Morocco

Article 19 of the 2011 Constitution establishes that men and women should enjoy equal rights and freedoms in all civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental matters.

1. Discriminatory family code

Under the Family Code (Moudawana) of 2004, the legal minimum age for marriage is 18 years for both men and women (it was previously 15 years for women). The Government engaged in a large-scale campaign to raise public awareness of the new law and encourage changes in behaviour. However, marriage under that age is legal with the permission of a judge and the minor’s guardians. According to Government statistics from 2010, judges granted minors the right to marry in 90% of cases before them. The data show that there were more than 34,000 marriages of minors that year, an increase from the less than 30,000 in 2007. In the vast majority of these cases, the minor involved was female. National statistics from 2004 estimated that the number of girls between 15 and 19 years of age who were married, divorced, separated or widowed was 11.1%. Early marriage is most prevalent in rural areas, where there are reports that 13 year-old girls have been married in recent years.

The free consent of both spouses is now required by law, and women do not need permission from a male guardian to marry. In practice, Moroccan families in rural areas have been known to exert pressure on women to marry against their will. It is especially difficult to determine the difference between arranged marriage and coerced marriage in the case of child brides in Morocco. It remains illegal for a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man. Extra-marital sex remains a criminal offence for women and men, although cases are very seldom prosecuted.

Under Morocco’s 2004 Family Code, mothers and fathers share parental authority and have the same rights and responsibilities. Husbands and wives have formal reciprocal rights on a number of issues,
including management of the household, childrearing, family planning, and legal cohabitation.\(^\text{13}\) Nonetheless, discrimination continues to exist.\(^\text{14}\) Men continue to be the legal guardian of children. Women may only act as the legal guardian is the father is absent or incapacitated.\(^\text{15}\)

Under the Family Code, the mother is the first choice for custody of children. Divorced women no longer automatically forfeit custody of their children if they remarry or choose to live in a different town;\(^\text{16}\) however, in such circumstances, fathers can be awarded custody of their children from the age of seven years, if they so request.\(^\text{17}\) Once children reach the age of 15 years, they can choose the parent with whom they wish to live.\(^\text{18}\) In 2010, Morocco announced the establishment of a familial mutual assistance fund that would guarantee alimony payments to divorced mothers who have custody of their children, although no information was found as to whether this mechanism is operational.\(^\text{19}\)

**Inheritance** rights, under the Family Code, are unequal. Daughters inherit half the share passed on to sons. Moreover, if there are no sons, daughters do not inherit all of their parents’ estate; part of it is distributed amongst aunts and uncles.\(^\text{20}\) In effect, the reformed Family Code of 2004 changed only the inheritance rules for grandchildren. In cases where the mother is deceased, children can inherit property from their maternal grandparents.\(^\text{21}\)

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The 2004 Family Code eradicated the concept of repudiation, i.e. a husband’s right to unilaterally divorce his wife, and the reform gave Moroccan women the right to divorce on the same grounds as men.\(^\text{22}\) In addition, divorce can no longer be authorised by a notary public but must be granted by a court and only after a judge leads the couple through a conciliation process.\(^\text{23}\) Divorced women must wait four months before they can remarry.\(^\text{24}\) There are reports that they are stigmatised in Morocco.\(^\text{25}\)

### 2. Restricted physical integrity

There is no specific legislation in place in Morocco to protect women from domestic violence, although general provisions against assault included in the Criminal Code can be applied.\(^\text{26}\) In 2002, the Moroccan government announced a national strategy to eliminate violence against women; according to the 2005 report to the Committee on the Convention on The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), administrative authorities from all concerned government agencies are making

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\(^{13}\) Articles 51 and 54 (on the duties of parents towards their children) of the Family Code in CEDAW (2006) p. 59  
\(^{15}\) UNICEF (2011)  
\(^{16}\) Sadiqi (2010) p.320  
\(^{17}\) Sadiqi (2010) p.320  
\(^{18}\) Article 166 of the Family Code in CEDAW (2006) p. 60  
\(^{19}\) World Bank (2013) p. 146  
\(^{20}\) Articles 342 through 344 of the Family Code in Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2010)  
\(^{21}\) Global Rights (n.d.) p. 6; CEDAW (2006) p. 56  
\(^{22}\) Article 98 of the Family Code in CEDAW (2006) pp. 59-60  
\(^{23}\) Article 121 and Chapter II, Title Six, Book Two of the Family Code in CEDAW 2006, p. 59  
\(^{24}\) UN (2012) p. 7  
\(^{25}\) Sabbe et al. (2013)  
\(^{26}\) CEDAW (2008) p.4; Sadiqi (2010) p.316
concerted efforts to address the issue. Nonetheless, in 2012 women’s NGOs reported that the government takes the issue of domestic violence very lightly and that no concrete actions are put in place at the legal and institutional level to overcome this issue.

Since the introduction of the national strategy to eliminate violence against women, the 2006 report to the CEDAW Committee states that victims of domestic violence have better protection and more opportunity to leave the family home due to government initiatives to create new institutions such as a special violence investigation unit within the police force and shelters to protect battered women. Women also have easier access to divorce; the time required for divorce proceedings has been reduced to six months. However, according to a 2010 report by Freedom House, if women seeking help from the police are unable to prove that they have been abused, they are usually returned home, leaving them in a worse situation than before the complaint was filed.

This acts as a powerful deterrent against reporting domestic abuse.

According to the U.S. State Department’s 2012 Human Rights Report, domestic violence is treated as a misdemeanour under Moroccan law. It is a high-level misdemeanour if the victim suffers injuries that result in more than 20 days disability leave from work. Otherwise, it is considered a low-level misdemeanour and rarely prosecuted.

According to Amnesty International, Article 496 of the Penal Code, which criminalizes hiding married women from “the authority to which she is legally subject,” could be used to penalise those harbouring women who flee abusive husbands. The U.S. State Department reported that this Article was used against domestic violence shelters in the past, but there were no reports of such incidences in 2012.

Nearly half of the population considers it acceptable for men to beat their wives in certain circumstances. Survey data from the 2003-2004 DHS found that when given a list of five reasons why a man might be justified in beating his wife, nearly 64% of women agreed with at least one reason.

A survey of women ages 18 to 65 by the Moroccan High Commission for Planning found that spousal violence (including psychological and economic, in addition to physical and sexual, violence) was the most common source of violence against women in 2009. According to the study, 3% of women who faced domestic violence reported it to a competent authority. Similarly, a survey of family courts revealed that relatively few women who had suffered from domestic violence approached police or

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28 Association Démocratique des Femmes au Maroc (2012)
29 CEDAW (2006) pp. 9, 63-65
31 Sadiqi (2010) p.316
32 Sadiqi (2010) p.316
33 U.S. Department of State (2013) p. 23
34 Amnesty International (2013)
36 Ministère de la Santé et al. (2005), Table 3.11
37 Haut-Commissariat au Plan (2011) p. 5
38 Haut-Commissariat au Plan (2011) p. 10
initiated criminal proceedings. 68% preferred to resolve matters within the family, and those who did use the formal justice system, preferred to ask for divorces in family courts. 39

**Rape** is a criminal offence in Morocco. 40 However, marital rape is not criminalised. 41 Before January 2014, under Article 475 of the Criminal Code, it was possible for a rapist to escape imprisonment if he agreed to marry his victim. 42 Victims had been pressured by judges and their families to marry their rapists in order to preserve family “honour.” According to the U.S. State Department’s 2012 Human Right report, there were many well-documented cases of this phenomenon in Morocco. 43 In January 2013, the Government announced that it would repeal Article 475, following a year of sustained campaigning by women’s rights organizations, spurred by the suicide of 16 year-old Amina Filali, who had been coerced into marrying her rapist. 44 Another year later in early 2014, the Moroccan parliament officially adopted a law to amend the Article by lifting immunity for rapists and preventing them from marrying their victims. 45

The penalty for rape ranges from five to 30 years’ imprisonment and depends on the circumstances of the crime. The prison sentence is longer if the victim was a minor, disabled, or pregnant, as well as if the victim lost her virginity during the rape. For the case of healthy, non-minor victims, the penalty is double if the victim had been a virgin (ten to 20 years’, instead of five to ten years’, imprisonment). 46 Reportedly, in at least one case, a medical exam was administered in a rape case in an attempt to determine when the victim lost her virginity. 47 Amnesty International has called the distinction between virgin and non-virgin victims of rape in Morocco “both discriminatory and degrading.” In addition, the organization noted that the articles on rape fall under the “decency” section of Morocco’s Criminal Code, suggesting that rape is a crime against a woman’s “honour” rather than her physical integrity. 48

A survey of women ages 18 to 65 by the Moroccan High Commission for Planning found that 8.7% reported facing sexual violence in 2009 and 0.04% reported having been raped. Expanding the proportion to the population of women in Morocco, there would have been an estimated 38,000 rapes. 49 Prevalence rates of sexual violence are highest for the group of younger women aged 18 to 24 years. 50 Strong societal pressure to conform to beliefs around personal and family honour makes it very difficult for women to report instances of sexual violence and harassment, according to a report published by Freedom House. 51 The U.S. State Department reported that the police in Morocco selectively investigated cases of sexual assault in 2012; among the minority brought to trial, successful

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39 World Bank (2013) p. 75
40 Sadiqi (2010) p.316
42 CEDAW (2008) p.5
44 Amnesty International (2013)
46 Criminal Code, Articles 486 and 488
47 Lamrani (2012) p. 4
48 Amnesty International (2013)
49 Haut-Commissariat au Plan (2011) p. 5, 8
50 Haut-Commissariat au Plan (2011) p. 7, 11
51 Sadiqi (2010) p.316
prosecutions were rare. A representative of Amnesty International stated that there is a need to train the police and judiciary on how to better handle violence against women in Morocco.

**Sexual Harassment** is criminalised in Morocco only in limited situations. An amendment to Morocco’s Employment Code in 2003 recognises sexual harassment in the workplace as an offence when committed by an employer, the head of the company, or the institution against the employee. Under the Criminal Code, abusing a position of authority by issuing orders, threats, coercion, or other means to obtain sexual favours is punishable by up to two years of imprisonment and up to 50,000 Moroccan Dirham. The law does not fully define the harassing act, leaving it up to a judge to decide what specifically constitutes such harassment, nor does it include harassment conducted by someone other than an authority figure. Reportedly, only few victims pressed charges against their employers for fear of losing their job, proving the charge, or facing disapproving reactions from family, friends, and co-workers. According to the World Bank, implementation and enforcement of sexual harassment laws remains weak in Morocco.

In early November 2013, a new draft law on violence against women, with provisions to extend the scope and penalties for sexual harassment, was published on the website of the Government’s General Secretariat. It was drafted by the Ministry of Social Development, Family, and Solidarity, in coordination with the Justice Ministry. However, this draft law is under negotiation with Parliament and women’s rights NGOs. Women’s rights groups complained that they were excluded from the drafting process and accused the Islamist-led Government of seeking to dilute the bill through changes.

According to a Freedom House report, there is no evidence to suggest that female genital mutilation (FGM) is practised in Morocco.

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According to the U.S. State Department, “Morocco is a source, destination, and transit country for men, women, and children who are subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking. Some Moroccan girls from rural areas as young as six or seven years old are recruited to work as maids in cities and often experience conditions of forced labour, such as non-payment of wages, threats, restrictions on movement, and physical, psychological, or sexual abuse.”

According to the Freedom House report, so-called ‘honour killings’ do occur in Morocco, but are less prevalent than in other parts of the region. Police are often reluctant to intervene, seeing such crimes as

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52 U.S. Department of State (2013) p. 23
53 Amnesty International (2013)
55 Penal Code, Article 503-1, added by law 24.03
57 Al-Ashraf (2011)
58 World Bank (2013) p. 80
60 Ismaili (2013)
61 United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe (UNRic) (2013)
62 Sadiq (2010) p.331
a family matter. However, rather than removing the clause in the criminal code that allowed men convicted of assaulting or murdering his wife if he caught her in the act of adultery to receive a lighter sentence, this has been extended to female defendants accused of assaulting or murdering adulterous husbands.

Abortion is legal in the first six weeks of pregnancy in cases where the woman’s mental or physical health is in danger. Consent of the woman’s husband is required unless the chief medical officer of the province or prefecture agrees that her health would be endangered by the pregnancy. Illegal abortions are criminalised by up to two years’ imprisonment for the woman undergoing the abortion, and up to five years for those carrying it out. There are no exceptions for cases of rape or incest. In practice, many doctors reportedly carry out unauthorized abortions in Morocco. About a dozen of them are serving prison sentences. According to Chafik Chraibi, Professor of Gynecology at Mohamad V University, about 900 abortions—often illegal and dangerous—are performed daily in Morocco, including 600 by medical practitioners and 300 by at-home methods.

Women in Morocco have the legal right to use contraception, and to access information about family planning and reproductive health. The Ministry of Health ran mobile clinics supplying family planning services to remote rural areas and conducted systematic home visits to encourage use of contraceptives. Knowledge of contraception among women in Morocco is nearly universal, and usage rates are also quite high. According to the 2003-2004 DHS, 63% of women reported that they currently used a method of contraception as a form of family planning; 54.8% used a modern method. However, contraception was also seen primarily as a woman’s responsibility; just 3% of men reported using a modern method of contraception. 12% of women age 15-49 (married or in a union) declared having unmet needs for family planning. According to the Population Reference Bureau, Morocco has been “a success story” in expanding its family planning services throughout the country; however, gaps in unmet need across socioeconomic groups persist.

3. Son bias

The male/female sex ratio at birth is 1.05 and for the working age population (15-64) is 0.96.

There is no evidence to suggest that Morocco is a country of concern in relation to missing women.

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64 Sadiqi (2010) p.316
67 Agence France Presse (AFP) (2011)
68 Mamarbachi (2012)
69 Jay (2012)
70 US Department of State (2011)
71 US Department of State (2013) p. 25
72 Ministère de la Santé et al. (2005), Table 5.1
73 Ministère de la Santé et al. (2005), Table 5.4
74 CEDAW (2006) p. 43
76 Population Reference Bureau (2012)
77 CIA (2012)
A 2004 research report by the Understanding Children’s Work project (UCW) found that boys were 4% more likely to be engaged in paid work outside the home than girls, while girls were 26% more likely to be engaged in unpaid domestic work within the home.\textsuperscript{78} This would indicate bias against daughters in regard to the allocation of domestic work.

The 2003-2004 DHS found that 91.2% of girls and 86.8% of boys under the age of two had received all their basic vaccinations.\textsuperscript{79} There was virtually no difference in malnutrition rates (very slightly higher for boys), and under-five mortality rates were higher for boys than for girls.\textsuperscript{80} This does not indicate bias towards sons in regard to early childhood care.

According to UNICEF, enrolment and attendance rates are slightly lower for girls than for boys in Morocco (at secondary level, 36% of girls and 39% of boys attend).\textsuperscript{81} The UCW report found that in rural areas, girls were 33% less likely to attend school than boys.\textsuperscript{82} Overall, this would indicate preference towards educating sons over daughters.

4. Restricted resources and assets

By law, Moroccan women have the same ownership rights to land as men,\textsuperscript{83} but tradition often limits those rights. Despite a favourable legal framework, women’s access to land is often restricted, particularly in rural areas, and few women own land.\textsuperscript{84} Where they do, it is often managed by male relatives.\textsuperscript{85}

Women are legally entitled to access to non-land assets and to manage such property as they wish. Under Morocco’s standard matrimonial system, spouses retain their own property.\textsuperscript{86} Women own only 7% of the Moroccan land.

With regards to access to financial services, women in Morocco have difficulty obtaining credit from traditional banks on the same conditions as men. In response, the government has launched numerous initiatives to support women’s entrepreneurship, including trainings, income-generating projects and micro-credit initiatives targeted at women.\textsuperscript{87} 27% of women compared to 53% of men hold bank accounts at formal financial institutions.\textsuperscript{88}

5. Restricted civil liberties

Women’s freedom of movement and access to public space is guaranteed under the Constitution on the same footing as men. According to laws implemented in 1994, women do not need their husbands’ authorisation to obtain a passport or travel, while under the new Family Code, all previous restrictions

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{78} UCW (2004) p.19
\item \textsuperscript{79} Ministère de la Santé et al. (2005), Table 9.2
\item \textsuperscript{80} Ministère de la Santé et al. (2005), Table 10.8, 11.4
\item \textsuperscript{81} UNICEF (n.d.)
\item \textsuperscript{82} UCW (2004) p.34
\item \textsuperscript{83} el joumou3and soullaliyat land ; Article 218 of the Family Code in CEDAW (2006) p. 56
\item \textsuperscript{84} Sadiqi (2010) p.323
\item \textsuperscript{85} Sadiqi (2010) p.323
\item \textsuperscript{86} Article 49 of the Family Code in CEDAW (2006) pp. 56-57; ECOSOC (2005) p. 16
\item \textsuperscript{87} CEDAW (2006) pp. 47-49; JICA (2007) p. 22
\item \textsuperscript{88} World Bank (2011)
\end{itemize}
on women’s freedom of movement within the country have been removed.\textsuperscript{89} The new law states that spouses should jointly choose where they will live as a couple.\textsuperscript{90}

Freedom of speech, assembly and association are not always respected in Morocco.\textsuperscript{91} NGOs are able to operate relatively freely, though, and there is a vibrant women’s movement in Morocco; many women have sought positions of leadership within this movement, rather than in the political arena, which until recently remained almost totally male dominated.\textsuperscript{92} Women’s rights NGOs are active in promoting changes to discriminatory legislation and women’s political participation, providing services to and advocating on behalf of victims of gender-based violence, and promoting literacy.\textsuperscript{93}

Women have had the same right to vote and stand for election as men since independence in 1956.\textsuperscript{94} As part of the 2011 constitutional reform, there are now quotas at both national and sub-national level: 90 seats were elected to the 395-member Chamber of Representatives in 2011, an increase from 34 of 345 were added to the parliament, of which 60 were reserved for women on a separate electoral list; there were 67 women members in 2009.\textsuperscript{95} Previously, 30 seats were reserved for women by an agreement to place women on the national lists of political parties.\textsuperscript{96} There continue to be six women in the 270-member Assembly of Councillors, elected in 2009.\textsuperscript{97}

The November 2008 agreement between the government and the decision-making structures of the major political parties stipulated that 12% of local council seats (equaling about 3,000 seats) would hereafter be reserved for women. Prior to this, less than 1% of these seats were held by women. More than 20,000 women ran for these offices in the June 2009 elections, with 3,421 winning seats. Twelve then became mayors and other local leaders through indirect election.\textsuperscript{98} In the current Government, there is one female in the 31-member cabinet. She serves as Minister of Social and Women’s Affairs. Several of the king’s senior advisors were women.\textsuperscript{99} Article 115 of the 2011 constitution specifies proportional representation of women magistrates in the Conseil Supérieur du Pouvoir Judiciaire.

A 2007 Pew survey found that 65\% of those polled believed men and women to be equally capable as political leaders.\textsuperscript{100} A World Values survey, also from 2007, asked a similar question without the option to rate them equally, and found that 58\% of respondents believed that men made better political leaders than women.\textsuperscript{101}

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\begin{footnotes}
\item[89] Sadiqi (2010) p.318
\item[90] CEDAW (2006) p. 57
\item[91] Freedom House (2010)
\item[92] Sadiqi (2010) p.327
\item[93] US Department of State (2011); Sadiqi (2010)
\item[94] Sadiqi (2010) p.311
\item[95] U.S. Department of State (2013) p. 20
\item[96] CEDAW (2006) pp. 23-24
\item[97] Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2010)
\item[98] U.S. Department of State (2010)
\item[99] U.S. Department of State (2013) p. 20
\item[100] pew Research Center (2007), Question Q.43
\item[101] World Values Survey (WVS (2007), Question V.61
\end{footnotes}
In its 2008 Concluding Observations on Morocco, the Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) noted its concern at the role played by the Moroccan media in perpetuating negative and limiting stereotypes regarding gender roles in society.\textsuperscript{102} The 2010 Freedom House report noted that media consistently portray women only as homemakers and mothers, fail to use gender-sensitive language, and downplay women’s achievements in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{103} A 2012 UN report similarly noted that Moroccan television frequently depicts women as weak in character and relegates them to the stereotypical role of home-maker or teacher.\textsuperscript{104}

The amended Labour Code, adopted in 2004, prohibits gender discrimination in employment, salaries, and promotion. According to the UN, protections to employees under the law do not apply to female migrant labourers and domestics. It also notes that women in Morocco are concentrated in certain jobs, for example, comprising 80% of textile workers.\textsuperscript{105} According to a 2011 Government report, the labour force participation rate for women in the formal sector was 25.5%, and a typical female worker earned 17% of what a man earned. Women were not represented in the leadership of trade unions.\textsuperscript{106} Survey data shows that, irrespective of marital status, women in Morocco spend vastly more time on household chores and child care than do men.\textsuperscript{107} They are also less likely to be literate, based on data collected from 2000 to 2007 by UNESCO, which show a literacy rate of 69% for males and 43% for females aged at least 15 years.\textsuperscript{108}

Morocco offers 14 weeks of maternity leave at 100% of a woman’s wages, payable from a national social security fund.\textsuperscript{109} The Labour Code includes three days paternity leave at full pay.\textsuperscript{110} A pregnant woman is also entitled to an additional year of unpaid leave if so desired.\textsuperscript{111} It is not clear how well these maternity protections cover women who work in the informal sector and who are not paid cash wages; for example, 92% of employed women in rural areas work in the agricultural sector.\textsuperscript{112}

Morocco further amended the Family Code in 2007 by passing the Nationality Code, which granted to Moroccan women married to foreigners the rights to pass on their citizenship to their children. Previously, only fathers possessed this right.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{102} CEDAW (2008) p.4
\textsuperscript{103} Sadiqi (2010) p.332
\textsuperscript{104} UN (2012) p. 10
\textsuperscript{105} UN (2012) p. 10
\textsuperscript{106} U.S. Department of State (2013) p. 26
\textsuperscript{107} World Bank (2013) p. 16
\textsuperscript{108} UNESCO (2011)
\textsuperscript{110} Labour Code, Article 269
\textsuperscript{112} JICA (2007) pp. 21, 24; CEDAW (2006) p. 53
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