



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Morocco lies on the northwest corner of Africa, across the Strait of Gibraltar from Spain. About the size of California, Morocco covers 172,413 square miles (446,550 square kilometers). Western Sahara, a disputed region that Morocco claims and administers, is 102,703 square miles (266,000 square kilometers) in area. Spain controls two coastal enclaves (Ceuta and Melilla) in the north.

Traversing the middle of the country from north to southwest are two snowcapped mountain chains: the Middle Atlas and the High Atlas, which includes Mount Toubkal, North Africa's highest peak at 13,671 feet (4,167 meters). South of the High Atlas Mountains lie the Anti-Atlas Mountains. In the north, along the Mediterranean Sea, runs the Rif Massif range. Most of the country's agriculture is grown between the mountainous interior and the Atlantic coastal lowlands, into which flow the Oum er Rbia and Tensift Rivers.

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History

The earliest known settlers of Morocco are believed to have come from southwestern Asia. Known collectively as Berbers, a more accurate indigenous term for them is Imazighen (meaning "free men"; Amazigh is the singular). Because of its strategic location, Morocco's history is replete with foreign invasion and rule, beginning with the Phoenicians in the 12th century BC and continuing with the Romans, Vandals, Visigoths, and Greeks.

The Arabs invaded in the seventh century AD and introduced Islam to Morocco. The Imazighen fought off direct Arab rule and established an independent kingdom in the eighth century. Two powerful Amazigh dynasties prospered until the 13th century, and even expanded the kingdom into other regions for a time. Following other invasions, the Alaouite Dynasty, which claims descent from the prophet Muhammad, took control in 1660. In 1787, Morocco signed a peace and friendship treaty with the United States. This treaty, which made Morocco one of the first independent nations to recognize U.S. sovereignty, is still in force.

European nations became involved in Morocco in the 19th century, and France made it a protectorate in 1912. The French ruled until Morocco's independence in 1956, when a constitutional monarchy was established. French and, secondarily, U.S. influence are still strong in Morocco. King Hassan II (who held power from 1961 to 1999) was a direct descendant of kings in the Alaouite Dynasty.

In 1975, Morocco occupied Western Sahara and forced Spain to withdraw. Morocco began developing the region but was opposed by its neighbors, particularly Algeria, and other

African states that recognized the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as Western Sahara's government. The SADR's military arm, the Polisario Front, then waged an expensive and violent war against Morocco. Determined to retain Western Sahara, Morocco built schools, hospitals, roads, and housing for the Saharan people.

Negotiations between King Hassan's government and the Polisario guerrillas opened in 1989 as part of a UN effort to solve the problem. A 1991 cease-fire ended 15 years of fighting and was to have preceded a UN-sponsored referendum in 1992. In the vote, residents of Western Sahara would be able to accept or reject annexation by Morocco. Unfortunately, the referendum has been repeatedly postponed because both sides cannot agree on who should be allowed to vote (i.e., all current residents or only those who were residents in 1974).

In 1996, a referendum in Morocco supported constitutional reforms that created a directly elected parliament and shifted some authority to local councils. Through elections in 1997, a Chamber of Representatives became Morocco's first freely elected legislative body. King Hassan II died in 1999; he was succeeded by his son Muhammad VI, who has maintained royal authority and conservative values.

THE PEOPLE

Population

Morocco's population of roughly 31.6 million is growing by 1.1 percent annually. It is composed of three main ethnic groups, the largest being the Imazighen and Arabs. Imazighen and Arabs interact but generally not on an intimate level. The Akkablajn (Haratin), descendants of slaves from West Africa, live throughout the southern part of Morocco. The term Haratin has a negative racial connotation. The Imazighen are geographically divided into three main groups: people of the Rif region refer to themselves as Irifin, people from the Middle Atlas mountains refer to themselves as Imazighen, and people of the High Atlas refer to themselves as Ashilhayn.

About 56 percent of Moroccans live in urban areas. Urban migration is swelling city populations. Casablanca and the metropolitan area of Rabat and Salé account for more than one-third of Morocco's urban population. Nearly 30 percent of Moroccans are younger than age 15. Western Sahara has an official population of about 491,500; most inhabitants are ethnic Sahrawi. These are nomadic peoples who live by animal husbandry and subsistence agriculture. The Moroccan government sends aid to Western Sahara and includes the people there in Morocco's official statistics.

Language

The main official language of Morocco is Arabic, although French also has official status and is used widely in business, government, and higher education. Moroccan Arabic, called *Derija* (literally, "dialect"), is the most widely spoken tongue. *Derija* is quite different from the classical Arabic of the *Qur'an*. Access to satellite television means many Moroccans understand Arabic dialects in neighboring countries.

Imazighen peoples, or some 60 percent of the population, speak Amazigh dialects in addition to Arabic. Prominent dialects include Tashilhayt (spoken in the High Atlas and Sous Valley), Tarifit (Rif region), and Tamazight (Middle Atlas region). Hasaniya, an Arabic dialect, is spoken around Goulmima and in the south, including Western Sahara. Spanish can still be heard in the north, which was formerly under Spanish control. English is gaining popularity.

Religion

Islam is the official religion of Morocco. The king is both the political and spiritual leader of his people. All ethnic Moroccans are Muslim. Conversion to another religion is not recognized by the state. Popular religion mixes aspects of various folk beliefs with traditional Islamic practices. Mosques are full on Fridays and during *Ramadan*. Many Moroccans are Sufi Muslims. Some Christians and Jews live in Morocco: Jews are mostly native to the country, while Christians have European roots.

Muslims believe in a monotheistic god (*Allah*). They accept most biblical prophets but consider Muhammad to be the last and greatest prophet. Muslims believe he received *Allah's* revelations through the angel Gabriel and recorded them in the *Qur'an*. Religion is a matter of daily practice. The Five Pillars of Islam that Muslims strive to accomplish are to profess *Allah* as God and Muhammad as his prophet, pray five times daily, give of their income to help the poor, fast each day during the month of *Ramadan*, and make at least one pilgrimage to Makkah, Saudi Arabia. Friday is the Muslim day of worship, when a sermon is spoken at the mosque during the noon prayer. Women are not barred from going to the mosque, but they usually worship at home.

General Attitudes

Moroccan culture is deeply rooted in Islam. When people suffer misfortune, they tend to attribute the cause to *Allah*, and the phrase *In sha'allah* (If God wills) is frequently heard. This belief is strongest in rural areas. Urban Moroccans, especially the more educated, do not adhere to it as much. Moroccans value family, honor, dignity, generosity, hospitality, and self-control (particularly of one's temper). A calm attitude gains respect. Women traditionally are restricted to domestic roles, but in urban areas they receive more education and may work outside the home.

Moroccan society has gradually become more materialistic than it used to be. People in rural areas tend to be closer to each other. Educated Moroccans are acquainted with other societies and cultures, but most Moroccans have a limited view about those outside their country. Their views of other societies usually trace back to their religion. For example, if a Moroccan dislikes another society because of its excessive alcohol consumption, it is due to Morocco's Islamic background.

Personal Appearance

The national garment is the *djelleba*, a hooded, ankle-length article of clothing with long sleeves. Although modest Western-style clothing is common throughout Morocco, many people wear *djellebas* every day over their clothing in

place of a jacket. Men also wear them on religious holidays and for other special occasions. For her wedding, a woman wears a long, hoodless robe known as a *keftan*. Moroccans believe it is important to be neat, well-groomed, and appropriately dressed so one will be treated with respect. Women may cover their heads with scarves, but some do not. When entering a mosque, Moroccans wear clothing that covers the entire body (except the head and hands), and they remove the shoes. One does not wear shorts or other recreational attire in public; shorts are reserved for the beach. Modern Western clothing is gaining popularity among young Moroccans, especially those in urban areas. The influence of Western media is noticeable in young people's clothing and hair styles.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

Moroccans generally shake hands when greeting, after which one might touch the heart to express pleasure at seeing the other person or to show personal warmth. Rural children conventionally kiss the right hand or forehead of their parents or elders to show respect when greeting. People might greet close friends or relatives by brushing or kissing cheeks.

Assalam Oualaikoum (Peace be upon you) is commonly used as "Hello." People also use *Sbah al Kheir* (Good morning) and *Msa al Kheir* (Good evening). More formally, one might say *Ahlan Wasahlan* (Pleased to see you). Friends may exchange the phrase *Labess*, which means both "How are you?" and "Fine." Greetings between friends also include inquiries about each other's well-being and that of their families. Hosts often extend repeated enthusiastic phrases of welcome. Less fervent greetings might be considered rude. It is polite to greet an acquaintance when passing on an urban street, but people do not greet strangers. In rural areas, most people know one another, so men greet men and women greet women when passing on the street.

Moroccans always use titles in formal situations and to address acquaintances. Friends address each other by first name. Elders might be referred to by a title such as *haj* (an honorable title for those who have completed a pilgrimage to Makkah) or the equivalent of "aunt" or "uncle."

Gestures

Moroccans eat with the right hand only. It is impolite to point at people or to let the bottom of the foot point toward a person. Moroccans generally consider it improper to cross their legs. Some might cross the legs at the knees but would not place an ankle over a knee.

Visiting

Frequent visits to friends and relatives are considered necessary to maintain strong relationships. Visiting is most popular on holidays but may occur at any time. Between family members, it is acceptable to visit unannounced. Whenever possible, friends make arrangements in advance. This is less common in rural areas, where telephones are not always available for calling ahead.

Moroccans are warm and gracious hosts. Social visits can last several hours. Guests invited for dinner in urban areas are not expected to take gifts. However, a gift of candy or a small toy for the hosts' children is appreciated. If urban residents visit a relative or friend in a rural area, they are expected to take a gift (staple foods, clothing, household items).

Guests generally are offered refreshments. Refusing them is impolite, although guests sometimes give a token refusal before accepting the offered item. Milk and dates were traditionally served as a sign of hospitality, but now cookies, bread, coffee, juice, or tea are more common. Mint tea is often offered to guests, business associates, or anyone with whom one might spend a few minutes during the day. It is considered a friendly, informal gesture that is affordable and easily prepared.

Guests please their hosts by complimenting them on their home. Men and women do not always socialize together. Rural couples more often socialize separately, while urban couples will socialize in mixed company. Men often associate in public coffeehouses, especially on weekends, holidays, or *Ramadan* evenings. At the end of *Ramadan*, heads of households give gifts of money or goods to the poor.

Eating

In most homes, the family eats lunch, the main meal of the day, together. Moroccans gather again at around five or six in the evening for coffee and a snack, followed a couple hours later by a light dinner of leftovers from lunch or soup.

Before and after eating, people wash their hands. In rural areas, a basin of water is provided; urban residents wash in the sink. Moroccans scoop up food with pieces of bread from a large communal dish, using the right hand only. Diners eat from the section of the dish directly in front of them.

Hosts encourage guests to eat as much as they like. If the hosts think guests have not eaten enough, they urge them to eat more. In traditional homes, it is impolite for guests to finish eating before the hosts, as this can imply the food did not taste good. Mealtime is an important time for conversation; guests who do not join the discussion embarrass the hosts. In restaurants, service typically is included in the bill, which usually is paid by the host.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Moroccan social life centers on the extended family, and family relationships are more important than any other. One's family is a source of reputation and honor, as well as financial and emotional support. It is considered one's duty to provide financial support to other members of the extended family when it is necessary or requested. Respect for parents and elders is an indication of true piety and manners. The significance of this relationship can be seen in the terms of address used for strangers in the street, where it is typical to refer to someone as a sister, grandmother, uncle, or brother, instead of using the standard greetings of "Madam," "Sir," or "Mister."

Historically, Moroccans used specific methods to keep

families together. They would build large houses designed to accommodate many family members, and additional rooms would be built in advance to make room for future married children. Even if they live separately from their parents, married children continue to maintain close contact with them. This practice has changed somewhat in Moroccan cities, but the idea remains. Parents may help newly married children buy an apartment upstairs or within the same neighborhood so as to be close but do not generally interfere with the domestic or private affairs of their children's families. Children often remain with the family until they marry, even after they have graduated from high school and have a profession of their own.

The tie between mother and son is the most important relationship. Men are very affectionate with children. Children, especially boys, are indulged but are also expected to contribute to the family by attaining a respectable position in society. Girls begin working in the house at a young age. When sons reach maturity, they are expected to care for their parents and siblings. A married son sometimes brings his wife to live with his parents in order to care for both of his family obligations at the same time. When necessary, adult children are expected to care for their aging parents in their own homes.

The father is the head of the family and provides the financial support. The mother's responsibilities include managing the home and providing care for the husband and children. In urban Morocco, some women share the responsibility of providing for the family's financial needs by working outside of the home. Since the 1980s, women have been encouraged to be involved in community and political affairs. Women currently hold high positions in government and business. One example is Fatima Zahra Mansouri, the current mayor of Marrakesh, one of Morocco's largest cities and main tourist destinations. Although women are held in high regard in Morocco, the movement for greater political and legal rights has been contested in recent years. Some groups call for equal rights based on Western models, while other groups argue for a more traditional, Islamic model for women's rights.

Polygamy is legal but not frequently practiced. A man may have as many as four wives, but he must have permission to marry from any wives he already has and must provide for each equally. Divorce, although frowned upon, is not uncommon.

Housing

Wealthy Moroccans can afford spacious villas, but most Moroccans live in apartments. Regardless of size, homes usually have a formal living room, where guests are entertained, and a television room, where family members spend most of their time. The living room is furnished with comfortable couches and pillows. Most urban housing has electricity and running water, but water access is less common in rural areas. Families migrating from rural areas to cities in an effort to find work have contributed to the growth of slums in Morocco's cities. Poor urban families may not have showers in their homes, so they go to the local public bath, or *hamam*.

Dating and Marriage

Dating in the Western sense does not occur in Morocco, but socializing between young unmarried men and women is becoming more common. Unlike the older generation, in which relationships between men and women were very limited, the new generation in Morocco socializes through school, work, and neighborhood. Dating one-on-one, as it is practiced in many Western countries, is not permitted. Some popular activities that are socially acceptable include strolling in the evening with friends, chatting in cafés, playing sports, and talking politics. Young women visit each other's homes at evening tea time or go shopping together.

When a young man becomes interested in marrying a young woman, he involves his family in the marriage negotiations. Women make most of the arrangements for the wedding before the official engagement party, where the men of both families gather to sign a contract and the families celebrate with sweets and flowers. In rural areas, young men and women often do not meet their mates until they are to be married. Urban couples meet in various situations, ask permission of their parents to marry, and have time to get acquainted before they get married. Marriage is the only love relationship culturally and religiously recognized in Morocco (unmarried couples have no rights) and is the most important of life events. When a couple is engaged, the man pays the woman's father or eldest brother a sum of money to meet her wedding expenses. This payment sometimes inhibits a man from marrying, because he cannot afford it. Women usually bring a dowry into the marriage. A woman is expected to be a virgin before marriage. Most women marry by their early twenties.

Weddings signify a new union between families and are celebrated as lavishly as possible. A wedding usually lasts two days. The first day is for the bride's female relatives and friends to come together and sing and dance. They decorate the bride's hands and feet with henna (a red plant dye). On the second day, the groom's family and the bride's family celebrate the wedding together to show they are one family.

Islamic law allows men to marry up to four wives, although it encourages only one. The state expects that the first wife agrees to subsequent marriages and that the husband proves that he has the physical, material, and financial capabilities to support more than one wife. Given these restrictions, very few polygamous marriages occur. Divorce is allowed, both in Islam and Morocco, but not encouraged socially. Under recent changes to family law, men and women have equal access to divorce. Divorced women return to their parents' home. It is easier for men to marry again than for women.

Life Cycle

Birth is an important family event and includes many ritual practices. When a woman discovers she is pregnant, the family celebrates one evening by cooking and cleaning for her and bringing her new clothes and other gifts. Around the seventh month of pregnancy, an expectant mother often gathers with female friends and family, who decorate her hands and feet with henna. When a child is born, the first

words uttered in his or her ear are those of the Muslim call to prayer. Seven days after the birth, a celebration is held to give the baby a name. A sheep is slaughtered as the name is pronounced, and friends and family bring gifts such as blankets and clothing for the newborn and money for the mother. Decorating the mother's hands with henna occurs again, and sometimes even the baby's hands are decorated. Most baby boys are circumcised in the first week after birth, but some families wait until the boy is age three or four. The circumcision is an important religious event and cause for another celebration. Young boys wear special clothing to the event, and a party is hosted with music and gifts.

Reaching adulthood does not bring with it any particular celebration in Morocco. Each family celebrates their own children's passage into adulthood differently and at different ages, depending on how quickly a child matures physically. The state recognizes someone as an adult at age 18, when an individual can apply for a national identity card.

In accordance with Muslim tradition, a deceased person is buried as soon as possible. The body is ritually washed with water, incense, and perfumes and wrapped in white cloth. Women stay at home and mourn while the men carry the body to the mosque. They offer prayers before taking it to the cemetery. Passages from the *Qur'an* are read while the body is buried. Three days after the death, and again at 40 days, friends and relatives visit to offer condolences to the family. Widows wear white for 4 months and 10 days.

Diet

Mutton, beef, and chicken are the principal meats in the Moroccan diet. Popular dishes include *kefta*, ground beef or mutton seasoned and cooked over charcoal; *tajine*, a meat-and-vegetable stew; and *harira*, a tomato-based soup with chickpeas, lentils, and beef or mutton. *Couscous* (steamed semolina made from wheat) is usually eaten on Fridays. Coastal Moroccans cook fish in a variety of ways. Mint tea is the national drink. Islam prohibits the consumption of pork and alcohol. Although some men drink alcohol, it is not socially acceptable.

Recreation

Moroccans enjoy spending time with each other, and activities are often spontaneous and simple. The basis of social life in Morocco is interaction with friends and family. Young men prefer playing or watching team sports, especially soccer. A few people play other sports or games, such as volleyball, tennis, basketball, or running. Champion runner Hicham el Guerrouj is a national hero.

Spending time in cafés is one of the main social activities among men, young and old, rich and poor. They discuss politics and sports, play cards or chess, and watch soccer games. Among the older generation, men gather in or around a mosque after prayer time to chat. Strolling the main streets in the evenings is another important way to spend time, especially among women, children, and the younger generation. Women regularly visit each other in their homes during tea time or on weekends. Some urban families with private transportation enjoy going on picnics in the countryside or to the beach. Families gather in the salon of

their homes to socialize among themselves. Because meals are considered an important social time, everyone in the family is expected to be present to share the dinner meal. Families do not go out to movies or restaurants, but they enjoy films and food with each other at home. Satellite television and pirated films are easily accessible to many people. Soccer balls are inexpensive and shared by neighborhood children who play together in the street.

The Arts

Forms of traditional music include Berber, Gnaouan, Chebbi, and Arab-Andalusian. Rhythmic Gnaouan music, originally from sub-Saharan Africa, features musicians that often do acrobatic crouching and whirling dances while playing. Arab-African *rai* (opinion) music is a popular art form, especially among Moroccan youth. Its lyrics are often about the social problems of young people and romantic stories that youth can relate to. Originally from Algeria, *rai* music was founded by Cheb Hasni, who was assassinated in 1993. All singers of *rai* music are called *cheb* (young man), followed by their first name. Youth also enjoy listening to Egyptian and Lebanese Arab pop music.

Morocco is famous for its pottery and ceramic tile. Artisans (especially Imazhigen) create silver jewelry, drums, carpets, hand-tooled leather, and wooden tables and boxes. Fine art forms such as painting and sculpture have developed significantly since Morocco gained independence in the 1950s.

Traditional literature includes histories, essays, and poetry, but other styles have been adopted. Poetry is often improvised and accompanied by a single-stringed instrument (*ribab* or *amzhad*) and a three-stringed banjo-like *lotar* or *kanza*.

Holidays

The most important holidays in Morocco are religious and are also celebrated as national holidays in which people are not required to work. Each year, Muslims observe *Ramadan*, a holy month of fasting and prayer, when no eating, drinking, or smoking is permitted from dawn to sunset. This month is revered as the time in which the *Qur'an* was revealed and is considered a time to renew one's faith. The dates for *Ramadan* (and all Muslim holidays) change from year to year in relation to the Gregorian calendar because they are based on a lunar calendar. *Ramadan* typically lasts for 30 days, and Moroccans celebrate this time with special foods and practices. They awake before dawn to share a light breakfast, and some people begin with prayer and fasting in the mosque. Children, pregnant women, travelers, foreign visitors, and the ill are exempt from the fast. Children attend a shortened day of school, and work hours are altered to accommodate the missing lunchtime and to allow people to rest in the afternoon. The fast ends each day after sundown, when participants eat a date and drink some milk, followed by a traditional soup called *harira*. Special breads and sweets are also served. Select prayers are offered each evening in the mosque, and the *Qur'an* is recited. The streets fill with people after these prayers, and people enjoy staying up late to visit with each other. The 30-day fasting period ends with a three-day feast, known as *Aid al Saghir*, which is also a

national holiday.

Three months after *Ramadan*, the Feast of Sacrifice is held to commemorate the near sacrifice of Ishmael by his father, Isaac. The holiday begins with an outdoor early-morning prayer in specially designated fields large enough to accommodate all of the community—women, men, and children. Later on comes the main part of the festival—the ritual slaughter of a sheep by some men of the household. Women then clean the meat and prepare special dishes enjoyed by the whole family in the following days.

Other religious holidays include *Ashoura* (a special day of fasting), *Eid al-Moulid* (a celebration of the prophet Muhammad's birth), *Aid al Kebir* (the feast at the end of the pilgrimage to Makkah), and *Mouloud* (celebrating the birth of Muhammad). In addition, numerous *Moussems* (religious festivals) are held throughout the year. Morocco's official public holidays include International New Year (1 Jan.), Throne Day (30 July), Youth Day (21 Aug.), Green March Day (6 Nov.), and Independence Day (18 Nov.).

SOCIETY

Government

Morocco is a constitutional monarchy, but King Muhammad VI has broad powers as head of state. He appoints the prime minister (currently Abbas el Fassi) and retains authority to dissolve the legislature or revoke its decisions. The legislature has a 270-seat upper house (Chamber of Counselors) that can cast a no-confidence vote against the prime minister or overturn legislation from the 325-seat lower house (Chamber of Representatives). Counselors are indirectly elected to nine-year terms by an electoral college of local leaders and professionals. Representatives are directly elected to five-year terms. Elected regional councils have authority and funding to oversee development. The voting age is 18.

Economy

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy, employing about 45 percent of the labor force. Most agricultural production is carried out by subsistence farmers, but a small modern sector produces enough food to account for 30 percent of all export earnings. Morocco has the world's third largest deposit of phosphate, which accounts for about 20 percent of export earnings. Other significant industries are food processing, leather goods, textiles, construction, and tourism. Morocco's small manufacturing sector is growing. Morocco has a small stock market, one of the first in the Arab world. About 15 percent of the labor force works abroad, primarily in western Europe. The money these workers send back to Morocco helps offset the country's foreign debt. Chronically high unemployment, illiteracy, a large government bureaucracy, and inefficient state-owned industries remain economic challenges. The currency is the Moroccan *dirham* (MAD).

Transportation and Communications

Paved roads connect all major cities and provide excellent access to the rest of the country. Public buses and interurban taxis are available almost everywhere. Rural people walk, ride

bicycles or motorcycles, or ride mules when carrying loads. Urban dwellers use the public transit system. Seven airports offer national service. A rail system connects the major cities of the north.

The government provides basic telegraph, telephone, and postal services. These are considerably better in cities than in rural areas. There are two main television stations: the government-owned station broadcasts nationwide, while the private station serves major urban areas. Satellite dishes are common and allow access to French and Arab stations. Two national radio stations and eight regional stations serve the country. Newspapers are common, though several have been banned; the government tolerates little criticism of its policies. Many Moroccans use shortwave radios and satellite television to listen to news or watch shows from other countries. Internet access is growing; all major cities and some towns have internet cafés.

Education

Public education is free and mandatory in Morocco. Since the 1980s, the government has devoted considerable resources to improving the education system. While the adult literacy rate is low, literacy among youth is rising due to government efforts to build schools and train teachers. Still, less than two-thirds of all eligible children actually attend school. Many cannot afford the additional costs associated with school, such as books, uniforms, transportation, and food.

Literacy rates are higher for men than women, especially in rural areas due to the difficulties in transportation to the schools. Only 20 percent of rural women are literate. Girls and rural children are less likely than boys and urban residents to attend school. Many students in previous generations did not finish high school, but the current generation generally obtains a high school diploma.

Preschool offers religious and patriotic instruction. Historically there were *Qur'anic* schools, the equivalent of a preschool, where children aged three to five learned the Arabic alphabet and how to recite the *Qur'an*. Now there are private preschools that instruct children in the Arabic and French alphabets, basic math, and the *Qur'an*.

Those who do attend preschool typically begin at age six or seven and continue in primary school for six years. They study Arabic, French, Islamic law, math, and science. This period is followed by three years of preparatory or middle school, where the same topics are studied at a more advanced level, and history and geography are added. High school follows and lasts for three years, ending with a major national exam, which is required to obtain a diploma and can be taken up to three times, once each year. Students choose a major, either in science or humanities, that will prepare them for attendance at a university. Majors are partially determined by scores on the national exam. Schools for medicine and engineering have limited spots, and it is very difficult to obtain a place. High school students study physics, English, Spanish, German, economics, and philosophy in addition to the basic subjects of earlier years. It is typical for students to have two hours of homework each night, and instruction is given in Arabic. Private school instruction is usually in French or English, but it is expensive and exclusively for the

wealthy elite.

Public university is free, and a bachelor's degree can be awarded in three years. Morocco has 13 universities and many colleges and training institutes. Children who do not finish school are often apprenticed to artisans to learn a trade, such as construction, ceramics, or metal working. There is a shared sense among Moroccans that the education system does not meet the needs of the job market or teach effective skills. Most learning involves rote memorization and lectures. Cheating is said to be widespread, and parental involvement is often limited. Recent attempts have been made to use more technology in the classroom and provide better books and other materials, but funding is often insufficient.

Health

Morocco lacks a comprehensive national healthcare system, but the Ministry of Health is trying to provide services to every region. Each province has at least one hospital and some clinics, but these generally do not meet the needs of the entire population. Facilities are severely limited in rural areas. Rural women often will not go to a hospital or clinic because there are no female doctors or nurses. While water in urban areas is usually potable, rural water supplies are not as clean.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

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POPULATION & AREA

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|---------------|----------------------|
| Population | 31,627,428 (rank=38) |
| Area, sq. mi. | 172,413 (rank=58) |
| Area, sq. km. | 446,550 |

DEVELOPMENT DATA

| | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Human Dev. Index* rank | 114 of 182 countries |
| Gender inequality rank | 104 of 155 countries |
| Real GDP per capita | \$4,600 |
| Adult literacy rate | 66% (male); 40% (female) |
| Infant mortality rate | 29 per 1,000 births |
| Life expectancy | 73 (male); 79 (female) |

*UN Development Programme, Human Development Report 2010 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).