

# MOROCCO: GENDER ISSUES BRIEFING NOTE

## Headline facts

Women in national parliament	Working in the labour force	Percentage of girls married by 18 years old	Literacy rate for women	Experienced violence
17% of seats in Lower House <sup>1</sup>	21% <sup>2</sup>	16% <sup>3</sup>	65% <sup>4</sup>	54% <sup>5</sup>



## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Morocco ranked 137 out of 149 in terms of the **Global Gender Gap** in 2018<sup>6</sup>. Over the past decade, Morocco has made **considerable progress in women's rights**, including improving maternal and child health and girls' education. The 2011 constitution prohibits discrimination based on gender, but deeply rooted social norms limit women's economic participation, particularly in rural areas. There has been **increased women's political participation**, but women remain underrepresented in Parliament. Over half of women experience violence and women face significant barriers in accessing justice. Moroccan women's rights groups continue to actively lobby for greater gender parity.

## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Women have had the **right to vote** in Morocco since 1956. Despite **significant political participation of women**<sup>7</sup> in the 2015 election, there is **limited women's representation** in Parliament.

Women currently hold: **17% of seats in lower house, 2% of seats in upper house, and 15.8% of ministerial positions**<sup>1</sup>. In 2011 a **quota of 30 seats for people under 40 years old** was introduced to Parliament<sup>8</sup>. These seats are split **equally between men and women**.

## SECURITY AND JUSTICE

Despite progressive trends in legislation, women face **significant barriers** to accessing justice in Morocco, are less likely to seek legal advice, and experience **lower resolution rates** to men<sup>9</sup>.

Women's participation in the **security sector** is increasing, with at least 13,614 women signing up for military service in 2019<sup>10</sup>. There are also increasing numbers of women entering the police force, in what Moroccans have termed the **'feminisation of authority'**<sup>11</sup>. Women are also active in the **Saharawi independence struggle**, including in leadership roles<sup>12</sup>. Morocco and Spain have undertaken a joint initiative to strengthen **women's roles as mediators** in various peace processes<sup>13</sup>.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Parliament adopted **new legislation** in 2018, which goes some way to combatting violence against women in Morocco<sup>14</sup>. However, critics argue that this law does not go far enough<sup>14,15</sup>. A 2019 survey shows that violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains widespread in Morocco, with **rates of VAWG at 54% nationally**<sup>5</sup>. Young women aged **25-29 are most vulnerable**. Rates of reporting of abuse are low, with only 28% of abused women having spoken to a person or institution about the abuse they'd experience. Only 6.6% had taken legal action<sup>16</sup>. The survey also found that 12% of women in Morocco have faced **harassment in public spaces** over the past 12 months<sup>17</sup>. Concerns have been raised about the **increased risk of violence for women with disabilities**<sup>18</sup>, domestic workers<sup>19</sup>, women prisoners<sup>19</sup>, and women from the LGBT community<sup>20</sup>.

Despite legislation criminalising human trafficking, Morocco remains a source, destination and transit country for women subjected to **forced labour** and **sex trafficking**<sup>21</sup>. Female undocumented migrants are often coerced into prostitution and forced labour in Morocco. There is also evidence of **child sex tourism** in major Moroccan cities<sup>21</sup>.

## EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

Moroccan women and girls are generally **well educated**, with nearly 97% of girls enrolled in primary school and 63% in secondary school. However, Morocco still faces gender inequalities in rural areas, with rates of primary net enrolment of 26% for girls and 79% for boys<sup>22</sup>. In 2017, 77,000 male adolescents and 117,000 female adolescents were out of school<sup>23</sup>. In 2018 the **literacy rate** for adult females was 65%<sup>4</sup>, however this drops to 10% in rural areas.

As of 2019, 21% of the female population in Morocco are in the workforce<sup>2</sup>. There is a significant **rural-urban divide**, with only around 17% of women joining the labour force in urban areas in comparison to 71% of men, while in rural areas the rates were 37% of women and 82% of men<sup>24</sup>. **Disabled women** face further barriers, evidenced by the fact that 91.1% of those with disabilities employed in the formal sector are male<sup>25</sup>. Analysis suggests the difference in earnings between men and women could be as high as 77%, with **men often paid almost double the amount that women** are paid for the same job<sup>24</sup>. Derived purely from discrimination, this acts as a major deterrent for women, and especially educated women, to join the labour force and may partially explain their low participation rates<sup>24</sup>.

## SOCIAL NORMS

Social norms in Morocco remain **conservative and patriarchal** and continue to **position women as inferior to men**, particularly in rural areas<sup>26</sup>. Evidence suggests 41% of men believe that financial support justifies marital rape, while 62% believe that women should tolerate violence to preserve the family unit<sup>27</sup>. Domestic responsibilities often limit the ability of women to pursue other roles in the workforce or civil society<sup>26</sup>. **Mourchidates**, who are female religious leaders and work alongside Imams in order to promote **tolerance, interfaith dialogue and equality**, are starting to challenge these norms<sup>28</sup>.

## YOUTH

In 2017 the percentage of **young women who were not in employment, education or training was 44%**, while the percentage of young men was 27%<sup>8</sup>. 82% of active young people earn salaries below 3000Dh<sup>8</sup> (UK£240). The percentage of young women earning less than this is higher, at 93%. Young girls who become pregnant outside of marriage are criminalised in Morocco<sup>29</sup>. **Child marriage** remains prevalent in Morocco, with 3% of girls married by the age of 15 and 16% married by the age of 18<sup>3</sup>. Young women have also been actively involved in **violent extremism**, with 38% of the 1,560 Moroccans who joined the Islamic State Group to fight in Iraq and Syria estimated to be women<sup>30</sup>.

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[Image] Moroccan Policewomen Exercising. Source: Moroccan Times [<http://themoroccantimes.com/2014/11/12664/german-organization-morocco-stable-country-north-africa>]