and full economic participation is not only a matter of human rights but also essential for sustainable development and regional stability of these countries and the region. The move also sets a precedent for other MENA countries to reassess their reservations to international conventions and consider concrete reforms that promote gender equality. Such actions thus contribute to the region's integration into the global community and enhance its credibility in international forums.

What comes next?

Following the lift of the reservation, Algeria faces the challenge of ensuring that this legal change translates into tangible improvements in women's lives. Potential hurdles include addressing societal attitudes that discourage women from exercising their new rights, due to cultural burdens, inconsistent implementation across regions, lack of legal literacy among women about their rights, and political opposition from conservative parties. Spoilers could include court challenges, slow adoption by local authorities or media campaigns emphasizing traditional gender roles. Beyond the domestic impact, Algeria's lifting of the reservation could strengthen its credibility in international human rights forums, potentially facilitating new partnership with UN agencies, development programs, and regional organizations focused on women's rights and equality. It could also encourage knowledge exchange, technical support, and access to international funding for women's empowerment initiatives, further integrating Algeria into global women's equality networks.

About the Author

Kahina Bouagache is a senior legal counsel, recognized Track 2 expert, and a certified coach with over 20 years of experience across the West Asian and North African region. Her expertise includes women's rights advocacy, gender-responsive governance, access to justice, youth and women's leadership development, institutional reform, and countering violent extremism (CVE). She brings a unique blend of legal, diplomatic, and coaching skills to complex environments, supporting transformational leadership, inclusive governance, and social cohesion. Kahina has led contract and program management initiatives in both corporate and development sectors, with a focus on driving systemic change and empowering underrepresented voices. Before joining CARPO as an Associate Fellow, she served in senior legal advisory roles in multinational companies, firms and led projects for international organizations such as AMIDEAST and the American Bar Association. She has also provided support to legal aid projects of several women's rights NGOs and governments, and actively contributed to legislative reforms on gender-based violence and equality. Kahina holds double master's degrees in international business and humanitarian laws. Her work has been featured by various regional and international feminist networks such as the Wilson Center, ABA Magazine, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Arab Digest, Mansklig Sakerhet, and others.

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