

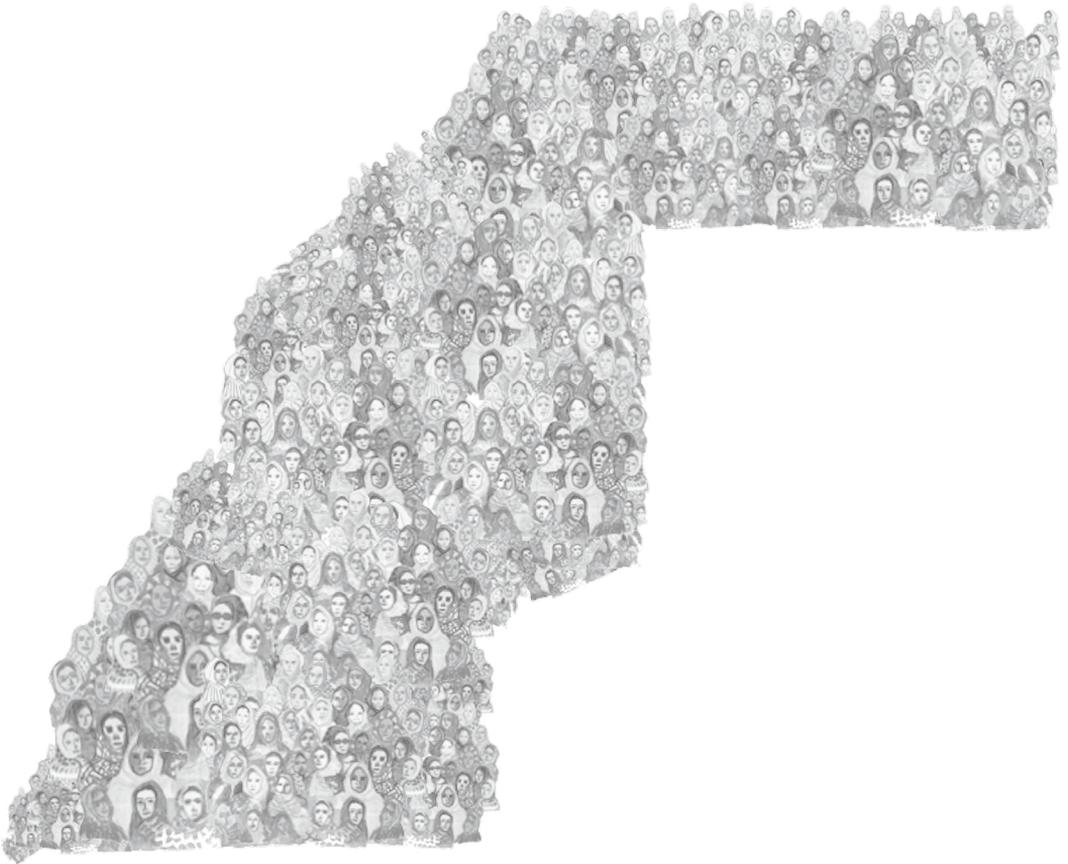
Let Everything Come to Light

Human Rights Violations of Women in Occupied Western Sahara (1975-2021)



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This publication has been carried out within the framework of the project *La verdad se abre paso: investigación e incidencia ante las violaciones de derechos humanos en el Sáhara Occidental. Visibilizando la situación específica de las mujeres saharauís. 2020-2021* (The Truth Comes Out: Research and Advocacy on Human Rights Violations in The Western Sahara. Focusing on the Specific Situation of Sahrawi Women). Funded by Euskal Fondoa–Asociación de Entidades Locales Vascas Cooperantes.



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Let Everything Come to Light. Human Rights Violations of Women in Occupied Western Sahara (1975-2021)

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1. Introduction



I lived through the war, I was a victim of disappearance and torture for many years, then I lived through the years of the ceasefire, and now war again. I don't see any difference in the Moroccan regime. Now it has other ways of killing our people, of torturing us right out in the open, of finding any reason to send our young people to prison. All the persecutions that our people suffer daily are the result of state terrorism adapted to the 21st century.

This report is the result of an investigation into human rights violations of women committed by Morocco in occupied Western Sahara between 1975 and 2021, that is to say, since the beginning of the civil and military occupation of Sahrawi territory. The investigation is a joint project involving a team of Sahrawi women human rights defenders who have created the Sahrawi Women's Space in the Occupied Territory, and the Hegoa Institute, and it has received the support of the Euskal Fõndoa–Asociación de Entidades Locales Vascas Cooperantes.

This report has been preceded by two works written by the Hegoa Institute: firstly, the investigation of human rights violations in Western Sahara published in 2012 with the title *The oasis of memory. Historical memory and human rights violations in the Western Sahara*¹, which included 261 testimonies by Sahrawi men and women in the refugee camps in Tindouf (Algeria) and in the occupied territories; and secondly the investigation of human rights violations of women in occupied Western Sahara published in 2016 with the title *In occupied land. Memory and resistance of women in Western Sahara*², based on focus groups with women political activists in occupied El Aaiun.

Both studies formed an important basis of knowledge and learning in terms of the design of this investigation, which is both quantitative and qualitative and which focuses on the human rights violations of women in occupied Western Sahara, with the added value of having been carried out jointly between a team of Sahrawi women located in El Aaiun and the Hegoa Institute.

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- 1 Martín Beristain, Carlos and Eloísa González Hidalgo (2012). *The oasis of memory. Historical memory and human rights violations in the Western Sahara. Volumes I and II.* Hegoa Institute. Bilbao. <https://publicaciones.hegoa.ehu.es/publications/281>. This study acted as the basis for other reports focussing on, for example, forced disappearance and on bombings of the civil population.
 - 2 Mendia Azkue, Irantzuz and Gloria Guzmán Orellana (2016). *In occupied land. Memory and resistance of women in Western Sahara.* Hegoa Institute. Bilbao. <https://publicaciones.hegoa.ehu.es/publications/348>.

Documenting in a targeted way the violations of women's rights in the context of the Moroccan occupation is essential in order to have specific, up-to-date tools that support demands for justice at the international level. This work has been made possible by the determination and commitment of the Sahrawi team, which not only works in the highly hostile situation of the Moroccan occupation and in the midst of the pandemic, but also given the circumstance of the breakdown of the ceasefire between the Polisario Front and Morocco, which has heightened Morocco's vigilance and repression of the Sahrawi population in occupied areas and, particularly, of people active in Sahrawi human rights organizations.

At the methodological level, this study is based on 81 testimonies by Sahrawi women who have been direct victims of one or more human rights violations committed by the Moroccan regime. In order to collect these testimonies, in-depth interviews were carried out, surveys were completed and supporting documentation was compiled covering the human rights violations reported.

The work carried out has included the following tasks: 1) preparation of the methodological approach for the investigation by the Hegoa team in consultation with the Sahrawi team; 2) joint preparation of the quantitative and qualitative tools for the fieldwork and the schedule for the documentation stages; 3) training with the team of Sahrawi researchers, including the development of content covering human rights investigations with a gender perspective, the validation of tools for fieldwork and guidelines for taking testimony; 4) documentation tasks carried out exclusively by the Sahrawi team, with support from the Hegoa team; 5) transcription and translation of all the testimonies and case forms; 6) processing of the information and transfer to the Excel database created for the purposes of this investigation; 7) quantitative processing of the data; 8) qualitative processing of all the testimonies (over 600 pages), and 9) final writing of this report.

Technical details	
Report on human rights violations of Sahrawi women committed by Morocco	
General goal	To analyse the violations of human rights committed against Sahrawi women in occupied Western Sahara by Morocco.
Specific goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To find out the general profile of the Sahrawi women whose rights have been violated. - To find out the incidents and characteristics of the rights violations, and who has been responsible. - To find out the consequences or impacts produced by the violence in the lives of the women. - To find out the strategies that women have used to deal with the violence suffered. - To find out the degree to which the women have been able to access justice (reports made, investigations carried out, responses received). - To find out the women's demands for reparation and guarantees of non-repetition.
Research population	Sahrawi women in the occupied areas who have suffered human rights violations at the hands of Morocco.
Sampling method	Non-probability sampling: snowball sampling method.
Sample	Sample size: N = 81 interviews carried out and surveys given.
Sampling site	El Aaiun, capital of Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara.
Information collection period	September 2020 – January 2021.
Information collection instruments	Interview form and script. (Appendix 1. Interview form). (Appendix 2. Interview script).

The statistical information processed is based on the 81 interviews carried out by the Sahrawi research team, based on which the same number of interview forms were completed. Each interview has been recorded, transcribed and translated from Hassaniya to Spanish, and some of them include supporting documentation (for example, reports made to official bodies, photographs and videos) provided by the women interviewed. Of the 81 cases, 77 women gave their testimony as direct victims and 4 as relatives of victims.

As well as basic information on the profile of the women interviewed, information was collected regarding the types of human rights violations, as follows: right to life; torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; sexual violence; violations of liberty and personal security; forced displacement; and violations of economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR). This is a broad range in order to obtain the most exhaustive possible knowledge of the human rights situation of women in occupied Western Sahara. Furthermore, information was collected regarding those who had committed the violence and also regarding the consequences or impacts of this violence, as well as the strategies used by the women to deal with or try to recover from these impacts. The study also aims to find out the levels of access to justice of the women interviewed, and the kinds of demands that they make in terms of reparation and guarantees of non-repetition.

All the testimonies were taken carefully and respectfully by the team of Sahrawi interviewers, who carried out a process of active listening to terrible experiences, unimaginable suffering and deep wounds. Informed, written and signed consent was requested from all the people interviewed. 99% of the women gave permission for their identities to be made public although, in the end, the research team chose to use codes instead of proper names when citing testimonies, following the principle of prudence, given the impunity with which the Moroccan regime represses those who report violence and defend self-determination and human rights in occupied Western Sahara³. Furthermore, and for the same reason, it was chosen to omit the names of the people indicated by the women as the perpetrators of the human rights violations documented in this report.

3 The identity of the women only appears in the case of the various photographs included in this report, provided by the women themselves together with their testimonies and as part of their explicit willingness to make visible the violence suffered.

This report contains quantitative data as an added contribution in order to show the frequencies and identify the patterns of Moroccan violence against Sahrawi women. The quantitative findings are combined with qualitative information obtained through the in-depth interviews, by means of the inclusion of testimonies that contribute to illustrating the seriousness of violent incidents. The testimonies constitute the essential information allowing us a glimpse of the horror of the experiences described by the women.

Due to the nature of this report, it is impossible to include references to the 81 testimonies collected in the investigation. For this reason, once all of them were checked, we carried out a process of selecting extracts that might reflect the general experience of Sahrawi women in Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara, particularly of those who are active in exposing the reality of the Moroccan occupation. In any case, the abundant information compiled now forms part of the living archive of the memory of the Sahrawi people and constitutes a source of great value for new research.

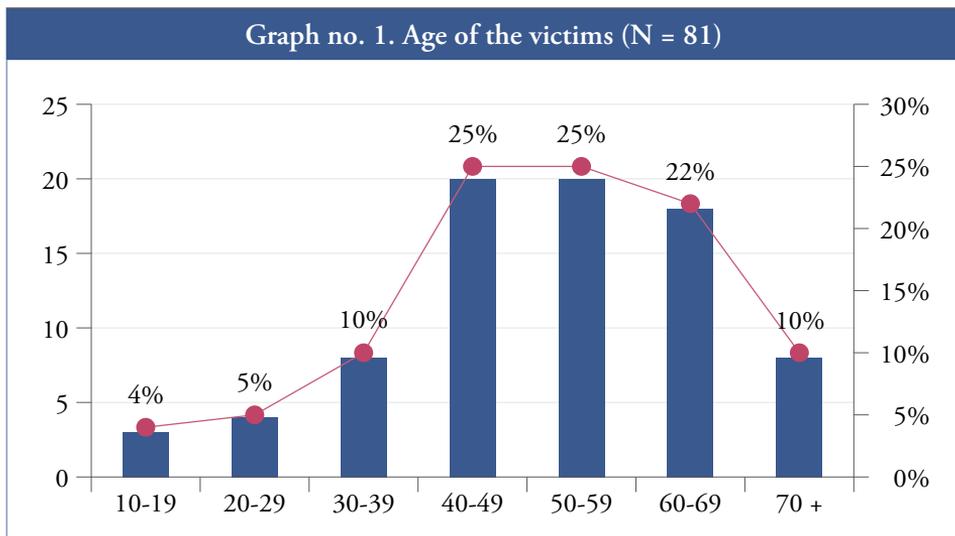
2. Profile of the people interviewed



Almost all of the women who gave their testimony for this investigation did so as direct victims of human rights violations committed by the Moroccan regime in occupied Western Sahara. Furthermore, three of them have given their testimony as relatives of women who have disappeared or been killed, and one as the mother of a child victim.

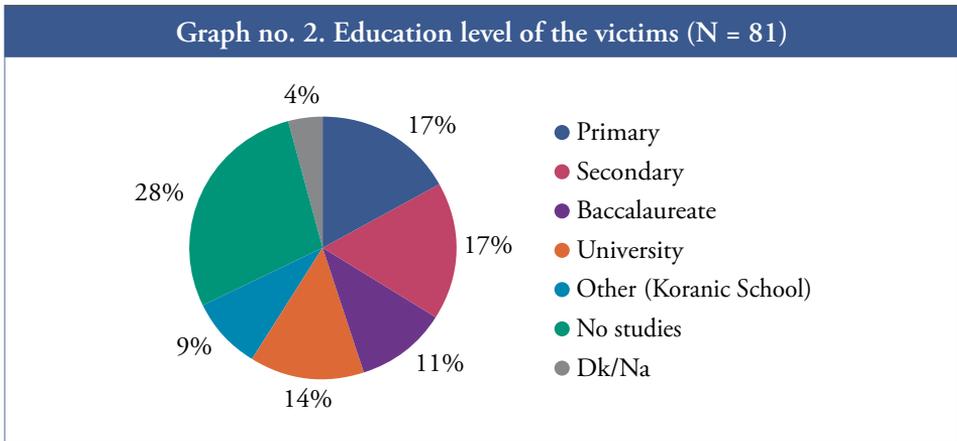
Most of the Sahrawi women who gave their testimony (58%) were born in the city of El Aaiun, and the others in places such as Tan-Tan, Gleimim, Boujdour, El Hagounia, Saguia el-Hamra, Esmara, Akka, Bir Anzarane, Echdeiria, Gdeim Izik, Ifni, Echraifia, Ouarzazate and Agadir. Practically all of them currently live in El Aaiun, with a strong presence (38%) in the neighbourhood of Zemla, while the others live in other parts of the city.

The age of the women whose testimony has been collected for this investigation ranges between 12 and 73, a very wide range that, in and of itself, is indicative of the great suffering of Sahrawi women, a suffering that has been prolonged over generations and up to the present day. At the time of their interview, most (72%) were in the 40 to 69 age range, 9% were under 29, and 10% over 70. The violent incidents suffered by the women occurred at different moments of their lives, including when they were children.

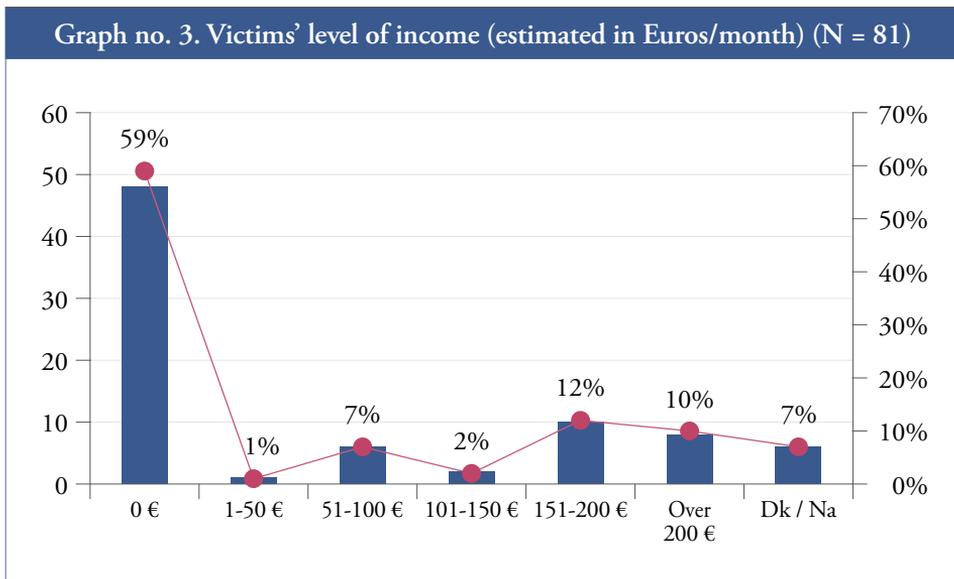


In terms of their marital status, 43% are married, 21% unmarried, 20% are widows and 16% divorced. The majority of them, 73%, have children.

In terms of their educational background, the majority of the women have had no formal education (28%). Of those who have, 17% have primary school educations, 17% secondary school studies, 11% have a baccalaureate, 14% have university degrees and 9% have studied at a Koranic School. These are figures that indicate limitations in terms of their right to education, whose causes, as shall be seen below, are directly related to the impacts of the military occupation.



Another class of information registered is the women's level of income, in order to give a view of material living conditions in occupied Western Sahara. Of the 81 women interviewed, 59% have no monthly income of any kind, 11% have incomes up to 150 Euros, 12% have incomes between 151 and 200 Euros and only 10% have incomes of over 200 Euros. The results are significant and indicate a situation of serious financial insecurity.



Furthermore, it is striking that of the percentages of women without any kind of monthly income, those with secondary studies (86%) and university studies (73%) are the highest. That is to say, contrary to what we might expect, for women in occupied Western Sahara, having a higher education level does not necessarily mean greater opportunities for employment or earning income. Once again, and as will be shown below, these figures link up with the impacts of violations of women's economic, social and cultural rights.

Lastly, as part of the basic information that allows a general characterisation of the Sahrawi women victims of human rights violations by Morocco, another of the aspects observed is their level of participation in organizations. In this sphere, over half (59%) participate in an organization that is part of the Sahrawi people's rights movement. Among those who do not participate actively in a specific group, many expressed their feeling that this does not mean they are not rights activists. Having consented to give their testimony for this study is proof of this.

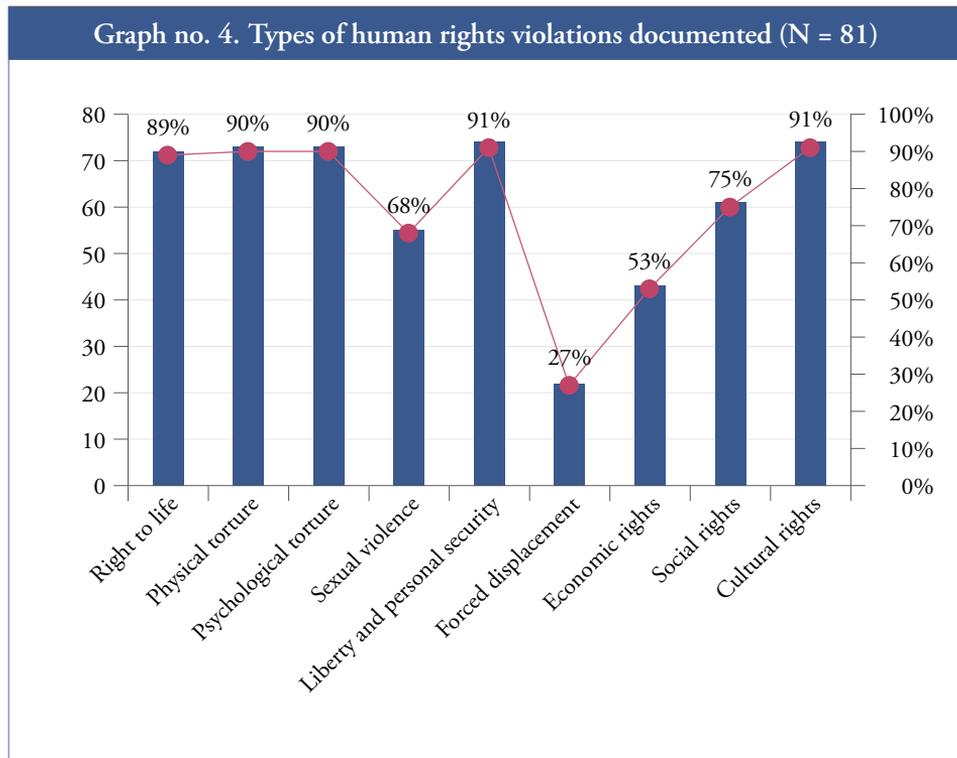
All the women who have given their testimony fit the profile of human rights defenders, according to the definition given by the United Nations in the *Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*

(1998), better known as the *Declaration on Human Rights Defenders*. This states that they are people who act towards the “promotion and protection of civil and political rights as well as the promotion, protection and realization of economic, social and cultural rights”. This covers a wide and diverse range of problems, for example, “the right to life, food and water, the highest possible level of health, an adequate home, a name and a nationality, education, freedom of movement and of non-discrimination”. This investigation reflects the experience of Sahrawi women who are victims of the repression of the Moroccan regime because of their defence of their rights as a people.

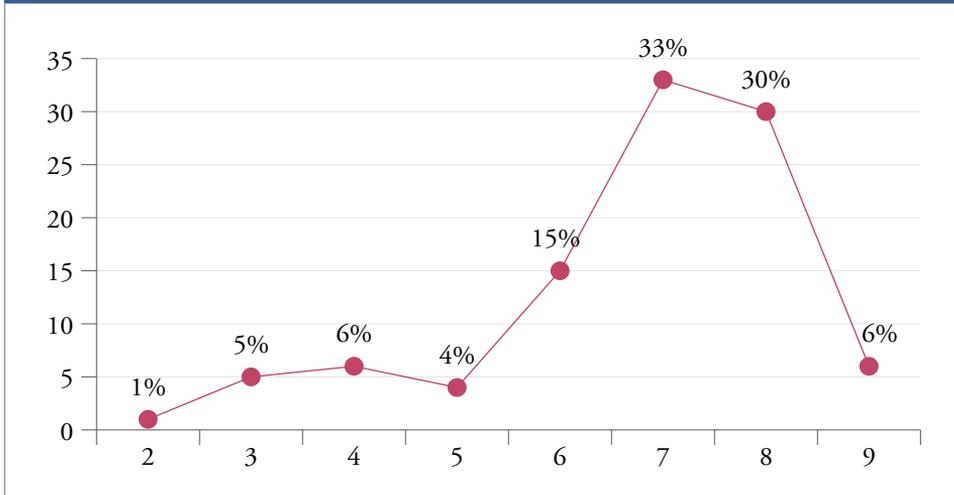
3. Human rights violations documented



The Sahrawi women have been victims of all kinds of human rights violations. As this investigation has revealed, the five types that appear most frequently are: violations of liberty and personal security (91%), violations of cultural rights (91%), physical torture (90%), psychological torture (90%) and the violation of the right to life (89%). These are followed by: the violation of social rights (75%), sexual violence (68%), the violation of economic rights (53%) and forced displacement (27%). On average, the Sahrawi women have been victims of 6.7 human rights violations during their lives, and the majority (69%) report between 7 and 9.



Graph no. 5. Number of human rights violations per victim (N = 81)



3.1. Violation of the right to life

89% of the Sahrawi women reported attacks on the right to life as direct or indirect victims. As direct victims, many of the incidents are related to crimes of torture and attacks on liberty and personal security, which will be set out in a more detailed way in later sections. As indirect victims, the testimonies reveal situations in which the women have witnessed **extrajudicial executions** of relatives or others known to them, some at clandestine detention centres⁴ and others in different circumstances.

4 The women interviewed often mentioned some of these centres in particular, such as: the Mobile Intervention Company Command Post (MICCP), the old Spanish army quarters in El Aaiun, used by Morocco as a clandestine detention centre; the Rapid Intervention Battalion (RIB) site, a clandestine detention centre near El Aaiun used by Morocco for moving disappeared-detained persons; Kalaat Maguna (Morocco), a detention centre located in the fort of El Glaoui, built by the French army in 1927; and Agdez (Morocco): a clandestine detention centre to where at least 200 men and women Sahrawi detainees have been taken. For more information about these and other Moroccan detention centres, see the *Mapa de Derechos Humanos del Sáhara Occidental* e created by the Hegoa Institute at: https://www.hegoa.ehu.eus/mapa_sahara/presentacion.html.

In prison they condemned us to a slow death. You die by gradually becoming ill, you start to have problems with blood circulation, then your joints seize up, and little by little you stop moving, you get something similar to cholera and then you die. We lost 27 companions in Agdez... When you start to get ill in prison, in 10 days you will be dead. They only let us knock on the door to tell them about a death, nothing else. In the case of Naaja, she asked me to tell the guard to get a pill for the pain, and when I did the guard insulted me and ordered me back in. Naaja died the following night. In Agdez, the way we were treated was indescribable, there are no words to tell everything that we Sahrawis experienced in that prison. When we told them about a death they came and broke that person's spine in order to be sure they were really dead. Everything was an insult to life, to the most basic human rights. (027)

They came for me, I was asleep and I had a little girl, aged just a year and 11 months. They blindfolded me and took me to the MICCP. I was surprised when I got there because they were holding my uncles and aunts and my cousins there, there were six of us from the same family and they tortured all of us, starting with my uncle and continuing with the rest of us. Then they took us to the RIB, which is the beach, the hideaway of torture and torturers, and that was hell. They tortured my cousin so much they killed him. I saw how he was bleeding from the mouth and the nose... it was really terrible to listen to his screams and groans, really terrible, until he died... They opened the door and the police took him out, I have been a direct witness to how little by little he just went away. (059)

When I was 16 they killed my mother. She was a nurse and she took part in the revolutionary struggle. She was threatened many times, they told her to stop everything she was doing or, if she did not, she would suffer reprisals. They detained her and took her to the old government headquarters, and she was there from morning until that evening, until my stepfather came and got her out. After two or three months my mother started to have a very sore head; I took her to the hospital, and she said to me, 'my daughter, don't let me sleep in the hospital for anything in the world'. In the hospital they gave her an injection that had a colour somewhere between red and black, more black than red, and immediately after that she started to swell up and the man who had injected her said: 'lie her down in the room'. I went to the market to buy her juice and soup and when I came back I saw my mother, barefoot, escaping

from the hospital. She was swollen and I ran towards her and she fell, with her mouth full of foam and she was covered in faeces, as God is my witness, I was the only witness to everything that happened, I was there when she was murdered; her skin was covered in red, green and black spots. Many people gathered there and they told me 'call the woman who washes the dead'... (006)

Among the violations of the right to life, 33% of the women interviewed have been the victim of **enforced disappearance**, classified as a crime of *lèse humanité* in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998). This is another of the most serious practices committed by Morocco against the Sahrawi population. The fate of many of the women subject to enforced disappearance continues to be unknown, while others were freed after spending varying periods as disappeared-detained, from months up to 16 years.

Some of the women interviewed have given testimony of the enforced disappearance of relatives, while the majority experienced this crime directly. The most frequent experience is that of those who were abducted and taken to one or more clandestine detention and torture centres, such as the MICCP, the RIB, the fort of Kalaat Maguna or Agdez. Morocco has practiced enforced disappearance against women of all ages: children, adolescents, adults and older women. As disappeared-detained, the women were subject to innumerable forms of suffering, as is made clear in the part of the report that covers torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

The practice of enforced disappearance was systematic in occupied Western Sahara during the second half of the 1970s, at the beginning of the occupation, and during the 1980s and 1990s. The extracts selected show the harsh nature and the continuing occurrence of enforced disappearances of the Sahrawi women over time.

We lived in Tan-Tan. They started to take all the women and children, I don't know if it was late 1975 or 1976. I was a little girl, I was 6, and when I was shut up there I saw them torture my grandmother and other women in front of us [girls and boys], I cried until I couldn't cry any more. When my grandmother wasn't even able to talk, they took her, they tortured her and they asked about her children and about those who had gone to the refugee camps. My grandmother was ill and couldn't move because of the tortures. Later they

dumped her near Glimin and she had to walk many kilometres in order to get home. She was with some friends until she died. She died alone, without her family. (037)

I was abducted in 1980; there were two police cars and a gendarmerie car. I was 32, very young, at that time. We got to El Aaiun, and at the main police station they interrogated me... Afterwards they blindfolded me again and took me to the MICCP; they waited until nightfall to start the tortures, I was broken... Later they took us in a military aeroplane to Casablanca, and the next morning they started again with the interrogation and the tortures. After ten months there, one night some lorries came, they took out ropes and started to tie us up by our hands and feet; they kicked us and hit us in all kinds of ways and they called us all kinds of obscenities: 'shitty Polisarios', 'sons of whores'... They tied us all up, women first, they blindfolded us and they put us in the lorries, and they had us tied really tight with the ropes; we were really weak, we screamed with pain and some cried, we couldn't take this mistreatment any more. We were there until they took us to the prison in the fortress of Maguna. When we arrived we suffered the same reception, they pushed us out of the lorries and the ones at the bottom were received with blows with sticks, they put us in some garages and they locked us up. I spent 11 years disappeared, until 1991. (071)

I was abducted in 1987. Two men dressed as soldiers came and told me they were from Security and they wanted to asked some questions for two or three minutes... As soon as I got into the car, one grabbed my hair and put my head between my legs, and then I realized that it wouldn't be two minutes, but rather days, or even an enforced disappearance, just like that of my grandmother and many other people who have been gone since 1975. I saw very quickly that this was going to be my fate. (001)

I am a direct victim, just like many Sahrawi women and men who are not in favour of the occupation of our territory. I experienced enforced disappearance in 1991; I suffered all kinds of tortures and hardships between November and December of that year. I was in the police station of El Aaiun, and they kept me hidden there for a long time and nobody knew where I was, I did not receive visitors and nobody knew where I was located and they did whatever they wanted with me... I spent the whole time with my eyes blindfolded and my hands tied. (003)

I suffered a crime against humanity, which is enforced disappearance; I was 20; they detained me on the 21st of November 1987 until the 18th of June 1991. I was at the secret MICCP centre in occupied El Aaiun. Later on they took me to the RIB, which was a military headquarters used by the Spanish in the colonial period. There we suffered many physical and psychological tortures, all kinds of violence. After a week of interrogations and tortures, they took us back to the MICCP again, and there they continued with the same torture, of all kinds. They refused me medical attention, they didn't let us sleep either during the day or at night, I couldn't lift my arms and I didn't have the right to wash myself or defend myself. They locked me up without any trial and my family was looking for me but without a reply. (019)

I was disappeared for four years, and my family didn't know anything about me, whether I was alive or dead. (059)

3.2. Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

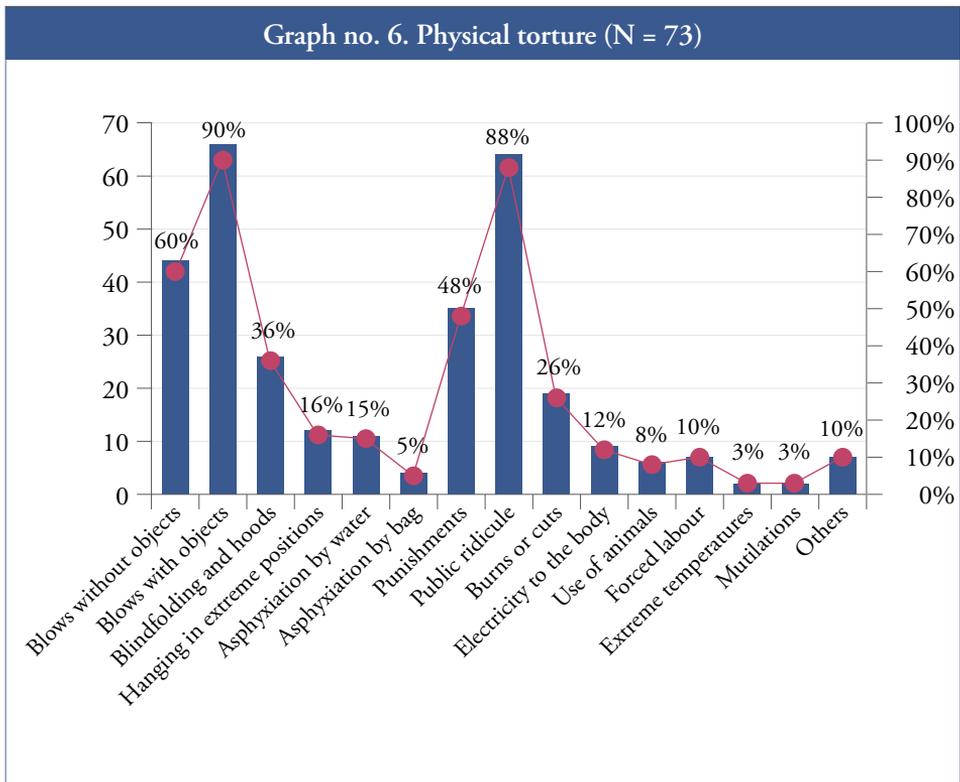
According to the *Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* (1984), torture is understood to be “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or her or a third person information or a confession, punishing him or her for an act which he or she or a third person has committed, or intimidating or coercing him or her or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official acting in an official capacity or other person acting in an official capacity” (art.1).

90% of the Sahrawi women interviewed have been subject to different kinds of **torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment** by Morocco. The incidents of torture occurred during the periods when the women were disappeared-detained, and in locations such as prisons or clandestine detention centres. Furthermore, this serious human rights violation also happens repeatedly in other contexts and places, for example,

before, during and after demonstrations, gatherings and protests, in public spaces and in full daylight.

For the purposes of this analysis, we have made a distinction between physical and psychological torture, although in general both kinds appear at the same time in the experience of violence

The forms of **physical torture** applied to the Sahrawi women have been many and in some cases have been very extreme. They include: blows with objects (90%), public ridicule (88%), blows without objects (60%), punishments (48%), blindfolding and the use of hoods (36%), burns or cuts (26%), hanging in extreme positions (16%), asphyxiation by immersion in water (15%), application of electricity to the body (12%), forced labour (10%), the use of animals (8%), asphyxiation with a bag (5%), mutilations (3%) and extreme temperatures (3%).



In many cases, the Sahrawi women were **struck with or without objects** for days and so hard that many lost consciousness.

They had an instrument that they called “the torturer”, which was a stick with a whip hanging from it. When they struck us with it, it was so sore the pain was unbearable. (076)

I was in a very cold place, it was really cold... I couldn’t stand it from all the torture. I remember that after pouring water on my head, they took a drive belt and hit me on the head until I lost consciousness. (012)

As soon as I entered the police station I encountered a group of Moroccans who started to beat me, hit me; a few of them took hold of me and they threw me around as if I were a ball. They always used to torture me at night. I cannot forget the night that the martyr Ejnaza Aallad died; I realized that my companion had died when they blindfolded me with a piece of clothing that had belonged to her. At that time they tortured, interrogated, tortured and interrogated us for 15 days. They tortured us until we were almost dead and then they would take us for interrogation. (060)



There was one behind me, who kicked me behind the heart, and then I was not aware of anything else, everything went black and I did not come back to reality until a long time afterwards. They pulled me by the hair and I was soaked, they grabbed me all over and they took me to that little room again. The torturers returned for me at nightfall, they handcuffed me and they blindfolded me. I was swollen all over from being hit, and one eye was completely closed, I couldn’t open it; and my mouth was also wrecked. (071)

The way they tortured one of the women was to put the baton between her toes and press down until her little toe separated from her other toes. (078)

In other cases, **punishments** and forms of **public humiliation** were recorded; the goal of these is to degrade and humiliate people and affect their dignity.

We spent 13 days undergoing continuous physical and psychological torture, without drinking or eating, never mind washing; they punished us by facing us to the wall standing on just one foot, with the other raised. We spent 13 days like that. (059)

Water torture is when they pour it down your throat; it caused us diarrhoea and we couldn't even stand up, they dragged us to the toilet. (060)

We organize many demonstrations and the repression against us is the same; they hit us with batons and they drag us through the streets, they take our clothes off; they want to give a very negative image of us as women. (043)

The combination of methods of physical torture has been a frequent practice against the Sahrawi women. As can be seen in the testimonies, they have suffered **hanging in extreme positions**, different kinds of **asphyxiation** (using immersion in water and other kinds of liquids, plastic bags, sponges or dirty rags), and **electricity applied to different parts of the body**.

They put me in a room that looked like a butcher's; there were hooks and chains everywhere. There was a bed for tying people down. They tied me to that bed and they started to pour foul water on my face, and another person took a whip and hit the soles of my feet and my thighs, until I lost consciousness. They stopped for a moment and then they started again with the same tortures. There were 11 of us women in that situation, the only thing you could hear were cries, sobs and groans of pain. They hung us up and electrocuted us, sometimes on the ears, other times on the lips... When they were tired of these methods they brought a stick, they put it under your knees, they joined your hands behind your back and they hung you upside down for an hour or two, which was so painful that you were sorry you had been born. Then they tied you to the bed again and they put it up on one end, with your head facing down. They made you swallow that foul water, until your stomach was full of that water, and then they jumped on it, and with their hands they pressed your stomach until you vomited all that water... it was a miserable situation... There were two months of continuous torture, and if they let us rest for a day, they came the next to continue the tortures (056).

I suffered torture when they detained me in El Aaiun. There were 20 young girls, at the MICCP. That night they took in quite a few in our neighbourhood,



including one who was pregnant. There they tortured me, they applied the table method, tying me to the table with my head hanging, and while they interrogated me they hit me. They also applied the method of the sponge in our mouths. (067)



They brought a bucket with a mixture of chemical products, which smelled bad, of salt and phosphorus in water. They put my head in the bucket to suffocate me with the smell of those products, and they pulled on my hair at the same time. Then they took a dirty cloth, they poured that mixture on it and they put it on my face, and it went into all my orifices; I couldn't breathe never mind talk, and another hit me with a baton, and another, seeing that I was asphyxiated, hit me until I moved. There was also a live cable and they tied me up and started to electrocute me... They hit me on the head again and again. (001)



The first thing they did was to hit me and pull out my hair, and then they took me to a table, they took off my clothes and they lay me down on it, and they started to tie me so tightly to the table that I could hardly breathe; they had left my head hanging, they put the table in a vertical position, I had my feet up and my head down. They hit me so hard on the soles of my feet that I almost fainted, and they put my head in nauseating water until I had swallowed it all. When they saw I wasn't moving they started to untie me; one sat on my stomach until I vomited all the dirty water that I had swallowed, and they started on another round of blows and kicks, insulting me, saying to me 'damn bitch, you'll see...'. They took me to the torture with electricity, they put cables on my toes and on my ears and they told me they wouldn't leave me alone until I confessed everything or until I was dead. (071)

Those who were detained were 48 women; we had gone to the parador hotel to demonstrate and a special repression squad came. They tortured me with electricity, seeing that I was very young. The others they tortured with wet ropes, whipping them. (076)

Blindfolding, which causes disorientation, fear and anxiety, as well as stopping people from recognizing their torturers, is a practice much used by Morocco against Sahrawi women detainees, sometimes for very long periods of time, which in turn has physical repercussions.

A blindfold over the eyes was obligatory. (013)

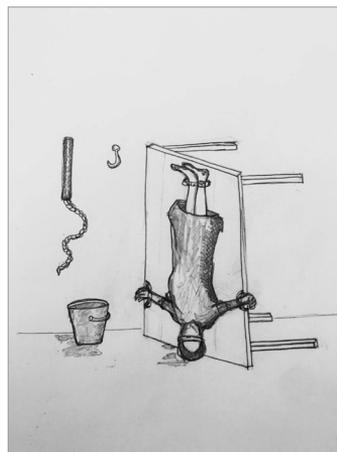
About midnight they came with a sack full of remnants of different garments, a load of pieces of clothing. They called each woman by name and blindfolded her with a cloth, they tied them so tightly that they felt as if their shoulders were becoming detached from the rest of their bodies. (034)

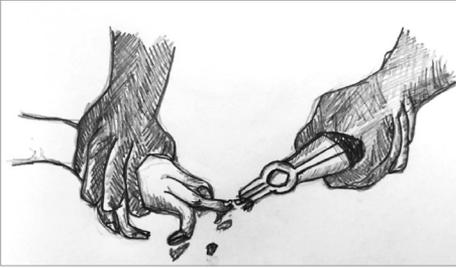
We spent 4 months with our eyes blindfolded, day and night. (060)

Other testimonies describe **burns, mutilations, the use of animals and of toxic substances** during torture, among other practices. These indicate efforts to increase the level of physical pain inflicted by the perpetrators.

I remember the pliers for pulling out nails..., the water and urine they poured on us and the beating; I was there two nights, and then they took me to the hospital... (013)

I was a child, I was locked in a room full of many women and children. They burned me with fire, I have burns. They also put nails in my feet, and





I still suffer after-effects. They did all this to me when I was little, and you don't forget that... (037)

I was standing and I was surrounded by a group [from the reaction force]. One of them hit me in the eye, I felt so much pain that I thought the earth had swallowed me

up; I fell flat with my hands to my eyes, and they continued to hit me all over. When I looked at my hands I saw that I had my eye in one hand. I said 'you have taken my eye out!' and they answered 'well we will take the other one out!' and they hit me in the other eye and they broke the bones under my eye. I couldn't feel anything from the pain, I was still being hit all over. They handcuffed my companions and myself; I couldn't make anything out from the haemorrhage... (029)

I had my eyes blindfolded and I didn't know there were dogs there... They bit me and the guards laughed. (001)

I felt the dogs close by; they threatened to let the dogs loose if I didn't tell the truth. (002)

We didn't know what time we were living in. They put us in a very old building that was scary; it was full of scorpions and snakes that fell on top of us. (074)

At the interrogation the first thing was they insulted me, then they put me on a table; it was very narrow and my body did not fit. I had to lie down there, my head was hanging down; they put polluting and toxic products on me, which smelled and they made me cough and choke, and they used a current to electrocute me... They did this to me for hours. (019)

A young man took a blow to the face from the police, with a stone, and it took half his face off, leaving him covered in blood, and when his sister saw that she started to throw stones at the Moroccan police. They detained her and kept her in until very late at night. They abandoned her on a piece of land, and she was blue all over from so much torture. All her skin was lifted up, it looked as if she had been sprayed with acid. We started to give her a traditional cure,

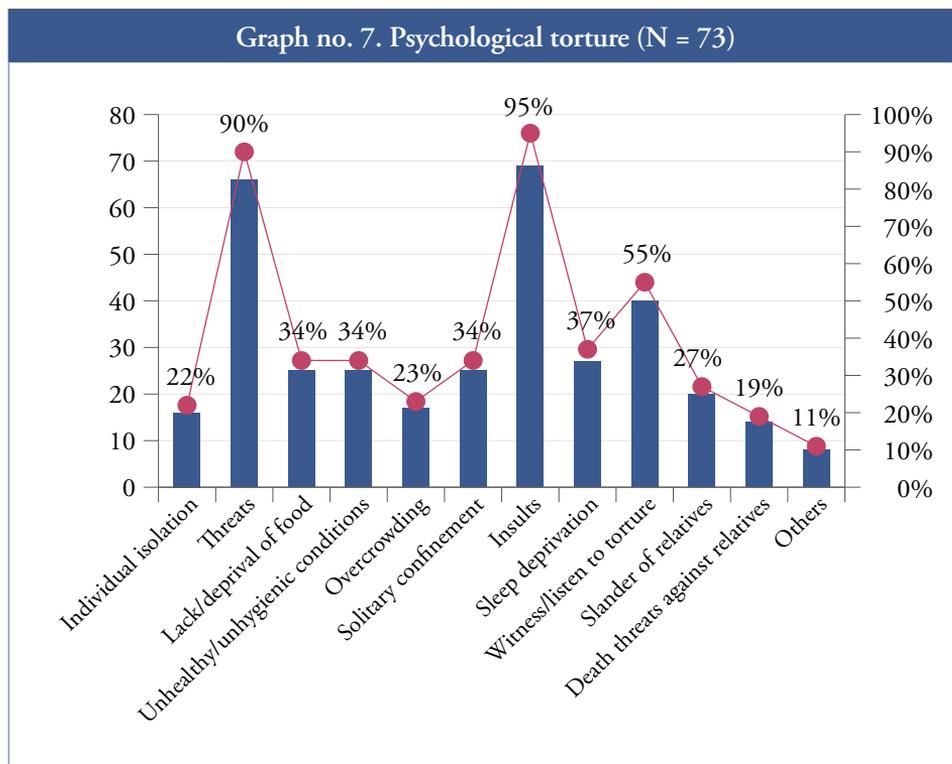
nobody could touch her with their hands, we moved her with some sheets. She recovered a bit from that, but later on died of a heart attack. (078)

Lastly, it is relevant to highlight the fact that some of the women who were disappeared-detained were made to carry out **forced labour**.

They made us clean the whole enclosure and do washing work; we washed all the clothing, everything was done by hand. There I suffered from many illnesses, and nobody treated me, they didn't even give me a pill; they told us only to call them if someone died, and nothing else. (056)

They brought very large sacks of flour and we had to make the bread; we did it in shifts. We did shifts in pairs; we got up at 5 in the morning and we had to have all the bread prepared. Many of our companions were old, they were weak or ill, and the young ones took over all that extreme work. They brought pulses with lots of twigs and insects. We spent the day with these big pots, to cook for everyone in the prison and kneading the bread. We were obliged to make that food for everyone, men and women. (060)

In terms of forms of **psychological torture**, the aim of this is to destabilize the person emotionally, creating such an extreme level of suffering that it can affect their mental faculties and their personality. The information on the psychological torture applied by Morocco to Sahrawi women in occupied Western Sahara includes various kinds: insults (95%), threats (90%), being in the presence of or listening to the torture of other people (55%), sleep deprivation (37%), deprivation of or insufficient food (34%), unhealthy conditions and/or deprivation of hygiene (34%), solitary confinement (34%), slander of relatives (27%), overcrowding (23%), individual isolation (22%) and death threats regarding relatives (19%).



A look at the testimonies makes it possible to understand more clearly the experiences of this kind of torture, whose methods have generally been applied in combination, with the goal of intensifying their effect.

Being disappeared-detained, the Sahrawi women have been subject to **sleep and food deprivation** and to situations of **isolation and solitary confinement**.

We passed six days of torture, interrogation, threats and fear. Without eating or drinking, we were dropping with fatigue and pain, and then they would order us onto our feet again. (002)

[In prison], after six months we couldn't walk, we were suffering from malnutrition, they had to carry us in a blanket out into the sun, we couldn't get up. (067)

We discovered them in a terrible situation, they couldn't stand up, really undernourished, with their skin covered in bruises, they teeth and molars were falling out, they dragged themselves to move. (071)

They punished us, they didn't let us sleep. They wouldn't let us go to the toilet; every time we asked they refused, we couldn't do what we needed to do. They kept us in the dark, we couldn't go out into the sun, so we started to lack vitamins D and C, and we started to suffer anaemia from the lack of nutrients in our bodies, and we started to have sight problems from being in the dark. (059)

They isolated me for 32 days in the dark in a little room, alone, as a punishment, sleeping on the floor, without a blanket or sheets. (001)

Those were very hard months that nobody can imagine; they tied our arms behind us and we were blindfolded all the time; they suffocated us to stop us from breathing, to keep us scared of dying straight away... I was alone in a cell isolated from the rest. We couldn't communicate with each other. (003)

I was alone, in a very small cell, for two years and six months. (025)

Another form of torture that most of the Sahrawi women interviewed experienced was being made to **witness or listen to the torture of other people**, sometimes relatives, other times friends or people known to them.

A lot of Sahrawi people go there and you could hear screams because of the torture; I saw people hanging by their feet, it was like the Inquisition, they told me 'if you don't talk, the same will happen to you'. It was a very big room, it was a slaughter house, in the colonial period they had used it to hang up pigs, sheep and cows. There they made use of it to hang up Sahrawis who didn't support the Moroccan invasion. (001)

I heard them torturing the boys, and I even heard shots. It was a constant terror of screams, moans, cries, you could hear everything. The soldiers said that the shots we had heard were because they had killed a young man who didn't stop shouting that he was Sahrawi and 'long live the Polisario Front!'. (002)

We were in the cell and they came looking for my mother. The captain called to the soldiers on guard and they took her out, they put her face down and they started to torture her. They closed the door between her and us. We heard the screams of pain because of the blows. I couldn't stop crying and the other women shouted from sorrow and fear. We heard one of them say: 'hit the bitch hard, harder, hit her properly!' We heard everything... And when they tortured my sister and me, the other women screamed and cried from fear and worry. (074)

Furthermore, in the testimonies situations of **overcrowding** are described, with imprisonment in cells with 8 or even 12 women, in **unhealthy conditions** and without means of hygiene or personal cleanliness.

They stripped us from the waist up and with a thorny palm branch they flogged us from the door; two of them grabbed your hands and the other flogged you on the back as far as a ditch; we didn't know whether it was day or night. And they threw us into the ditch, on top of everyone else, both women and men. People only went there to empty the cans we used as toilets; we didn't shower or change clothes, we were covered in fleas and filth, we were piled up there and nobody could breathe. (056)

They took us to Agdez, they took us off the lorries pushing us as if we were cattle; they put us twelve to a cell, like sardines; we were there, malnourished and in terrible conditions of hygiene. (...) Those conditions were terrible; we shared clothing when one person went to wash her clothes, which was done just with water, without soap. We just had one lot of clothes, and when we washed them we had to cover ourselves with a blanket until they were dry and then put them on again. (071)

We spent four months at the MICCP. They didn't let us wash, we were invaded by fleas and dirt to an unbelievable extent. I never imaged that so much dirt could come off the human body. (060)

We were all facing the wall, there was a distance of a metre between us, they didn't let us talk or do anything, and we even had to relieve ourselves in that position. For those three days of torture they didn't take us to relieve ourselves, we did everything in that cell. (076)

Extending the **threats to relatives** of the victims is another resource used by Morocco as one of its practices of torture and other cruel treatment against the Sahrawi women, a resource that seeks to multiply the psychological impact of repression.

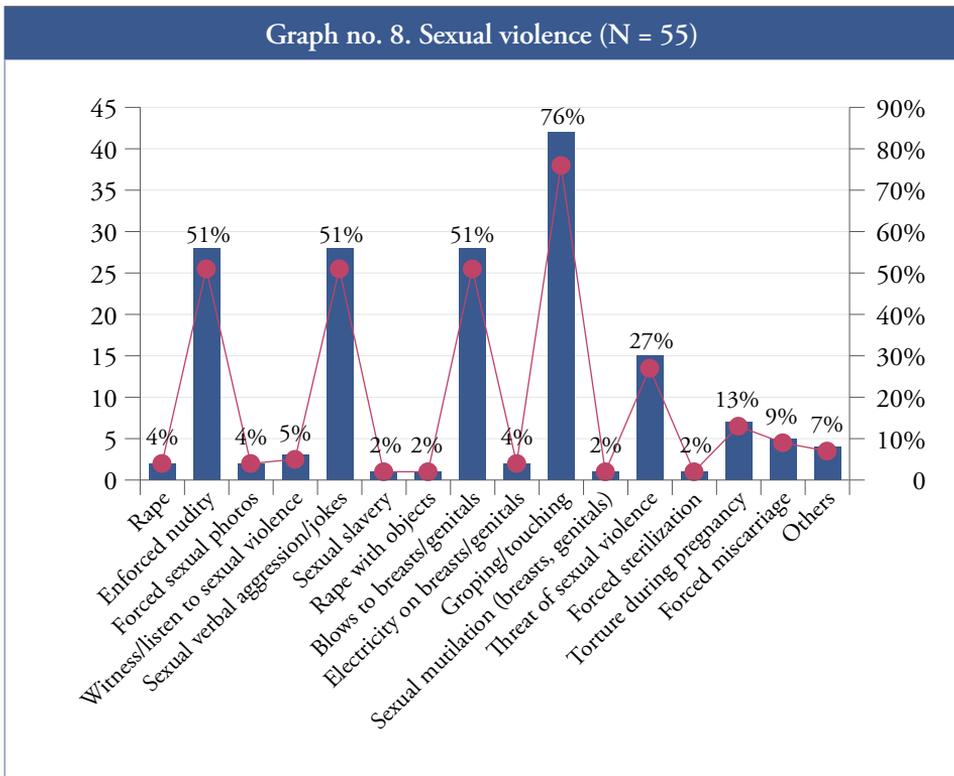
[In prison] I had long hair and it started to fall out. They brought me a bag to collect the bloody locks that fell from my head. They took that bag to my mother, who thought they had killed me. It was a way of torturing her as well, psychologically. [Years later, after getting out of prison], she told me that since they took her that bag with my stained clothing and my hair, she began to suffer inside in a way that she could not get over, she was sure they had killed me. She also told me that they had taken her some pills that she had never seen. And that the police told her that they were pills that prostitutes take, and that I had been a prostitute. She told me that they shattered her, that they had destroyed her dignity. (060)

3.3. Sexual violence

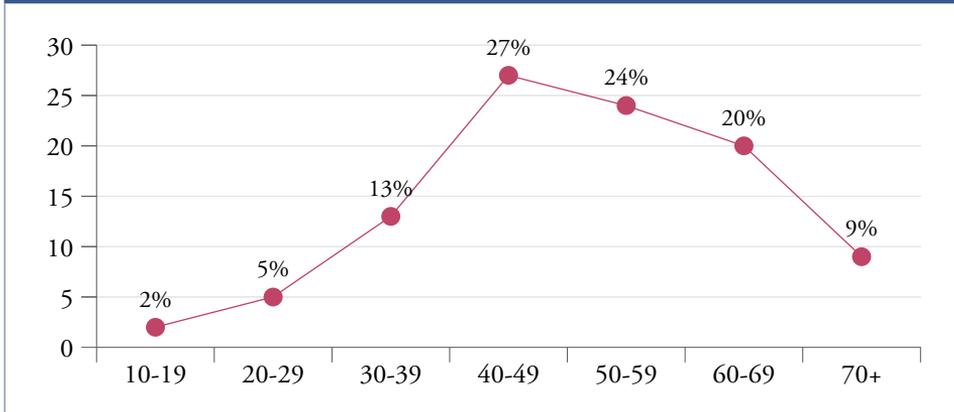
Just like enforced disappearance, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) includes sexual violence as a crime of *lèse humanité*, in the forms of “rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity” (art. 7). This is a kind of serious violation of human rights that presents particular difficulties in terms of documenting it around the world; the normalization of sexual violence against women, the very nature of this crime and its strong personal, family, social and cultural implications, are factors that make it difficult to report.

Western Sahara is no exception, and so these human rights violations have not had the same visibility as others. However, more and more Sahrawi women and men are contributing to drawing attention to this matter, which makes it possible to start to measure the extent and systematic nature of the practice of sexual violence as part of the repressive policies of Morocco. An example of this can be seen in this investigation, since 68% of the Sahrawi women interviewed report having suffered sexual violence at the hands of the Moroccan security forces.

Specifically the Sahrawi women have described: groping and touching (76%), forced nudity (51%), verbal aggression and/or jokes with a sexual content (51%), blows to the breasts and/or genitals (51%), threats of rape (of either them or relatives) (27%), torture during pregnancy (13%), forced miscarriage (9%), being made to witness or listen to sexual violence against another person (5%), rape (4%), enforced sexual photographs (4%), electric discharges on the breasts and/or genitals (4%), sexual slavery (2%), rape with objects (2%), sexual mutilation (breasts, genitals) (2%) and forced sterilization (2%). All these crimes have affected adult women and also children and adolescents.

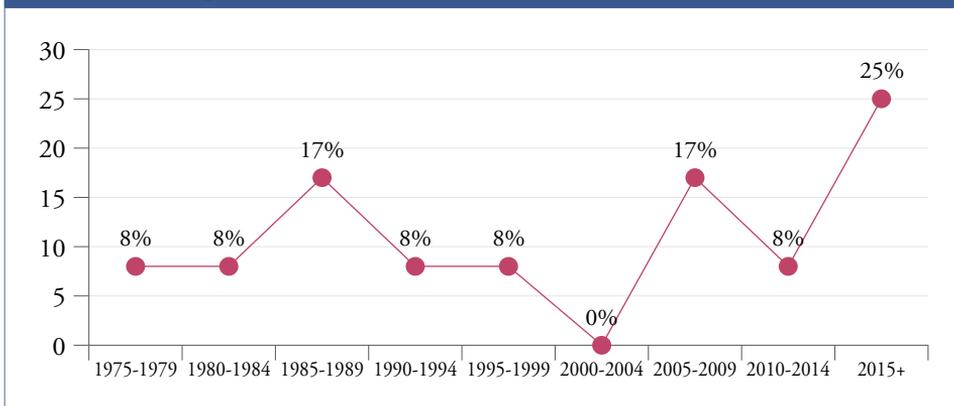


Graph no. 9. Age range of the victims of sexual violence



If we observe the periods of time during which the incidents of sexual violence have occurred, these are constant over time since 1975, with the beginning of the occupation, until the present time, with an average frequency of 8%, with the only exception being the 2000-2004 period, for which the women interviewed do not report this crime. The three periods for which higher levels of sexual violence are registered are: 1985-1989 (17%), 2005-2009 (17%), and, particularly, since 2015 (25%). This last figure could be due to, bearing in mind that stated above, a growing willingness of women to report this crime, in an international –and also Sahrawi national– context that is more and more aware of its seriousness.

Graph no. 10. Periods of the incidents of sexual violence



The women give testimony of circumstances in which various kinds of sexual abuse occurred together, such as **groping and touching, enforced nudity and verbal aggression and/or jokes with a sexual content.**

They were men, and they started to search me, to touch me all over my body. Harassment and touching, that is the daily bread of the executioners and the guards. They have impunity. (001)

At the interrogations they used the opportunity to grope us, and they also threatened to rape us. (002)

We were detained, they separated us among different cells in the prison. We were there for two hours, then they searched us really carefully, they stripped us and they even touched us, they insulted us with words that name the parts of my body. (005)

The tortured my little sister and then they took her to prison; she spent five days imprisoned, she and four other women, without clothing, without melhfás, they hit them, they urinated on them, they told them all kinds of obscene words, all kinds of insults. (008)

They hit me until I was weak, then they took off my melhfa, they left me with what was left, in my underwear; they tied me to a table by my hands and feet, and they started to torture me on the table again. (060)

At the demonstrations, when they hit us they always go to sensitive parts of the woman's body. This treatment is so cruel and humiliating... On more than one occasion, right in the street they have taken off a person's melhfa by force, before the eyes of all those present in the street. They go for the parts of the body that I cannot mention here... If they get to grips with you in the alleys, imagine the worst, because they will do anything to you. (064)

You are walking along a street and suddenly they stop you and they start to harass you with very obscene words, that affect your dignity. One night they detained us and we had to listen to all kinds of insults and provocations; they told me that I was a whore and that I am married to an old man who cannot give me sexual pleasure any more, and that I go through the streets looking for sex; all that and much more. (033)

Over half the Sahrawi women who reported having suffered sexual violence received **blows to their breasts and genitals**.

I suffered much sexual violence and harassment; they burst into our house many times, they hit me on the head, so I have had to have stitches a number of times, and also on the breasts, saying very obscene words to me... (043)

[At the demonstration of 23 April 2013] we suffered a great deal of violence, they hit us and they dragged us. After half an hour they took me from Maatala Street and I suffered much abuse in the police van; they hit me all over with their hands and feet, they harassed me sexually, putting their hands on my chest and crushing my breasts violently; that day I suffered more than I had ever suffered before, everything bad you can imagine. (...) They took me to the east of El Aaiun, about four or five kilometres, and there they harassed me sexually in a savage way, something that I don't want to remember; they wrapped me in a blanket and put some stones on top of me, as if I were dead and when I tried to get out of that blanket it was really difficult, and I found that I didn't have my melhfa. (029)

They kicked me with an army boot in my private parts and I spent about 40 days suffering vaginal haemorrhages, in silence, without anyone knowing anything. They used to always give me stitches after giving birth and that kick broke the suture and my vagina opened. A cyst grew and that had to be treated as well. It caused me a great deal of suffering. (033)

They started to interrogate us, which means 'question-torture-question-torture'. They sat me on a cold, wet floor; one asked me and the other, if he didn't like my answer, hit me, and blow after blow, on one side and on the other, first with his hand and then with an iron bar. I was a minor, I wasn't even 18, I was the youngest in that group. They kicked me between the legs, in my private parts, and with the baton on my backside, and also between my legs. I suffered a lot of pain because of those blows down there; they hit me intentionally in my private parts. It was a long time before I could go back to high school. (058)

There were two agents dressed in civilian clothes behind me, and they insulted me and said all kinds of swear words and obscenities; twice they hit me, slapping me and kicking me. One dragged me and took my clothes off, he

went for my breasts, to squeeze them... Now I suffer a lot of pain in my right breast. (068)

In other testimonies there are clear **threats of rape** (of the person concerned or of relatives), **attempted individual or gang rape**, and **rape**.

On black Thursday [28 May 2005], on that day there was a brutal intervention by the occupation forces, breaking into all the homes, hitting whoever they found, and they thrashed me in the main street. Afterwards the intifada started; we started to go into the street with Sahrawi flags, a lot of young people. I was threatened by the head officer, calling me at four in the morning, saying that I had to leave Boujdour, which I didn't do, and then they started to threaten my family and say that they were going to abduct me and rape me. (029)

I have suffered harassments, attempted rape, sexual harassment; they have taken my clothes off and touched me all over my body, on my private parts... There was a woman aged 19 and some boys who were raped, they were crying and shouting, they have damaged their pride forever. They bring trained soldiers, they are special forces, and they carry out gang rapes and they don't care whether it is a man, woman or child. (...) There was a girl aged 13, it was terrible to hear how she screamed and cried; we had our eyes blindfolded, you could only hear the voices and the screams of that girl, it made my hair stand on end, I couldn't go to her aid. I suffered more for her than for me, not being able to stop them touching her. (003)

In prison I saw them rape two Sahrawi women. They tried to rape all of us. (...) There are many things that I cannot tell... (009)

I had my hands tied, then they began with false accusations, obscene words and threats of rape. They took my clothes off, and they left me as my mother gave birth to me; they brought glass bottles and they threatened to rape me with them. (012)

It was October 1983. A week before our transfer to Kalaat Maguna. There was an attempted rape and we reported it. The guards, because of being reported, became harsher in their treatment of us. (060)

They wanted to rape the youngest of us, they took each of us, they said 'you, get up', and they took you. If it had not been for the intervention of Salma, may she rest in peace, who protested against the harassment we were suffering... All of us started to shout so they wouldn't rape us. (076)

There were nine of us girls. They dragged me into the police station, the other girls also suffered the same, they had brought them to the police station before me. They started to insult me and say all kinds of obscene things to me, words that I cannot say; they hit me with chairs and sticks; the only thing they didn't do was to shoot us. They opened their trousers and they said to us that they were going to rape us, they ordered us down and the floor and they were going to gang rape us. (006)

Every day when I got out of high school two policemen followed me, one on each side, until I got home, and on the way they didn't stop threatening me with making me disappear, abducting me and raping me, and so I didn't want to go to high school any more. (064)

As part of the sexual violence, we found cases of **torture during pregnancy, torture of nursing women, as well as forced miscarriage and even forced sterilization.**

I was pregnant, they started to drag me, they hit me with all kinds of things; that building was under construction and they hit us with the wood from the scaffolding, hitting us all over the body: the face, the head, the legs... They dragged me and I had blood all over my body, and great pain in my abdomen, I was pregnant, my water broke... They had no pity. That about making women have a miscarriage has a long history. (006)

In the 80s, (...) during the worst sessions of torture, I suffered a very serious haemorrhage, my blood gushed out, and I had a miscarriage there. I had had the miscarriage and they continued to torture me; I had very strong pain in my uterus and all over my body; they said 'the only thing that you Polisarios do is procreate', one stepped on my thigh and the other poured water on me with a hose to remove the blood; they said 'you want there to be lots of you, you bitches'. (013)

They hit me so often on the side that I suffered a miscarriage. They hit me in the breasts and on the stomach, and as a result, the child was born dead. (021)

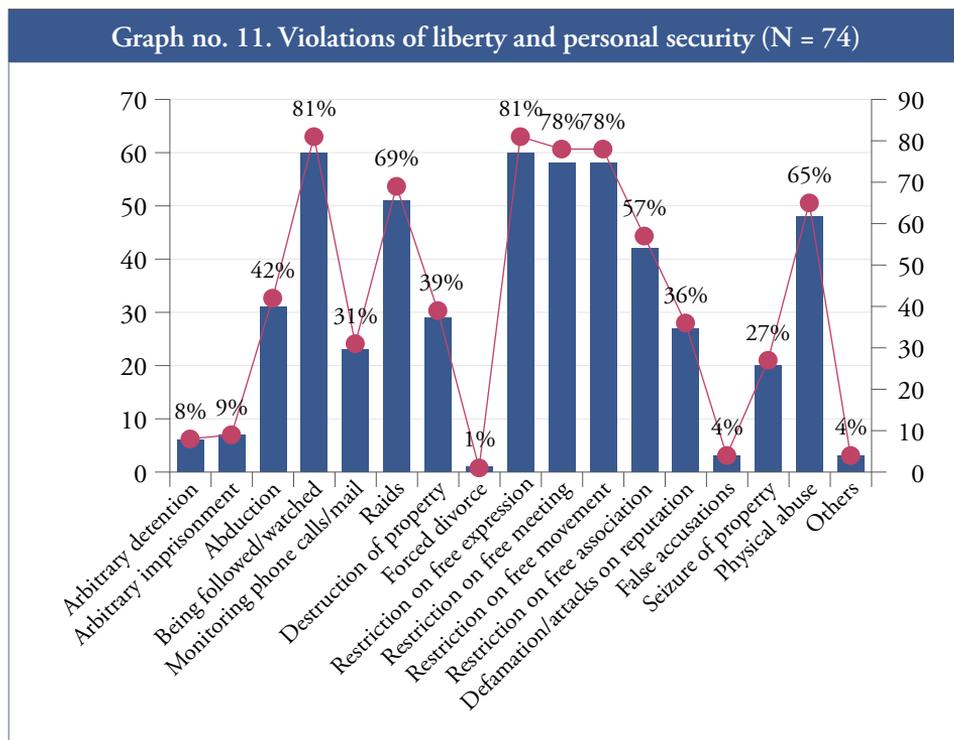
There came to be around 48 women there, including my sister, who had a new-born daughter there, who was just a week old. They put all of us in a single room, and among us were some pregnant women, who had miscarriages there... They tortured us in the interrogations and they threatened to cut our heads off. We were at the MICCP. (076)

The carried out an operation on me in the prison and as a result I didn't menstruate again. They did a tubal ligation and I haven't menstruated from then to now. (009)

3.4. Violations of liberty and personal security

91% of the Sahrawi women who have given their testimony for this investigation have suffered attacks on their liberty and personal security, that is to say, it is the kind of human rights violation that appears most frequently together with the violation of cultural rights, which we will look at below.

As with the other serious human rights violations documented in this investigation, the attacks on liberty and personal security have affected women of all ages. The crimes registered are: being followed and watched (81%); violations of freedom of expression (81%), meeting (78%), movement (78%) and association (57%), raids (69%), physical abuse (65%), abduction (42%), destruction of property (39%), defamation and attacks on a person's reputation (36%), monitoring telephone calls and/or interfering with mail (31%), seizure or confiscation of property (27%), arbitrary imprisonment (9%), arbitrary detention (8%), false accusations (4%) and forced divorce (1%).



The testimonies regarding **being followed and watched**; **restrictions on freedom of expression, meeting and movement**; **physical abuse and raids** indicate the high level of persecution and political repression that Sahrawi women are subject to on a day-to-day basis, particularly those who participate in organizations or actions relation to the defence of their people's rights.

Right now, this house where we are, we know that it is being watched constantly by the forces of the occupation. (005)

Morocco will not allow either journalists or international observers into the occupied Sahrawi areas. The press that covers what happens here is Moroccan, it is managed by Moroccan security itself, it only covers what interests Morocco. What we suffer as Sahrawis is not documented by anyone. They say that human rights are respected and that there are associations that work in this area: it is all a lie, everything is managed here in occupied El Aaiun and in the Sahrawi territories in general by the Moroccan regime's security. (043)

They have stopped me travelling, for example they constantly deny me permission to go to Geneva; the last time I went was in December 2016; they have banned me from travelling. (001)

They have banned all members [of the organization] from going out and meeting each other; we are organizing a new political project and they want to stop it, to bring it down, to stop us from meeting at all cost. We are under siege in our own homes and we are not permitted to visit our families and neighbours; we are confined but it is a political confinement, not because of the pandemic, but because of our ideology. Even now, with me talking to you. We are under the microscope 24 hours a day; I receive threats every day, and my children, my husband, my whole family. Threats at my home, outside of it and everywhere. (019)

Now they are using the pandemic to confine us even more than we were; we have always been confined, but now it is total, a state of emergency and of siege; we cannot leave our homes or meet, either in the street or with our families and neighbours. COVID-19 has been good for them, they are happy because they have found another reason to keep us inside. (059)

At the rallies they always beat us, they maltreat us, we get beaten with batons at all of them. Since then [the events of Gdeim Izik] they have banned all kinds of demonstration or rally. (072)

When we celebrated Algeria's victory in the African Cup, a policeman took me by the hand, he threw me down on the tarmac and he started to drag me. (076)

Here in El Aaiun, we spent quite a few days on hunger strike, in solidarity with those young men who were also doing it. The Moroccan occupation forces intervened and they hit us, me and many other women, savagely (082).



Source: testimony (017).



Source: testimony (029).



Source: testimony (029).

Because of its link to free expression, the Moroccan regime also stands out in terms of **repressing freedom of information**, directly attacking Sahrawi journalism professionals.

The women had organized a demonstration near the beach, in El Aaiun; I collected their testimonies and I started to take photos. The police arrived, they took my camera, they searched me and they took me to the Royal Police Station in El Aaiun. I spent a night of interrogation there, with torture and threats. (...) I know what I am facing; they torture us and they stop us from pursuing our profession in the streets or interviewing activists who come out of prison; they don't want witnesses to what they do. (058)

Abduction is another of the forms of repression practiced by the Moroccan authorities against Sahrawi women. In many cases, they are forced to get into the cars of the Moroccan security forces and taken to places far from the city, where for hours they are hit, harassed and threatened, and then they are left in those places. Together with the abductions, the Sahrawi women give testimony of **arbitrary detention and imprisonment**, lasting hours, days or months. In all the cases documented of arbitrary detention and imprisonment this has been accompanied by torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

They put me in a car, between them, and they abducted me. I was not yet 18 at that time. (002)

In 2009 we paid a visit to Aminetu Haidar and there was a police cordon around her house. They ordered us into an official car belonging to the occupation police force, followed by another two official cars, one was a Land Rover and the other a Prado. They took us to Wad Saguia. There they threatened us and they separated us. It was an abduction. Then they dumped me at a place frequented by vagabonds and stray dogs. (005)

I was at a rally beside the Hotel El Engyir, on the 29th of May 2005, they took me away by force, they put me in a car and that took me to the police station on Bucraa Street. There I suffered torture, harassment and insults. There I saw a man, his clothing was covered in blood, his body was bloody, with a haemorrhage, and I was scared he would die, he was bleeding by my side. (...) After some hours they let us go. I had bruises all over my body. (003)

At all times, whenever we get back from a trip, we are the victims of police violence and illegal searches. They confiscate documents, symbols of the revolution, personal mobile phones, cameras. In 2017, they detained us at Casablanca Airport, they harassed us, they hit us, they abused us, they pulled our hair, they groped our private parts... (005)

In 2014 I remember that we were returning from a trip to Algeria and we came across the Moroccan army waiting there for us [at the airport]; they checked on the whole Sahrawi delegation, they took off our clothes, both women and men; they took our belongings away, they hit everyone, without minding that they were hitting diabetic women and older people. (043)

In Casablanca I was intercepted by Moroccan security personal, who were in civilian dress. They interrogated me for three days. I was detained at the police station, without being a prisoner, for those days. I couldn't communicate with my family. Afterwards my detention lasted seven months... (020)

I was with this group of women, at that prison, for six months. I was a minor aged around 13; it was a crime to imprison minors in those sub-human conditions and to suffer all those tortures. My mother went on a hunger strike, which nearly killed her, and that is why they let me go. (076)

Practices of **defamation and attacks on the reputation** of Sahrawi women, particularly in the social media, are more and more frequent and, in general, have a clear component of sexism. This is a kind of persecution and harassment that violates their right to privacy and that seeks to humiliate women and isolate them from their social surroundings.

Now they are using new methods, which are defamation campaigns; they keep publishing false news about me. (019)

There is another war that is being carried out by the Moroccan occupation to defame activists. They have websites that are run by the Moroccan security, social media, Facebook, Instagram, to defame and slander activists, with all kinds of obscenities. All because we are activists who fight for our rights and we hold firmly onto our cause, which we defend with teeth and nails. They have imprisoned us, they have tortured us, they have defamed us, and as a last means they are making use of the social media to do this. (029)

They defame us on the social media and pirate the websites we have, they publish pornography on our websites, they write a lot of articles to defame us, where they say that we are prostitutes, mercenaries and many other things. I can't comment on anything, because as soon as I do, I start to get threats through Facebook and to my phone. (043)

They have defamed me, saying that I am a nobody, a prostitute, they try to humiliate me as a woman in a conservative society, so that men look down on me. (058)

The worst thing they have done is to smear me educationally. The intelligence services have a website in the social media, and there they uploaded my photo with a classmate in 2012, in order to bring my image into disrepute. My classmates and other people started to say 'your photo is in the social media'. I started to be ashamed of being with my classmates. (064)

They detained me, they confiscated my mobile phone and used the opportunity to copy all the private information it contained: photos and videos of my private life. Afterwards they published this on the social media, on a website they have, threatening me saying they will continue to post other photos with all my movements. I feel as if I am being watched through a microscope. Every time I go somewhere with someone, the next day it is on the social media. (005)

The attacks on liberty and personal security include **house raids** and the **destruction, seizing or confiscation of property**, whether these be homes, personal belongings or animals, directly affecting the livelihoods and material well-being of the women and their families.

On 10 November 2010 the special forces came to the door of my house, they forced their way in; we were attacked by an entire squad; they frightened my little daughters with their rifles; they said they were looking for the foreign activists who were at the Gdeim Izik Camp. My daughters were very scared. (001)

We were in Emrikle; they arrived and shot into the animal enclosures, killing the camels in front of us. They left us without animals. (021)

I was a witness of the events in the Bucraa district in 2005; they destroyed many Sahrawi houses, including ours. They broke doors, walls and everything inside. (043)

Our house was open to everyone in general, and to Sahrawis in particular. The Moroccan regime accused us of sheltering separatists, and in retaliation they wanted to take away part of the house. (...) In 2014 they attacked us savagely; I was there with my mother and my young son; they took us out of the house and they threw all our belongings into the street and then demolished the house. (047)

They destroyed the house, they broke our things and they threw our provisions into water deposits. (008)

They came into my bedroom, they destroyed everything, they opened the cushions... I had a sewing machine with which I made a little money to maintain my family and they took it. All this was done with threats and insults. (060)

They broke all our property, the fridges, the cooking utensils, they left the house upside down; everything we had of value they stole, and they left the house covered in broken glass. (076)

After Gdeim Izik, our houses were searched and totally destroyed, our furniture and our belongings, even the smallest things. The police and the army allowed our houses to be plundered. (078)

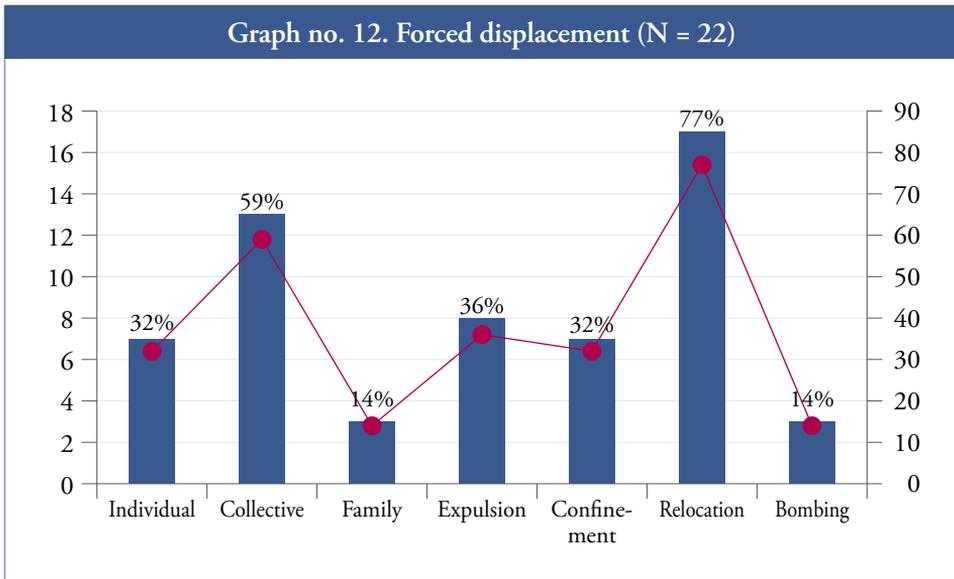
Another relevant fact is that some Sahrawi women whose husbands were members of the Polisario Front suffered pressure from the Moroccan security forces to divorce them. The practice of **forced divorce** can be linked to the goal of isolating and weakening the will of female and male Sahrawi activists, breaking their emotional and family bonds.

My husband had gone with the Polisario Front. They detained me and at the police station they told me to bring an end to the marriage, that I had to ask for a separation and put an end to my marriage. (060)

I knew of women who had been obliged to end their marriages because their husbands had joined the Polisario Front forces. (079)

3.5. Forced displacement

Although being forced to move and seek refuge fundamentally affects the Sahrawi population in the Tindouf camps, it is a kind of serious human rights violation that has also affected the Sahrawi population in occupied Western Sahara, from the beginning of the occupation and to the present day, and not only as the relatives of displaced persons, but also as direct victims. The women interviewed indicate with the most frequency: relocations (77%), followed by collective displacements (59%), expulsions (36%), confinements (32%), individual (32%) and family (14%) displacements, and bombardments during forced displacements (14%).



The testimonies indicate that, although at the beginning of the Moroccan occupation **collective forced displacement** affected the whole Sahrawi population, later on, Morocco practiced it against people known for their political activism against the occupation, by means of **forced expulsions and relocations**.

When they arrived, the Moroccan forces entered armed to the teeth, with tanks and missiles. They began every kind of violence. They were times of horror and fear; the intention of the Moroccan regime was to annihilate

all the Sahrawis. The people began to leave the cities, going anywhere. The families left their things and they went. (060)

In 1990, my older sister and I were on our way to the Sahrawi refugee camps when we were abducted, on the Morocco-Algeria border. They detained us in a Moroccan base, we were there almost three months... Then they made us go to Tan-Tan, they prohibited us from returning to El Aaiun. We returned to El Aaiun after a year. They detained my sister again and they obliged her to return to Tan-Tan again. (002)

I organized a visit to the province of Dakhla to cover the demonstrations by activists, women and men, demanding transparency in the case of the death of a civilian prisoner due to a lack of medical attention. Coming back from the city of Dakhla to El Aaiun, when I arrived, I was expelled from El Aaiun and obliged to live in Dakhla. They prohibited me from returning to El Aaiun. (005)

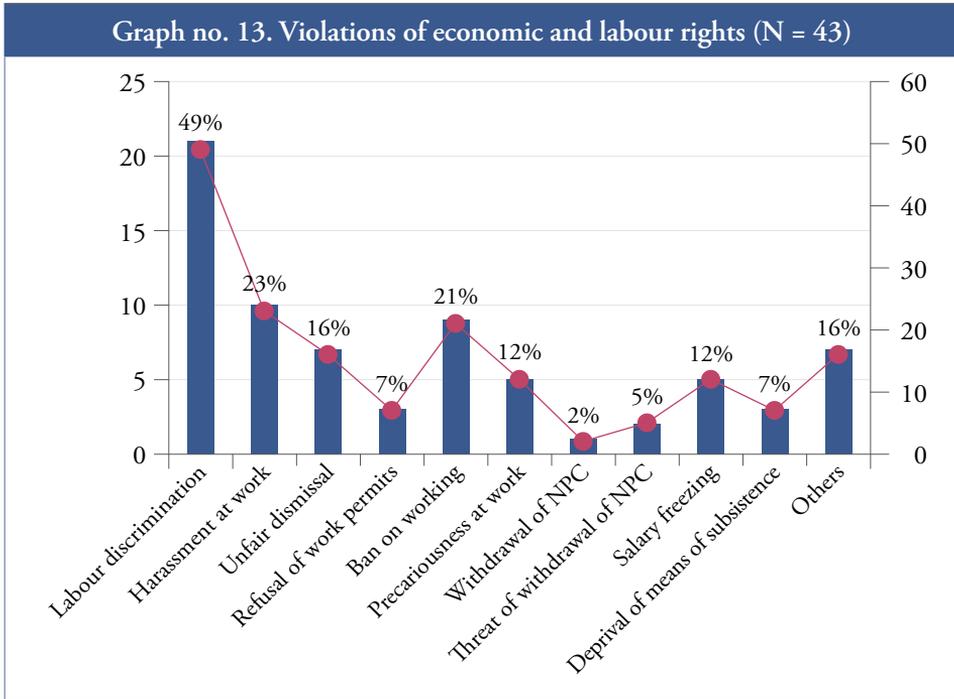
When the 2005 group left prison, they were waiting for me at a police checkpoint. I was detained for around 24 hours with other activists. They forced me to leave Boujdour, and every time I came back they expelled me again. I had to wander between the countryside, Smara and El Aaiun. The occupation forces came in the early morning to the house of my aunt, in El Aaiun, and they told her that she would also have to leave the city. (029)

3.6. Violation of economic and labour rights

Morocco's policies in occupied Western Sahara are aimed at, among other things, the socio-economic and labour exclusion of the Sahrawi population, which clearly affects women. The majority have no income, or a very low one, which has consequences for central aspects of their survival, such as the possibility of paying for basic food, as well as for their levels of personal autonomy.

The kinds of violations of economic-labour rights experienced by the Sahrawi women include: labour discrimination (49%), harassment at work (23%), ban on working (21%), unjustified dismissal (16%), salary freezing (12%), increased precariousness at work (12%), deprivation of means of subsistence (that is, the territory's natural resources) (7%), refusal of work permits (7%),

and the withdrawal or threat of withdrawal of the National Promotion Card (NPC)⁵ (7%).



The violation of economic and labour rights affects women for the mere fact of being Sahrawi, but above all to the extent to which they participate in activities in the defence of their people’s rights. There are numerous reprisals against those activists who have or aspire to have a job in occupied Western Sahara.

Discrimination and harassment at work, as well as **bans on working**, for them or their families, affect women of all ages.

However well qualified we Sahrawis are, they do not take us into account, and when any Moroccan colonist without any education comes along, they are offered the best jobs at the phosphate deposits. Our young people are marginalised in every respect. We are totally unemployed, even those who have good qualifications. (008)

5 Those who hold an NPC card receive monthly financial support from the authorities

As a young person aged 32, educated and with a university degree, I have no income. After graduating, there was an open call for jobs in the area of justice, and one of the matters covered, here in Sahara, was the autonomy proposed by Morocco. I didn't fill in the sheet... I also applied for another open call and they asked us about Gdeim Izik, they wanted to know what we thought; there were Moroccans who said that those who were at that camp belonged to the mafias who wanted to cause destabilization; I said no, they were Sahrawis who were fighting for independence and for social justice. Of course they didn't give me the job... (012)

In occupied Western Sahara we cannot work in equal conditions. Those Sahrawis who are not involved in political matters are not treated the same when it comes to work, and so imagine if we are activists... We do not dream of working under the Moroccan regime. (020)

My siblings and I have all got qualifications, but they have banned us from taking jobs because we belong to the Polisario Front. I got my degree in 1993, and at that time there were few Sahrawis who had degrees; as a punishment they did not let me into any jobs, I was always rejected. There is nobody in our family working, despite the qualifications we have. (047)

When young Sahrawi people leave university they already know that they will have to stay at home, because the Moroccan colonists will be given jobs first. Even if you pass an official exam, they take the place from you and give it to some Moroccan big shot. In every Sahrawi family there are three or four members who do not work or earn anything. (064)

Other forms of reprisal are **unjustified dismissal, salary freezing and obstacles to promotion at work.**

It was the 8th of March 2005, International Women's Day, and I took part in a rally for the dignity of Sahrawi women. After that rally they fired me from work and they took me to prison for political reasons. Since then I have not had any income. (019)

They do not give me a raise or a promotion because I am a Sahrawi activist and they say 'if you don't change your position, you will always be down there, with those at the bottom'. (001)

Another of the common mechanisms by which Morocco punishes Sahrawi women who defend their rights is the **threat of withdrawal, or actual withdrawal of the National Promotion Card (NPC)**, popularly known as “the card”.

I am the daughter of a modest Sahrawi family, which works grazing their camels and lives from this. My older brother worked for the council, but he was fired; my sisters received support worth half a ‘card’, and they cancelled it. (029)

When trying to obtain this card for people with no income, they stopped me and all my family. They have excluded us from all official support. (047)

I have no work. I received a subsidy, but they took it away from me three months ago, because they say I am an activist and that I took part in the Gdeim Izik camp. (055)

We are a small country and a very rich one, but the population lives in total poverty under the occupation. They took away the official subsidy I had because there were meetings at my house, and because of my political positions, that was the reason. They cut off your subsidies as a punishment, even if it is the only thing you have to live off. (056)

Other testimonies point towards the more general framework of the economic violence that accompanies the Moroccan occupation, which is the **plunder of the natural resources** of the Western Sahara. This plunder and the economic and labour exclusion of the Sahrawi population have extreme consequences that form part of the set of attacks on the right to life.

We are a poor people in a land rich in resources, that the occupation forces pillage without consideration. And our resources go to peoples in other countries. (005)

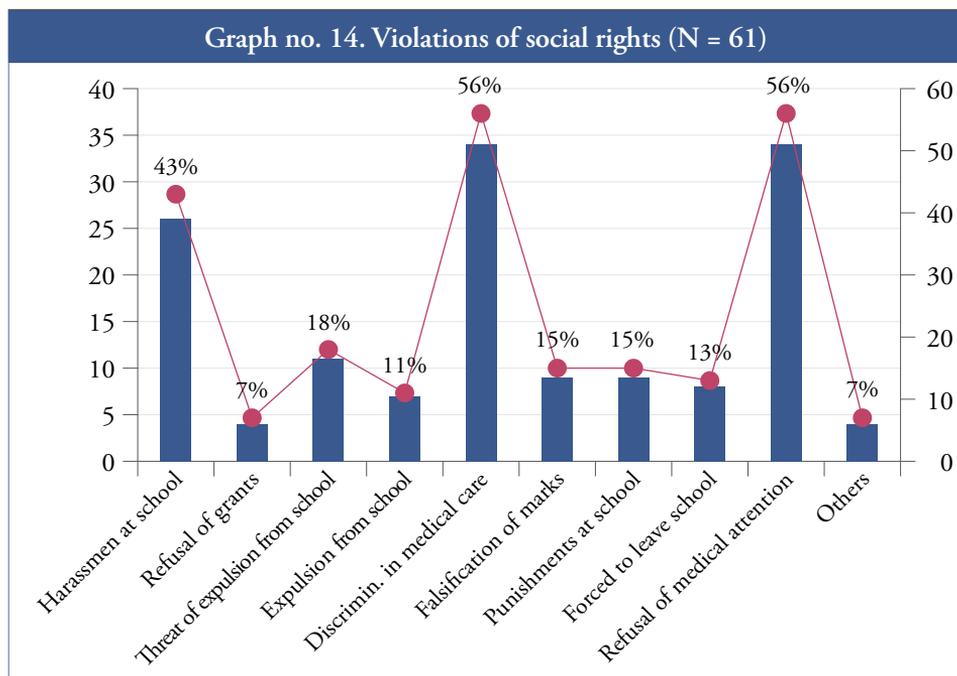
Thousands and thousands of lorries leave Guerguerat with the riches of the Western Sahara. They are our riches and we see how they are taken to European countries, even the sand that we use for construction is taken, to marginalize us more. (008)

Young people, here in the occupied territories, after they have been educated and have their qualifications, are rejected when they apply for jobs. How many Sahrawis have been excluded from participating in the application

processes for Fos Bucraa and to work in fishing! The only thing open to them is to emigrate and risk their lives making the deadly crossing to Europe. I was born in '88, and when I start to remember my friends, almost half have died in the ocean trying to emigrate. This is because of the policy of the occupation, it hurts a lot, an educated youth without any possibilities in their own land and ending up at the bottom of the sea. (012)

3.7. Violation of social rights: health and education

In the case of violations of the social rights of Sahrawi women, this investigation has looked principally at educational and health rights. The information found shows that, most frequently, the women experience discrimination in terms of medical attention (56%) or a refusal of medical attention (56%). There was often a high frequency of harassment at school (43%), followed by threats of expulsion (18%) or expulsions from educational institutions (11%). Other kinds of violence against the women in a school context include: punishments (15%), being given low marks without reason (15%), being forced to leave school (13%) and the refusal of grants (7%).



The reports of **discrimination in, or refusal of, medical attention** by Moroccan health workers or Moroccan police personnel who work in hospitals are repeated again and again. In many cases, the Moroccan health workers are willingly hostile, and in some others this attitude seems to be conditioned by the threats made by the Moroccan security forces.

On the third day of that peaceful demonstration they entered the house where we were. I was hit by a stone thrown by one of the policemen. They took me to the hospital of Moulay Hassan Ben Mehdi, where I was not attended to by anyone. (005)

I went to the hospital because I was giving birth. There they were all Moroccan and I started to get very nervous, I was scared and I couldn't manage... The midwife threatened me, saying, 'why have you come, if you don't want to give birth? I hope you die'...I was scared they would kill me or kill the one in my womb, I couldn't stand it. (043)

They hit the women who were there, they also hit my brother and they broke my arm. An ambulance took us to hospital, but there was no medical attention then and there isn't now. Those who hit us are Moroccans and those who receive us at the hospitals are also Moroccans, and they are all Moroccan security. (043)

At the hospital, this woman [from the health staff] did not treat me; they had taken out my eye and they didn't even give me a bandage; I asked them to give me some water to drink, my throat was dry, and they didn't pay any attention to me, because they were scared of the Moroccan regime, they played deaf. (...) A policeman took me by the hair and dragged me to the courtyard, and there he kicked me, which made me fall among all the rubbish there; I started to vomit blood, which they took and put on my face (...). They took me to another room where they handcuffed me and my interrogation started; they took turns, every half hour other interrogators would arrive, and they asked me to sign, which I did not do; I was there all night; they made me give the fingerprints of all my fingers against my will, like that until 7 in the morning. A cleaning woman came; they had gone out and were smoking; I asked her to give me something to drink; she offered me a glass with a bit of milk; I gave her a telephone number so she could say I was there, but the police arrived and they started to hit her, and they said that she wouldn't work in hospitals again. (029)

We cannot attend the hospitals because they are also police or army institutions. We do not trust the hospital staff at all. We have quite good traditional medicine, which has saved us on many occasions. (005)

When I went into hospital they gave me some injections, and each unit was very expensive, and when I took one it caused an allergic reaction. When I took them to a Sahrawi nurse he said that they were for bacteria in the blood, and my analysis said that I didn't have bacteria in my blood. I still have them stored. We suffer in all areas: socially, health care, we are being excluded from everything, because we are Sahrawi. (033)

When they hit me or I suffer an injury, at the hospitals they always give us medicines that are not related to the thing that is wrong with us; we always resort to traditional Sahrawi medicine; for wounds and bruises, we treat them traditionally, in the Sahrawi way. (043)

Among the violations of the right to education, those that stand out are **harassment at school, threats of expulsion from school, punishments at school, expulsions from school and being forced to give up studying.** This information may explain the fact that, as was noted above, 44% of the women interviewed have no formal education or have only studied at primary school.

Between 1994 and the year 2000 I was banned from matriculating at university. After my matriculation I went to Rabat, the capital of Morocco. I was obliged to matriculate there because in the occupied Sahrawi territories there are no universities. There I experienced the same problems: threats, harassment, I couldn't study normally with the rest of my class, I couldn't get into a student residence; it was another nightmare at university. In the end I returned to El Aaiun; I had to study by means of distance learning, on my own. Afterwards I spent many years [disappeared-detained] in prison. I have not had the chance to finish my studies or to get a decent education. These are the consequences of the occupation and the forced disappearances. (019)

When I was in secondary school, in 1999, we carried out demonstrations against the Moroccan occupation and we received many threats from the administration in the classroom, they said that if we continued like that we would be sent to prison, abducted or expelled. Then, come the year 2000, they expelled a group of us pupils. (043)

They banned me from registering in Agadir and Marrakech, the two of them, and they told me not to try anymore, because there was an order from the General Directorate of Intelligence that blocked my university matriculation. They have banned us from getting an education and choosing careers in which we can contribute a lot. I have lost this opportunity. (012)

During my university studies I suffered from a lot of racism and discrimination and especially when we were in Sahrawi dress. On one occasion they stuck to the door of the room in the residence a pamphlet that said “stinking, malodorous Sahrawis”. Another time they threatened us and attacked us in the residence. They emptied it of official workers and guards so that the soldiers could come in and they said to them ‘there are the Sahrawis’; the only thing we could do is go up to our rooms and shut ourselves in out of fear. (035)

On 16 December 2005 they went to the high school, they entered, they took my sister and they hit her, they abused her in the high school itself. They refused to take her to hospital, they stopped the ambulance going for her. Afterwards they surrounded our house and stopped any kind of visit. She was in the last year of her baccalaureate. They harassed her, they marginalized her in a very racist way and after that day when they gave her a beating she spent two months without being able to move. The little ones, out of fear, stopped going to school. After that they failed my sister and they stopped her from continuing her studies. (...) When I was in 5th year, one day a policeman came into class accompanied by the school head and the caretaker. They told us, ‘you know that we can take you inside the school; we abduct you and take you to places belonging to the police and nobody will ever hear from you again’. (064)

They phoned me from the school that my 12-year-old-daughter attends. When I got there I saw that she was being interrogated and struck by the school head and other people. They said that she had worn military clothing and that she had a Sahrawi flag. They took the two of us to the police station, and they took our phones from us. Then they took her to a place where they interrogated her again. I heard her screaming and groaning, but they wouldn't let me go to her. I felt dizzy out of fear for my daughter, I couldn't speak, I was really worried. They ordered me to go home and get clothing for her. I regretted doing so, because I was thinking that when I returned I wasn't going to find my daughter. When I got back she was a wreck, crying. She told me that they had threatened her and hit her. They took it in turns to hit her, and every time

they found a news item related to the Sahrawi people or the Polisario Front on her mobile phone, they hit her again. She also told me that they tried to rape her. (062)

In 2008 I went to occupied El Aaiun. I prepared for the exam, I studied, and when I went to see the list of those who were being admitted I saw that my name was not there. I signed up for the lists in the city of Boujdour in occupied Western Sahara. I prepared the exam, but they had put a red mark on my documents. For four years they denied me the right to study. That affected me a lot, it was difficult for me to overcome that blow, that injustice. Then I knew that as they could affect my economic situation, they could do the same with my academic situation. (005)



Source: testimony (062)

In childhood we didn't study, and ignorance holds you back. I was at a number of primary schools, but we were stigmatized for being Sahrawis, and my family told the girls that they didn't need to go to primary school anymore and I didn't attend again. My family took that decision for fear that something would happen to us, because the teachers hit us, they stigmatized us, and we suffered a lot of racism for being Sahrawis. (046)

The **falsification of marks**, marking students down to affect their progression through school and the **refusal of grants** are practices that are described in the testimonies of the Sahrawi women.

When I was little I dreamed of studying medicine. I had got good marks in the first year of my baccalaureate and in the second they gave me a mark that I wasn't expecting. That affected me, because I had studied a lot. A year later I saw that they had lowered the mark necessary for medicine and that I could apply. I applied and they left me on the waiting lists. But I was eliminated again. Then I decided to apply for nursing and I got it. The first test was corrected by computer and I passed it. The second test was oral. I knew I was very well prepared, I had the level of French that they were looking for and I had studied a lot, but when the exam finished I realized that they had put a

letter on my sheet. When the results came out, my name was not among those who had passed. I realized that I was not selected at any exam for political reasons. (030)

Every time there is a demonstration they would come to me and threaten me with failing me for that year. Their only resource for pressuring me was in the area of studies. The first year I got good marks in the exams and even so, they failed me with a zero. When I asked to resit, they rejected me. The teachers told me, separately, 'don't ask for that, let it go'. The second year they did the same. The third year the principal told me 'you are banned from studying'. At that point they prohibited me from studying completely. I finished my baccalaureate on my own, but they have done the same: I have been requesting my certificate for 3 or 4 years and they don't want to give it to me. (064)

When the marks arrived, I was shocked, I had a very low mark, which I didn't deserve. I couldn't ask for it to be revised, for fear that they would carry out reprisals against me and fail me, I had to accept it. I lost the opportunity to get an education. (022)

I was a hard-working student, but my marks from secondary school were always 3 out of 20. We obtained the worst marks because of our political positions. (012)

Reprisals at school have affected both the women interviewed and their relatives.

I was brought up by my uncle and aunt and they were nervous about what might happen to girls under the occupation, and so they didn't register me for school. Now my children have many problems, they have obstacles put in their way when it comes to having documents issued, or to get a grant; they do not treat them the same, because they are Sahrawis and children of activists, the price is being paid by our children. My oldest son has been detained and beaten, and when he went to university he found a lot of obstacles in his way, and in the end he had to stop his education. The other son started to suffer the same, he matriculated in Marrakech and there he was threatened. He decided to leave education for fear that something would happen to him, he stayed at home, saying that he didn't want to be detained at a police checkpoint, and

that whatever is going to happen to him, let it happen at home. My other children, after seeing all that, say they don't want to study, that if that is the result, while Morocco is in Sahara they don't see any future. (033)

Our children are stigmatized, they are failed and given low marks so they cannot get into the courses they want, and it is difficult for them to get grants to stay at university residences. They don't receive any aid for transport. This is a message aimed at students, so they don't get involved in politics. (001)

When I was studying I received a great deal of discrimination because I was the daughter of an activist who fought against the Moroccan occupation. In terms of an academic education and the future, I know that I cannot have a future under the occupation, since all the universities are inside Morocco, in the occupied Sahrawi territories there are no universities, and that means that we have to go to Morocco to continue our education. The children of Sahrawi activists are not allowed to progress, and they exclude us from grants. (022)

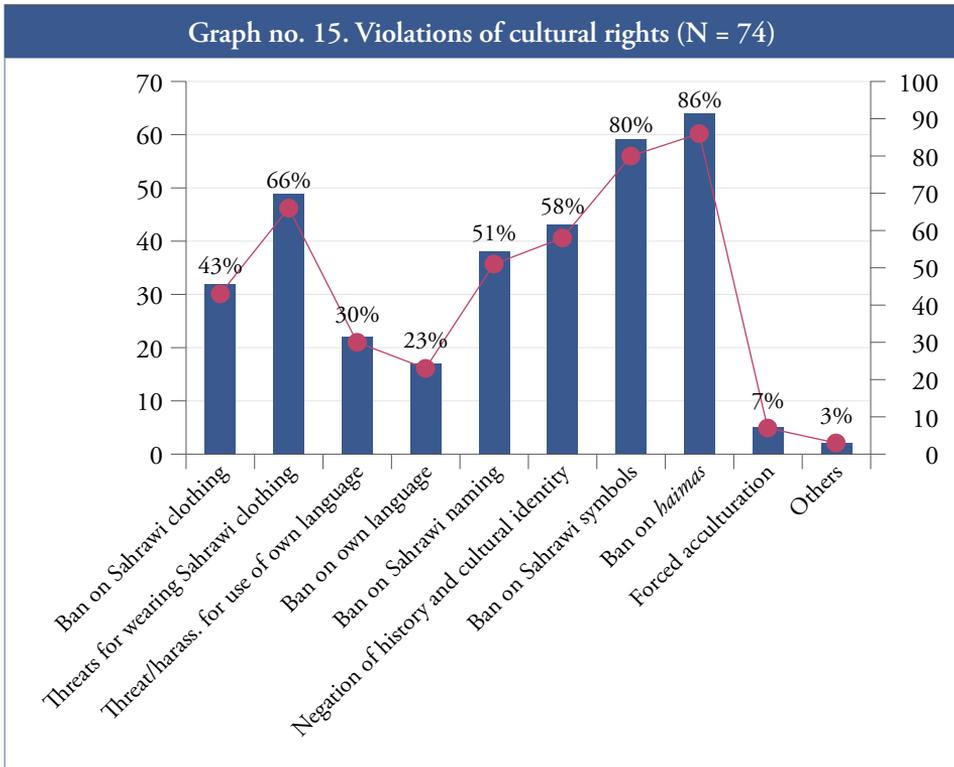
I studied inside Morocco, at primary, secondary and baccalaureate schools, and day in, day out they repress us, stigmatize us, and fail us for being the children of Sahrawis. We have grown up without access to anything, stigmatized by the colonists, and by the children of the colonists, by the Moroccan staff at the schools and by the government workers in the offices; they fail us, they give us very low marks, we cannot choose the degree course we want. I am on the black list of young people who cannot get grants because we are the children of activists and because of our own activism. (058)

In 2018, when I was in the third year of my degree, they deprived me of my grant and the transport credits that they gave to the others. It is the way the occupation has to apply pressure, to keep the sons and daughters of human rights activists out of the public universities. I am an economics graduate, in accounting; I have applied for jobs and I have never been accepted; we know that most jobs get given out to people they know. (004)

3.8. Violation of cultural rights

Among the violations of cultural rights, the Sahrawi women interviewed have been affected most significantly by the following: a prohibition on traditional

Sahrawi homes (*haimas*) (86%), a prohibition of wearing or showing Sahrawi national symbols (80%) and threats for wearing traditional Sahrawi clothing (66%). These are followed by a negation of Sahrawi history and cultural identity (58%), the prohibition of registering new-born children with Sahrawi names (51%), the prohibition of Sahrawi clothing (43%), threats or harassment for speaking Hassaniya (30%) and the prohibition of speaking Hassaniya (23%). Lastly, 7% of women state that they are being subjected to a forced acculturation process by the occupation.



In occupied Western Sahara, the prohibition of *haimas*, the traditional Sahrawi home, has particularly intensified after the violent dismantling of the Gdeim Izik camp in 2010 by the Moroccan security forces

In spring we always went to the camp and in summer to the beach and we prefer to put up our haimas, it is our culture and it represents us as Sahrawis. After Gdeim Izik they prohibited the use of the haima; your freedom in your

own land, your cultural liberty, is interfered with; you have just put up a haima, and in no time the Moroccan gendarmerie comes and stops you. (012)

After the camp of Gdeim Izik they don't let us put up haimas. In Smara in the summer it gets very hot and we can't rent a place in El Aaiun. The whole family always came and set up a haima on the beach, and now we can't because of the ban; they see everything as a political threat, but for families that come from elsewhere it is difficult for us to rent. They don't let us set up a haima on the beach or anywhere in the city. (055)

Haimas are banned. If we go out to the countryside, nearby, not far from the city, and we want to set up a haima, they don't let us. As soon as you have put up the haima, they come and tell you to take it down. Since the events of Gdeim Izik they don't let you put them up, they say 'either you take it down or we will', and with this you get into a new confrontation that brings with it other problems and new threats. (064)

The haima –as a symbol of the events of Gdeim Izik– started to be seen as an enemy of Morocco. First in Um Draiga, which they bombed with napalm, and then at Gdeim Izik, since everyone had set up their haimas there: the Sahrawi people emptied the city and set up at Gdeim Izik, in their haimas. And now the Moroccan occupation has prohibited it, as soon as you put one up they take it away from you. There is a ban on their use everywhere, and if you put one up in the wild, 400 kilometres away, you have to meet certain requirements; there is a helicopter that is used to patrol at all times, to check everything. On top of houses it is not permitted, and at the beaches there are signs stating the prohibition. There is hysteria from Morocco about this matter. (043)

The prohibition of Sahrawi national symbols, in any form, **threats for wearing traditional clothing**, the **prohibition on registering Sahrawi names** or **harassment for speaking in Hassaniya**, are part of the everyday experiences of the Sahrawi women.

I was born on the 27th of February, which, for Sahrawis, is the day of the proclamation of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, and they put a ban on registering me on that day, they registered me with the date of the 1st of March. (...) When I was in 4th year, a teacher arrived from Fez. At about

that time we started to use the melhfa. It was us three that the cleaning was assigned to, and she said 'these who are wearing melhfas, they'll start the cleaning today'. We felt that she wanted to humiliate us. (...) When we were in secondary and pre-university school, we were harassed for our way of speaking, our dialect. When we spoke to teachers they made us speak in Moroccan dialect. (012)

They get on the buses and they tell us that we have to take off our melhfas, but we refuse. In the courts, in institutional places, they insist that we have to go with other clothes. We constantly receive threats and harassment for wearing melhfas, but we continue to wear them because it is our way of dressing. (021)

To go to university I have to travel to a Moroccan city, and I always come across girls who have more experience than me and they tell me that when I am there I should not put on my melhfa or talk in my Sahrawi dialect, so that I don't suffer discrimination among the Moroccans, particularly because of the Amazig who are there, and what I have to do is dress like them and talk in their dialect to pass unnoticed. (022)

Once I went out into the street to celebrate a national Sahrawi anniversary and I was wearing traditional black and white Sahrawi dress; they harassed me in the street, there were two agents behind me and they were saying 'why have you put that dress on' and 'what are you celebrating?'. They followed me and they said all kinds of obscenities to me until I got home. (057)

A neighbour of ours had to change her son's name; all the composite Sahrawi names like Brahim Gali or Mohamed Salem, are prohibited in the Moroccan civil registry. (...) Our traditional names, names of Sahrawi martyrs, of Sahrawi leaders or of activists, here in the occupied territories, cause the Moroccan administration allergies. (043)

We wanted to give my son a Sahrawi name, but they didn't let us. (062)

They told my husband that he couldn't register our son with the name that we wanted; they told him to give him the name Mohammed or any other one. (072)

All the names that represent our struggle or our leaders are prohibited at the Moroccan civil registry. (057)

When you go to the registry, they won't let you have a Sahrawi name; they tell you to choose another one or your child will remain off the census, without a birth certificate... There is nothing for it but to invent another one, so that the new-born can have an identity card and register for school, because if you don't have that birth certificate, it is as if you don't exist. (058)

They wanted to oblige me to speak like them, in their dialect, and I absolutely refused to, I told them that I am an old Sahrawi woman, that I have always spoken Hassaniya and I will continue to do so. (021)

Once a group of Moroccans laughed at how I spoke, and they told me to say 'long live the King of Morocco', which I did not do. (082)

Hiding or negating Sahrawi history and identity constitutes another of the cornerstones of the acculturation of occupied Western Sahara.

Morocco's goal is young people, and the consequence of all that is ignorance. Morocco wants to keep the Sahrawi people in the occupied territories in ignorance. In 1988, as part of the programme that was called "the pioneers of El Aaiun", they deported young people into Moroccan territory, aged 16, 17, far from their families, to another, different culture. (...) Here at school, every day at 8 in the morning they oblige you to sing the Moroccan national anthem. We see how we have also been occupied culturally. (012)

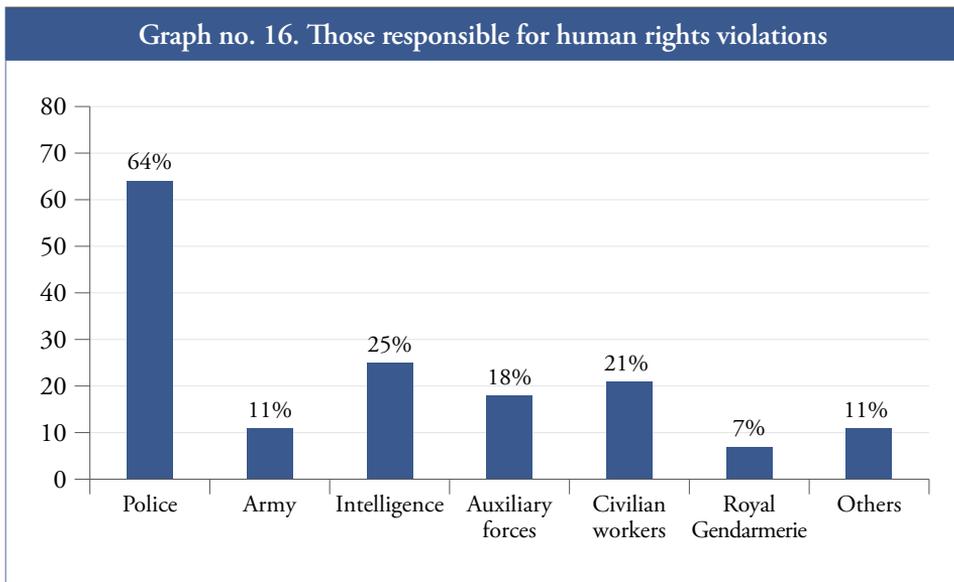
A friend of mine did a study of Sahrawi identity, and she was helped by a teacher, who even gave her documents, but the administration at the school did not accept it. The teacher told my friend that he couldn't continue helping her because he was scared. She failed the year. (035)

The only history they teach us is about the Alawite kings of Morocco, and it is not the real history, it is a twisted history that they change every year according to their interests. There is nothing permitted about the history of Western Sahara. (043)

4. Those responsible for the human rights violations



A large majority of the Sahrawi women victims of human rights violations, 75%, identify the Moroccan security forces involved in the incidents of violence against them, while 25% could not do so. The security forces identified include: police (64%), intelligence services (25%), auxiliary forces (18%), army (11%) and gendarmerie (7%). Very often, the Moroccan agents operate in civilian dress, and the victims also report combined operations by various security forces.



Those directly responsible, the ones who abducted us, introduced themselves as police. (039)

Those responsible for those tortures and human rights violations were the police and auxiliary forces. (045)

Abductions always happen in the same way; they come for you dressed in civilian clothing. But they are known by everyone. Their cars are official. (060)

The ones who came and took away our father and our mother were a mixture of police, army and gendarmerie. (034)

They were policemen, from the reinforcement forces and the secret police, dressed as civilians to pass unnoticed and so as not to appear in the photo as forces of oppression. (043)

Furthermore, **69% of the women are able to identify those who perpetrated the violations directly**, compared with 31% who are unable to do so. This figure is striking, since, for example, in the case of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishments, one of the main factors that explains the great impunity with which this is perpetrated around the world is the considerable difficulty involved for victims in identifying their torturers and proving the facts. However, in occupied Western Sahara, although some Sahrawi women who have been detained and tortured do state that their aggressors operate with their faces covered, they were blindfolded or they were obliged to look downwards, in the majority of cases the perpetrators showed their faces without any qualms whatsoever, which is indicative of the total impunity with which the Moroccan authorities operate in their repressive practices against the Sahrawi population.

X was an official in the security unit, and divine justice took care of punishing him; he died in 2009. When I was at high school he used to keep watch on me, very closely, he always came to the administration of the school to ask about me. (012)

X had no qualms about confirming the disappearances. During the tortures he told me 'if you tell us everything we want to know and you give us exact information, you will go home, and if you don't do so, your fate will be worse than that of your grandmother [disappeared]'. (001)

In '84 they took me to X, and he said 'look, I am like a donkey, I eat and I don't think, I only swallow: if they tell something about you once more, I'll cut your head off'. (013)

There are many [aggressors]; I know some, and others I don't; it is a very big group and some use nicknames. There is one who is the boss, they call him X, in occupied Boujdour, and there is another called X. (043)

Before, when I was young I didn't know them, I gave them nicknames, but now I know the aggressors and the torturers (...). There are many of them and they are the same ones who have tortured all of us. They are all men, they live here and they belong to the secret services and the Moroccan security. (037)

We know the first name of the man who keeps watch on us, but not his surname. When we lived in another neighbourhood he watched us there, and when we moved they brought him to continue watching us. Of the torturers who used to hit us, we know a few. (033)

In the case of occupied Western Sahara, it is also important to highlight **the degree of collaboration in the violence of Moroccan civilian workers**, indicated by the women in 21% of the cases. Their participation has occurred in repressive actions together with the police and army, for example in actions restricting the rights to movement, association and demonstration, in raids and actions of vandalism and plunder of the property of Sahrawi families.

During the events of 28 September 1999, the Moroccan authorities armed Moroccan colonists with swords, axes, chains, knives and they told them 'to go and exterminate all the Sahrawis'. Supported by the Moroccan security, this avalanche started: they started to destroy homes, one by one, and they beat us, not minding about our gender or age. They attacked everything, breaking all the furniture and belongings and stealing the women's jewellery. There were three days of pure hell; we were so afraid that they were going to tear us apart in our homes, it was terrible. I was pregnant and the colonists and the Moroccan security forces threw stones at my stomach. (006)

In 2010 I was at the Gdeim Izik camp with my family. I woke up at about three in the morning, frightened; I heard shouts, they were attacking by air and by land. The army attacked with tear gas and rubber bullets. Later the confrontations moved to the city of El Aaiun. A new-born girl, just 8 days old, died because of a toxic substance that they used on us. They were armed to the teeth, with guns, rubber bullets; police dressed as civilians, and all we had was either stones or the option of fleeing. The next day they made Moroccan civilians take part in the riots, and men, women and children came with sticks and stones to fight with Sahrawis in the neighbourhood. They set fire to some homes. They came to our house and they beat us. Those were terrible days. (080)

On other occasions, as we have seen, Moroccan colonists participate in the political persecution in different spheres: schools, health centres, Moroccan administrative offices and other places.

Some testimonies, as well as indicating the direct responsibilities of the Moroccan authorities in the human rights violations in occupied Western Sahara, also highlight the **responsibility of international actors**, such as the United Nations, the European Union, and states such as Spain, for abandoning Sahrawi territory without completing its decolonization and because of their later collusion with the Moroccan regime, and France, because of its close alliance and complicity with Morocco.

The United Nations has deceived us; we have been waiting for 30 years for negotiations that they knew weren't going to happen, and they haven't done anything to make them happen. We have lost 30 years of our lives waiting. The United Nations have been renewing the ceasefire that has not favoured us at all, quite the opposite, they have given us a living death. We have seen how Morocco has violated human rights in Western Sahara again and again and the United Nations has not lifted a finger. They have bombed us in front of the United Nations Commission for the referendum in Western Sahara. They have never denounced it, quite the opposite, they have normalized human rights violations in occupied Western Sahara. (078)

Those responsible are the Moroccan authorities, and we also attribute responsibility to Spain for abandoning us and letting them invade our land, the Moroccans from the north and the Mauritians from the south. (055)

The European Union supports the plunder of Sahrawi wealth, and this causes the impoverishment and the marginalization of the Sahrawis. France benefits from our riches; it lifts its hand and says that Western Sahara is part of Morocco. Where will we be heard? (008)

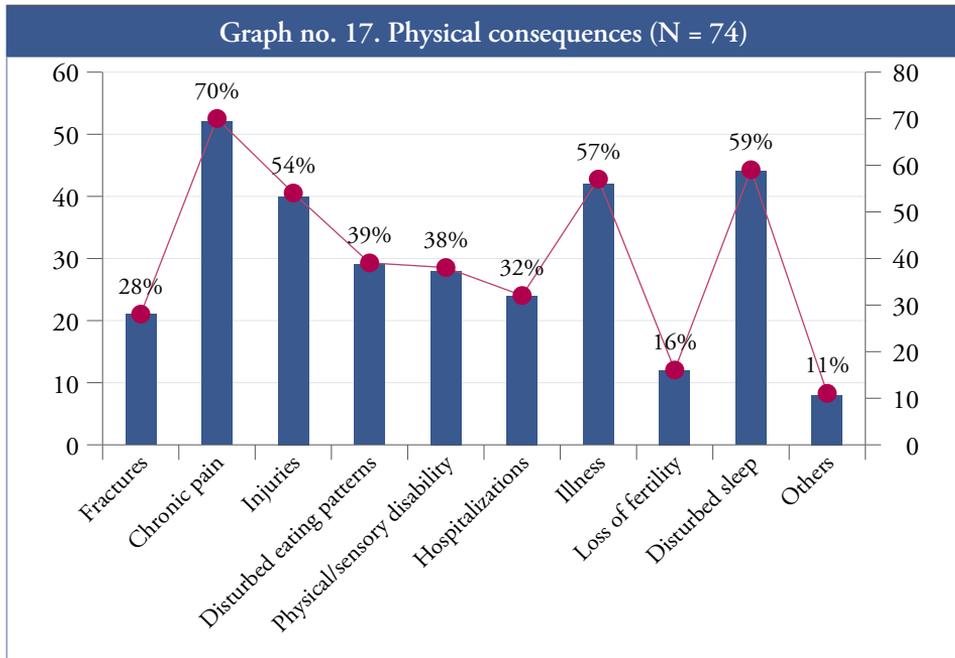
5. Impacts of the human rights violations



The consequences of the human rights violations documented in this investigation are physical (91%), psychological and emotional (84%), and family and social (74%). The impacts are often chronic, because of their level of seriousness and because of a lack of medical and/or psychosocial attention after the incidents of violence. On occasions these impacts have resulted in consequences that have limited, or rendered impossible, one or a number of dimensions of the women's lives.

5.1. Physical consequences

The most common physical impacts detected are: chronic pain (70%), disturbed sleep (59%), illnesses (57%) and injuries of various kinds (54%). Other physical impacts reported are: disturbed eating patterns (39%), physical or sensory disability (38%), hospitalizations (32%), fractures (28%) and a loss of fertility (16%).



In the testimonies there are abundant examples of the physical consequences of violence. A selection is given here.



Source: testimony (006).

There are many consequences; right now I am suffering from pain in my back, my knee, my nose. They fractured my nose, my shoulders, my head hurts... (005)

He kicked me and broke my ribs; I didn't realise at that time. He made a movement and I felt like I was going to die; I think that when I fainted under torture it was because of that blow to the ribs. Afterwards you start to suffer the consequences of torture, gradually, and they are with you at all times. (012)

At first my head hurt, then my thighs and then the pain went down to my knees. This happened after falling from the Land Rover that they were carrying me in. Now I have dislocated bones; he dragged me with a baton to move me. (013)

My skin is black from so much beating. My head suffers internal noise constantly, my eyes do not see well. When I suffered the blow to my nose it caused constant swelling. I have never been to the hospital, I have always tried to use traditional medicine. (021)

In physical terms I suffer from stomach problems, rheumatism, nerves... They operated on my back because of the tortures and beating. (019)



Source: testimony (005).

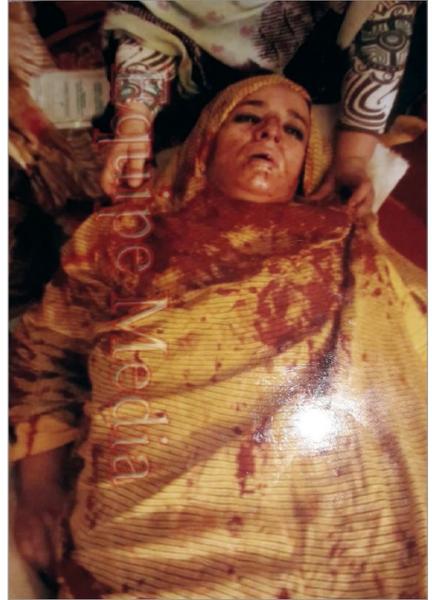
I have many marks on my body from so much hitting; they broke my arm and a tooth; they have cut open my head many times; I still have pain in my head. (043)

Physically they have caused me to lose an eye and my bones are deformed and bruised. (029)

In prison we started to get ill; our teeth fell out and our flesh fell from our feet; we were naked and hungry. There were constantly people who stopped moving; they suffered paralysis of their limbs; we lived in a hell. (056)

We came out of prison with chronic illnesses; four years without seeing the light of day; we had problems with our sight, bones, backs, stomach; I have rheumatism from being in such a narrow place. (059)

When I got out of prison I could barely walk; I had and still have problems in the lumbar region. I have a lot of problems from the torture I suffered. They burst my eardrums during those interrogation sessions. I spent four years without being able to sit, and even now it is difficult for me to spend much time sitting. I have had very serious problems that are still with me now. (060)



Source: testimony (008).



Source: testimony (043).

The torture and prison caused further problems for all of us; our bones are deformed and we have rheumatism; we cannot even make small movements. (071)



Source: testimony (029).

My mother, the poor thing, became ill; she came out of prison paralytic. Her legs and arms shrank and her neck was twisted towards one side. They had hit her so much on the head that it had become totally twisted. Her hands went stiff. We had to feed her, because she couldn't do it herself. She came out very ill and she was like that until she died in 2014. I also became ill from all that torture, particularly because of that water mixed with other products that they tortured us with. (074)



Source: testimony (029).

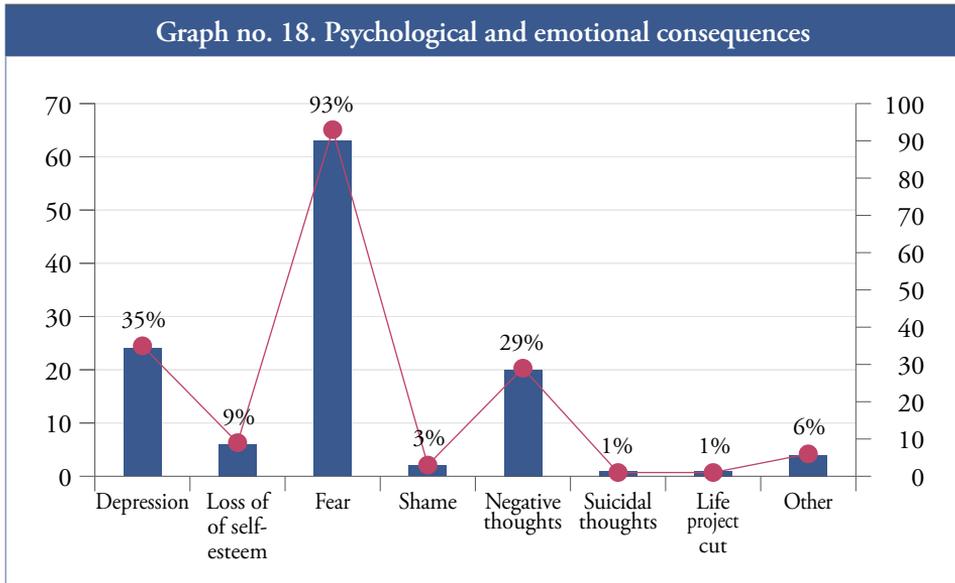
They tortured me with electricity until I passed out; now my right leg is dead from that electricity that they applied to me. The consequences have been great; that part which is disabled, now I cannot feel it, it is asleep. And the rest of my body hurts constantly, I cannot sleep properly due to this unbearable pain, because of the beatings I received; my chest hurts a lot; I can't control my bladder, I have to use nappies; I can't control all my muscles, they have destroyed my life. (...) This hemiparesis I have is a result of all the torture I have received; sometimes I cannot move my hand, it falls asleep. (076)

I have chronic insomnia, I cannot sleep; my young days still torture me; I have diabetes and my blood pressure gets very high. (037)

I suffer from migraines, which are very painful for me, and then I cannot stand either noises or lights; now I also have high blood pressure, I cannot travel or do many things. They hit me on the back, so hard that for weeks I couldn't get up. I still suffer considerable pain in my back because of those blows, and I am almost unable to do any physical effort because of the pain. (082)

5.2. Psychological and emotional consequences

The psychological and emotional impacts reported to this investigation have been, most outstandingly, fear (93%), followed by depression (35%), negative thoughts (29%), loss of self-esteem (9%) and shame (3%). What is more, there is also mention of suicidal thoughts (1%) and a feeling of having one's life project cut short (1%).



The testimonies that express living with **fear** are the most numerous, a feeling that is frequently linked with **alterations of sleep patterns and nightmares**.

The material things that we have lost can be regained, but the most important, such as those disappeared and murdered, that is what hurts us the most. They have us living in a constant state of terror and fear. Still today I live in fear. Sometimes I imagine those policemen following me; I see them on the wall and I see that they are going to trap me and abduct me. Now I am afraid of everything; I don't meet other people much; I don't talk to anyone; it is if I am in a constant depression. I live with terror. (008)

I can no longer sleep well. (...) During my pregnancy I couldn't go outside for fear that they would hit me and I would suffer a miscarriage, I spent those

nine months confined at home; at that time there were demonstrations every day in occupied El Aaiun. (043)

We are suffering this harassment constantly; it leaves its mark, every night we are alert, afraid that they will assault us; the children tell us that we should close the doors; we live in a state of constant terror. (047)

[At university] I suffered humiliations and repressions, to the extent that when I met a Sahrawi woman I would embrace her and start to cry. I became depressed. We couldn't go out, for fear. It was with other Sahrawi women that I found shelter and protection. I even thought of leaving my studies and returning to my family. (035)

When they took my son I made banners and wrote letters, and I delivered them; but there is no justice; I have been afraid; I have many injuries and this causes fear, insomnia, pain in my soul... (055)

Everything I have experienced, the torture, seeing my relatives die under torture, prison... it still marks me; what has happened to me I cannot assimilate; every night I remember it again, and I see the image of my cousin who died under torture. It was very hard. (057)

During my disappearance I slept little, I had fears. They used to come and sexually harass us... we couldn't sleep for long periods... That stayed with me after getting out; I couldn't sleep, just three hours at most; I felt "programmed" for three hours, no more, and I had nightmares... Thank God I have had psychological treatment and little by little I have been recovering, but unfortunately the repercussions are still occurring and some of them will be with me for the rest of my life, since they have no cure and your head cannot forget them. (019)

The publication of my personal life on the social media affected me. We are a very reserved people. We are very careful about our privacy. I suffer because I have been deprived of my personal life. I sleep just a few hours at night, and my sleep is badly interrupted, and during the day I cannot sleep at all. (005)

I was a girl with a future ahead of me; they have taken away my smile, in that prison I lived with my aggressors and I couldn't see them, I only had contact

with them when they spoke, I didn't know who they were... I didn't know that those kinds of tortures existed... (003)

Other psychological impacts are the **pain due to loss or because of family separation**, during periods of imprisonment, due to worry about the suffering of family members because of the violence they themselves have suffered, or because of the forced displacement that has divided Sahrawi families.

My mother is still suffering; she cries every day because of the death of her son. They killed him after the destruction of the Gdeim Izik camp; they shot him. (047)

Is there anything harder than having to leave your children without shelter, unprotected? (013)

Some things I will never, ever forget. At the time of my arrest, the screams of my son [nursing] during that struggle; I tried to stay with my son and the soldiers pulled at him, and it is an image that I will die with. The image of my family, when the soldiers took me out; my mother being held up by other people so as not to fall, my younger sisters, with their arms folded, watching the scene, and my father to one side, in a corner of the house. That image will be with me always; it is an image of pain and impotence. I spent 16 years disappeared-detained. (027)

[When I was disappeared-detained], my daughter was aged 1 year and 11 months, that caused me a psychological war, I didn't know if she was alive or dead, whether they had left her with my parents or not; I knew nothing about my daughter; I had milk in my breasts and I knew nothing of my daughter. I had all kinds of thoughts, that they could have stolen her and taken her to Morocco. In prison the thing that concerned me the most was that girl who I left, so little and without being weaned; I used to turn over in my head what might have happened to her. (059)

[When I was disappeared-detained], every time I thought of them [her mother and her daughters] I cried a lot, and the situation in which I left my mother, so weak and without any support. I thought I would never see them again. (071)

When we knew for sure that the Moroccans had come to stay, my family decided to get out of the occupied areas; they had to go to the refugee camps. I suffered

greatly from loss, separation from my husband and later separation from my family. It was a great suffering to be left alone in such a short time. I became like most women, with a new-born girl without a father and without grandparents. Our people dispersed in just a few months. (...) I even borrowed men's sandals from the neighbours to put them at the door, in case the army or the police came at night, so they would see the sandals and think there was a man there, and then they would leave me alone. That is what I thought, in my fear, and so I slept well for many nights, thanks to that fantasy of the sandals. (079)

The testimonies also reflect, particularly, some of the **psychosocial consequences of sexual violence**.

That [sexual violence] is very humiliating, it humiliates your dignity, it lowers your spirits and your self-esteem, it damages your pride. (001)

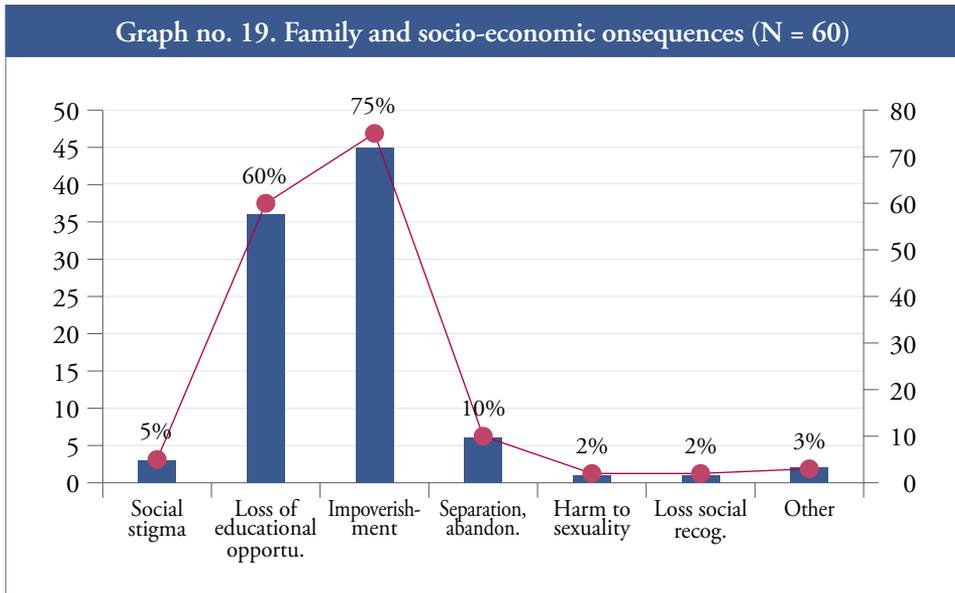
I was 14, it was terrible for me, a minor, and I didn't know much; I felt dirty and my concern was about pride and what would be said by my loved ones and my family, which is conservative; in our culture it is seen very badly that a woman or a child suffer that kind of harassment. (003)

The threats of rape and the sexual harassment affected me a great deal, mentally. For a time I wasn't sleeping at night, I couldn't sleep. (...) There are people who suffered rape and they kept silent about it, because of our society and how important virginity is in it, they were scared of the shame they would experience in society. (012)

What affected me most was the sterilization they subjected me to; that was the cause of all the ills that I suffer from. (009)

5.3. Family and socio-economic consequences

Among those Sahrawi women who have indicated family and socio-economic consequences of human rights violations, the large majority refer to an impoverishment or deterioration of their material living conditions (75%) and the loss of educational opportunities (60%). Other impacts mentioned are: separation from family (10%), which is more commonly given, as we have seen, as a psycho-emotional consequence; social stigma (5%); loss of social recognition (2%); and harm to sexual relations (2%).



Impoverishment or deterioration in living conditions is linked to a range of factors that usually appear in a combined way: the physical and psychological aftermath of torture resulting in incapacitation for a working life (for them or relatives they depend on), the Moroccan policies of economic-labour exclusion of the Sahrawi population, and the economic costs of the repression for families with members imprisoned for political reasons.

Neither my husband nor I work. My husband, who was our only support, worked as a tailor, but the consequences of prison and torture have meant that he is ill and he can no longer do anything; but we still have God. (033)

My family is poor; my only support was my son, and now he is a permanent prisoner for participating in the peaceful demonstrations of Gdeim Izik. The prison is very far from where we live, about 1500 kilometres; it is an enormous effort, both physical and financial. For us, a family without resources, it is very difficult to make these visits; we don't have anywhere to stay, or money to rent a place to be able to visit our son. (082)

At the family level, the Sahrawi women interviewed relate multiple impacts. Many of them have suffered the **loss of close relatives** to killings, enforced disappearance, forced displacement, illnesses and/or political imprisonment,

or their **family members suffer by extension** the repression that Morocco carries out against them.

They mutilated my childhood; I was left without my mother and without siblings. (037)

They took a relative of mine and I prisoner; I was nursing my son, the one who is a prisoner now. We have been suffering the Moroccan invasion since the first day; from that day to this we have not lived a single day of peace, we no longer know what it means to live in peace. My daughter died of illness, because of the shocks, as a result of the mistreatment received by her siblings, the raids that were constantly being carried out... She couldn't stand it anymore and she became ill, psychologically, until she died. I blame the Moroccan occupation directly for that illness. The same with her older brother, they sent him mad and he was ill all the time until his death; I also blame them for the death of my oldest son. They made my children ill and as a result they died. (021)

When I come back from a demonstration at which they have beat me and my children ask, I tell them they haven't done anything to me. Although one of the children knows everything because sometime he comes with me and he knows what is going to happen. He always expects bad news about me, that they have killed me or they have detained me, and when he sees me come back he thanks God. (...) This very day, we had a police car in front of the door of our house, and my youngest daughter, who is scared of the police, did not want to go out to school, saying she was scared... As we have suffered so much harassment, so many raids on our home, and watched so much, now they have that fear. When we want to meet or do something at home, we have to take her somewhere else, so she doesn't suffer. (033)

They turned up at my house at three in the afternoon; I was pregnant and my daughter was ill with chicken pox; she was very weak, the poor thing; one of them caught hold of her and threw her, and she was lucky because she fell on a mattress and was saved. (013)

[During my disappearance-detention] my children and the other children of the Sahrawi women were left without parents, almost all of them had problems, without money and without resources, it was very difficult for the family to live decently. My children couldn't continue studying. My daughter disappeared, we

didn't find out anything about her, we don't know if she is alive or dead. (...) When we got out of prison, years later, I didn't recognize my son, who cried with happiness when he saw me. But the most shocking thing was the way I found my mother: old and sad. She looked like my grandmother. The year they took me, when the two of us went together, people thought we were sisters. And I found her changed and defeated. Like a sack of bones sitting there. She looked at me and said: 'daughter, don't you recognize me?'. My mother had suffered greatly during my absence; she had suffered the fear of having lost her daughter and the work involved in having a big family to maintain, without a mother or father. The situation was very difficult, dramatic. I came out of prison crippled, my children had had no schooling and they were scared, with one daughter disappeared and my mother weak and sad. (060)

When I got out of prison, my oldest daughter, whom I had left when she was 11, ran towards me: she was 21 now. She embraced me and fainted... I didn't recognize her, I thought that she was just one of the people who were there to welcome us... When we got home, I found my mother in a corner. She was suffering from Parkinson's disease, and they had given her some pills so that she could withstand my return; and my brother, who had schizophrenia, was in another corner. I fell into a deep depression; the joy of my liberation didn't last long; my family had suffered much because of my stay in prison; I embraced my mother, I started to cry and nothing more... When I calmed down a bit, I asked about my daughters. I had left them very small, and they were now young women. What concerned me the most were my mother and my ill brother. (071)

The family consequences also include the suffering of **women whose children are political prisoners** in Moroccan prisons.

We go to visit our son in prison and it is very hard; we spend a day and a night on the road to get there. They look at us threateningly. We don't get out to rest at the cafeterias out of fear. They say things to us that we don't like, in a threatening tone. It is a risk, but we have to bear it. (021)

At the time of the Gdeim Izik events, they detained many people; over 600 just in El Aaiun, including my son. They went for him directly; he went through three days of extreme torture, they hit him, they pulled the nails out of his hands, they broke his ribs. Then he was taken into Morocco, to Rabat.

For visits, we cannot see them, they only let us listen to them. They have condemned my son and another eight to life imprisonment. (080)

The day when they were going to try my son at a military trial, I was in front of the court to see him pass. They arrived with him, he was handcuffed; I shouted that I wanted to see him, that he was my son, and they looked at me and swore at me; they didn't let me get close. When the trial ended they passed in front of me again, and I didn't see him again. Now it is a great ordeal to visit our children. (082)

Stigma and social isolation are two of the effects of the human rights violations pointed out by the women, especially in the case of those singled out for their political activism.

After my arrest and being set free, my friends from pre-university started to reject me, until I was alone; I came and went to my studies alone. I felt rejected by everyone, because of pressure from their families. I had friends, but I lost them because of my struggle and my resistance to the occupation. Even my own family advised me and they said they would look after me, but in the end they know you are right, they start to understand you and they leave you in your struggle. (012)

People were afraid of me, I felt like a germ; my family couldn't come close to me because they were afraid of the Moroccan authorities. The police were watching me all the time; that kept people away from me, out of fear of ending up like me. That left me isolated. I feel cursed; anyone who gets close to me receives a threat and they take them directly to prison, because I have been a disappeared person. My family suffers from interrogations; they have to notify them of all my movements, who has come, whom I have been with, why they came... It is like feeling watched in another prison, but in my own home. (019)

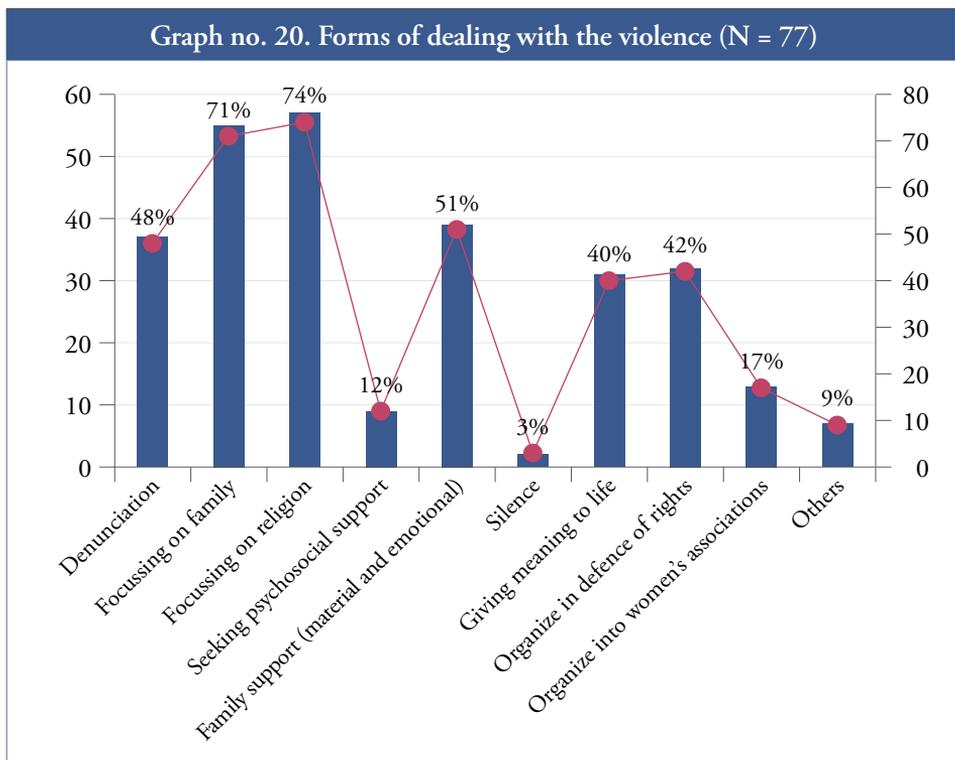
The Moroccans' racism got worse after Gdeim Izik. Your neighbours, with whom previously you had a certain neighbourly relationship, or who ate with you, after Gdeim Izik kept their distance. These relationships have been broken, to the point that many have gone against us. When the soldiers used to arrive, they would say, 'there you have the Sahrawis, we haven't done anything'. (035)

When we left school to go home, the girls and I were always followed by the police. They said harassing, humiliating things to us; so much so that we started to feel like not going back to school any more. And in the street you felt really bad, because people see that the police are following you and they think that you have done something improper or indecent. People in the street don't imagine you are in that situation because you have shouted slogans, defended the Sahrawi cause, been in demonstrations or fought against racism. (064)

6. Forms of dealing with the violence



Facing the levels of violence described in this investigation, the women refer to various mechanisms they use in order to counteract their impact and that they resort to as elements of support. The most frequent are: focussing on religion (74%), focussing on seeking family well-being (71%), relying on the support of their families, in emotional and material terms (51%), denouncing violence (48%), organizing in order to defend their rights (42%) and giving a meaning to their lives (40%), often related to their political struggle for the Sahrawi people. Organizing into women's organizations appears in 17% of the cases, 12% say they have sought psychosocial support and, lastly, 3% have opted for silence as a mechanism for coping.



A faith in God and religion, the motivation to guarantee the wellbeing of their **families** and the emotional and material support that they receive from these and from **friendships**, often with fellow political activists, are essential parts of the life experience of the women interviewed.

[During disappearance-detention], if I hadn't had great faith, I couldn't have stood it. The fear, the threats, not knowing when they are going to kill you... (060)

I thought about my children and this made the pain bearable. (013)

My faith helped me a great deal, and the strength of my grandmother and my children helped me. The thread that kept me alive, that flaming torch, was my children. Now I want to let them study, to offer them shelter, I don't want them to be orphans or that they go to jail, that protection I am giving my children. Because, what is more, their father died and now I am the pillar of my family; if I die, who will my children stay with? (037)

I phoned my children and I told them everything; I said that they would see photos that defame me and that I would be beaten and tortured, and that all that is happening is because I am an activist in the fight for the independence of their country and for their rights; I wanted to calm them and them not to be shocked. And also to strengthen myself, knowing what was going to happen, and try to stop it affecting me. (033)

Thank God I have a family that understands me and loves me; they say to me 'on you go', I am the pride of my family and when I go out they support me. That is very important, when you feel understood, that support means I go on fighting for my ideals and principles, and also the people around me and my friends are activists. It is true I have lost the opportunity to study, to work, to get an official job and earn an income, but I don't mind; my work and my dream is to be a human rights activist. (003)

Thank God I have great faith, a lot of willpower; I have had the support of my friends, the ones who were with me in the prison and the ones who were outside as well. Those four years of enforced disappearance gave me much more strength, more tenacity and perseverance to continue. We have created a big family, we are united, we are always in contact and we have built a strong friendship outside prison. Our conviction to defend the self-determination of our people has grown more, and denouncing human rights violations by the Moroccan occupation, this has helped us come together easily. (019)

[In prison] they left me in a dark place; little light came in. I became disoriented. After about an hour I started to hear voices coming from other rooms; Busheiba, may she rest in peace, was reciting a verse to help me be calm and to tell me that I wasn't alone. In the verse she was telling me that, whoever I am, whether man or woman, wherever I come from, that they were there and that these were other lands. That returned all my energy to me in an instant. I stood up and started to thank God. I thought, 'I must be calm' in order to be able to keep my mind healthy. 'A few moments ago I was sure that they were going to kill me. Now I have an opportunity and I am alive, among many people I know'. I had hope again. (020)

When the Moroccans detained us, my mother took care of seven children, our children. She had to breastfeed three of them at once, including my son and two nephews. (080)

I have had the support of my family and the Sahrawi people. I spent a lot of time in hospitals; there have been many operations, but thank God, with the support of my family and neighbours we have been able to make progress. (060)

Denouncing violence, organization and mobilization to defend their rights and their **strong convictions** related to the Sahrawi cause, are also crucial mechanisms of resistance in the face of violence.

My injuries are physical: they have broken my feet, my ribs, they have dislocated my shoulder, my head and my leg; but they have not broken my hope or my will to keep fighting until the end. (003)

Thank God, your principles and values mean that you can overcome all atrocities, because of the importance and justice of our cause. (...) A thing that gave me strength to stand it all was reading a lot about the history of revolutions and the history of occupations, because Sahara was not the first country occupied; there is the matter of Palestine, the extermination of the native peoples in the Americas... I returned to history and that meant I could withstand everything we suffer; it would be necessary to make sacrifices, people must give in order to take up their rights. (012)

I have never been happy, but since I started to belong to the associations I am stronger, with more courage to continue working in something I like and that helps in my people's struggle. (055)

In the '70s, we knew that in every house where they held clandestine meetings to raise political awareness in favour of the Polisario Front, that what happened to us was going to happen. When we were preparing demonstrations, we knew that we could be arrested, both during Spanish colonialism and with the Moroccan invasion. We knew that they could torture us, rape us... But we had very strong convictions for our cause, we had become committed in a very serious, constant and long-lasting way to the independence of our land. (...) An example is Fatma Elghalia, a historical activist who played a very important role in Agdez prison, from 1976, risking her life to teach us, help us and teach us Sahrawi women prisoners to read and write. She started to write on the soles of her shoes, in the dark, hungry, in the most extreme conditions of torture and neglect by the Moroccan authorities. She risked this in order to teach Sahrawi women, culture in general, political classes, about resistance to and defiance of the enemy. She made us see that the stages of being in prison were not all the same and it was necessary to make use of the times when control and vigilance were less to learn and educate ourselves. We even celebrated holidays and anniversaries. When they realized they punished us. (060)

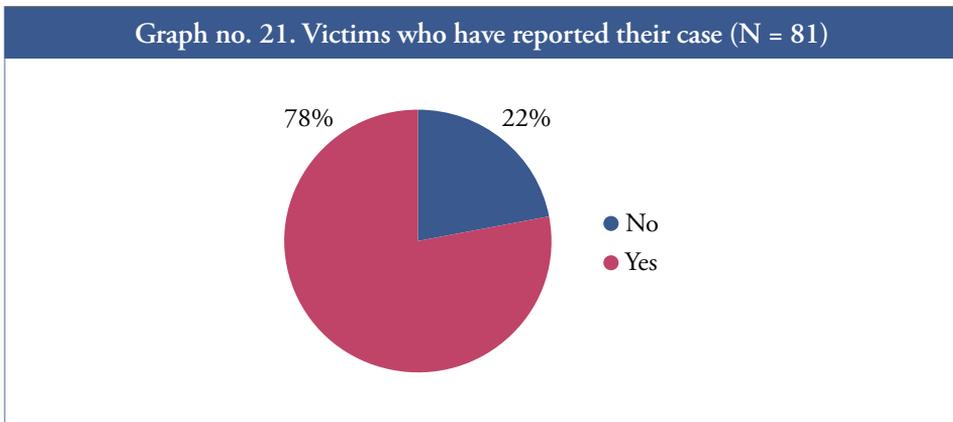
Sahrawi women have known how to hold on tightly to our culture. Our mother, when we used a Moroccan term in our dialect, scolded us and said 'that is not our way of speaking'. And all our mothers were like that. The same with our clothing; we have kept wearing it, we have been born and grown up under the Moroccan occupation, but we don't use any words in their dialect. We have always known that with the disappearance of our identity and our culture, our cause would also disappear. It is not a question of being an activist and leaving our customs and traditions to one side: these things are closely linked. They said that I was part of the first generation to have kept up these customs and traditions, but all this is thanks to what my mother, my aunts and the other women taught me. (029)

The whole neighbourhood mobilised and we rose up strongly in favour of our liberty; we put out our carpets in the streets and we hoisted our flags. They sent the police and armoured cars from the Moroccan army to lay siege to our street. But that day we took the street and the roofs of our houses. That day, in that street, we tasted independence. (078)

7. Victims' access to justice



78% of the women interviewed have reported, at least once, the human rights violations they have suffered at the hands of Morocco, motivated more by their **activism in defence of human rights** than by real hope of receiving justice.



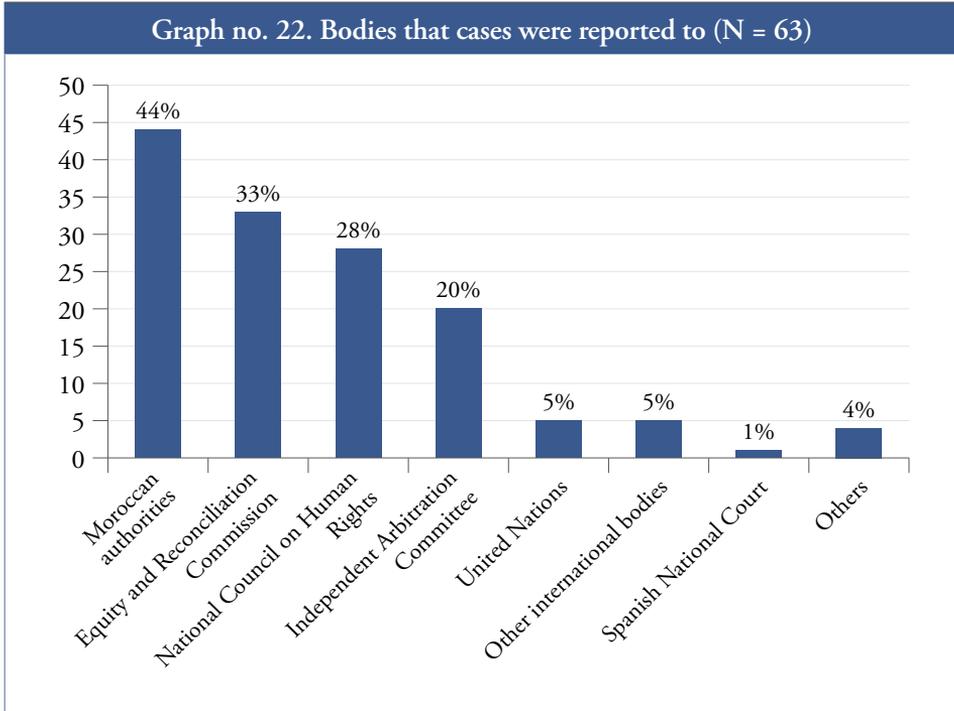
The victims and their families have reported the guilty people in order to take them to court and in order to reveal the truth of what happened to us, during those years and in those secret places, with the enforced disappearances. (019)

We have reported these things, because I don't want these things to repeat themselves, either with my daughter or with any one of the Sahrawi people; because we all suffer the same with this occupation force. (062)

If a woman is raped, by whoever, and even more so if it is by the Moroccan occupation, she should not remain silent in the face of a crime like that, never. Quite the opposite, it is crucial to denounce it everywhere, and in every forum. (012)

Mostly, the incidents were reported to bodies of the Moroccan administration (44%), the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (Morocco) (33%), the

National Council on Human Rights (Morocco) (28%) and the Independent Arbitration Committee (Morocco) (20%)⁶. In other cases, the women have made reports to the United Nations (5%), other international bodies (5%) and the Spanish National Court (1%).



22% of the women have not reported the incidents and the most frequent reasons given for not doing so were the **expectation that no justice would be obtained** from the Moroccan authorities and a lack of trust or **fear of possible reprisals** against them or their families.

We have never reported the facts; the torturer is Moroccan and the administration is also Moroccan; there can be no justice in these conditions. (012)

⁶ Although the National Council on Human Rights, the Independent Arbitration Committee and the Equity and Reconciliation Commission declare themselves to be independent bodies, their independence and impartiality are strongly questioned by Sahrawi human rights organizations.

At that time, 2016, I thought that the King's prosecutor was going to investigate what had happened, that it was going to release me, return my camera and my personal belongings, and that is why I reported it, but there was no response. Quite the opposite, they tortured me for asking about my camera and making a report; they said 'you cannot report anything because you are guilty just for saying "Western Sahara"; you are living in Moroccan Sahara and you are lucky to be out of prison. As soon as you say "Western Sahara" again you know what your fate will be, we will take you to prison'. I lost consciousness from so much torture and I realized it was not worth making another report, that it was no use reporting anything here, to the same enemy. (058)

I have never reported anything for fear of the reprisals they might make against my family. My husband and I have suffered so much prison and we are so scared... There was a time in my life when I was absent from all activities, out of fear of what might happen to my children. We are a family that has suffered so many threats and so much harassment, that we live in terror. (068)

No international bodies work here. The United Nations averts its eyes and they don't care what happens in the occupied territories. We always let them know what happens to us and they don't say anything, they are in the cafes and doing tourist activities, and the number plates on their cars are Moroccan. (043)

90% of the cases of violations of the Sahrawi women's human rights, whether or not they have been reported, have not been investigated. The testimonies collected reflect the great obstacles encountered by the women, and the Sahrawi population as a whole, when obtaining justice in the context of the Moroccan military occupation.

I have gone to the public prosecutor in El Aaiun, but he has not done anything. I have presented reports with photographs and with recordings, but they tell the thief to steal and the persecutor to keep watch. That is their policy. They are corrupt and torturers. It is an invading country that has invaded a civilian people, unarmed. (037)

I have reported incidents over twenty times to the administration of the Moroccan occupation and to their appeal court, but nobody has responded

nor have they told us anything in writing to this day. I don't have any knowledge about what they have done with these reports; we report on the occupation, and the occupation is the one that handles this matter, so they won't do anything about it. (029)

Their response to my report was silence, just like the thousands of reports by direct victims and relatives of disappeared and imprisoned people. The authorities take the report and they don't do anything with it; nobody dares to try a policeman for torture. All our evidence is hidden by them and they threaten our witnesses so that they do not speak out. This means that everything is forgotten; everyone is scared and they don't dare to defend us as human rights activists. (003)

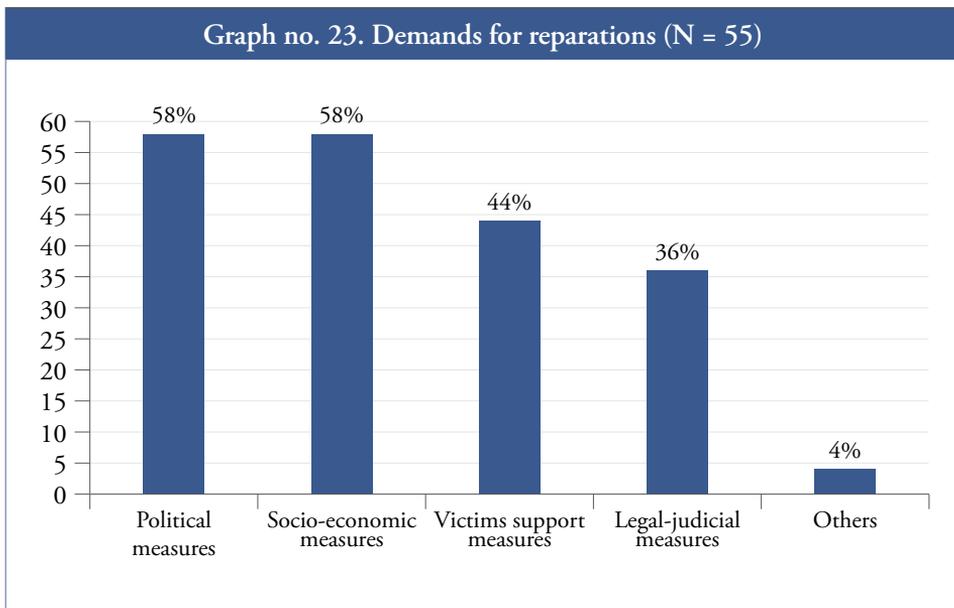
When I reported the fact that they had beaten me, they asked who I was reporting; I said that the authorities had beaten me. They took the report and they laughed at me. I know perfectly well that they have thrown it in the bin. They have never told us anything. (082)

It is very unlikely that they will process an individual report. There was a joint feeling among all the victims who had been in prison to make a collective report. A committee was created and we have made thousands of denunciations, but it didn't go anywhere; in Morocco there is no justice. You make a report and they do not respond, these files are void, and there is administrative silence; these files are archived and abandoned, that is to say, they might as well not exist. Of all the reports only two or three have come to the light. We are Sahrawi victims and they practice racism against us; they have never admitted torture in Morocco. (019)

8. Demands for reparations



The Sahrawi women's demands for reparations for the human rights violations committed by Morocco are varied in nature. They include political measures (58%), such as **independence**, the **recovery of territory** and the **end to the occupation**. As socio-economic reparations (58%), the women advocate **financial compensation**, **labour support**, **health attention** and **educational measures**. With regard to the victims (44%), the women propose measures for the **prevention of violence against women**, the **protection and memory of victims** and **psychosocial attention**. As legal-judicial measures (36%), the women demand that the **people responsible be tried** for their human rights violations and that there be **legal rehabilitation of victims**.



Within the framework of their rights to reparations, the women who have survived Moroccan violence clearly see as a guarantee of non-repetition the exercise of the **right to self-determination** of the Sahrawi people, a matter that links **independence** and the **end of the Moroccan occupation**. Other

demands expressed are the **return of the refugee population and the liberation of political prisoners.**

My demand is self-determination and the independence of the Sahrawi people, it is our right; and to judge those responsible for all we have suffered, such as the tortures and the imprisonment. We ask that they be judged and imprisoned, but I know that it will not happen like that, because they are part of the Moroccan occupation, which also needs to be judged. (029)

The only thing that can repair us is that they go, that the occupation end and they leave us free in our land. (013)

We want them to return to us our territory and our natural resources, such as the phosphate and our fishing. (064)

What I ask, for the damage done, firstly, is to recognize the crimes of the Moroccan occupation committed against the Sahrawi people, and particularly the rights violations that Sahrawi women have suffered under the occupation. (012)

My request is that Morocco leave, that the Moroccan occupation end. When they go, I will be in peace together with my children. There is no wealth or money that can pay the debt they have with me. There is no money that can pay for my orphanhood, the life of my grandmother, and of my father and my grandmother, the life of my mother who died in exile. And my life is still in danger. What I want is independence, I don't want money. And I want half of my family to come here, to be able to enjoy the rest of my years together with my mother's side of the family. I want to live in dignity. (037)

What my mother most desired was independence and to see the people we love who are elsewhere. She used to ask God that she might live to embrace her loved ones from the refugee camps. That is what she wanted, to be with all the family again. But she became a martyr. She is a martyr because she died in that way, after being tortured and imprisoned. (074)

The only thing that can repair this injustice is our independence; the return of our loved ones, who went to the refugee camps; all families being reunited, free and independent. The only thing I ask is that it be ours: our land and our freedom. (080)

The only thing that will repair the damage caused is that all detained persons be freed, that the whereabouts of all those who have disappeared be known, and our independence; that the Moroccan occupation end. (082)

It is necessary to join forces to denounce all crimes and unmask the Moroccan occupation, and to help the victims, we have many victims. Also, to examine the question of human rights in the occupied territories. (012)

I support the defence of our rights and that everything that should be ours as victims be looked at, but the political situation is not at that point. That can be solved with our independence. (020)

The tortures, the prisons, the detentions, the surveillance..., they are not new to us. Back in 1970, with the Zemla uprisings, we suffered those tortures and those persecutions by the Spanish colony. However, our neighbouring country, which is like us, which speaks like us, dresses like us and believes in God like we do, was more cruel. It made us suffer and continues to make us suffer much more. That is what has surprised us and hurts us. And let present and future generations know that those who declared the Sahrawi revolution, the Polisario Front, want a free country for their children and their grandchildren. It is very important to continue what they have begun, to continue with the spirit of struggle to achieve freedom for the Sahrawi people. The 1970s were very difficult and times have changed; let them make the most of this change to continue fighting. Previously the enemy was not watched by international organizations and had complete impunity to torture. It is important to fight and not to lower our guard. We have to achieve freedom and think that it is for life, we have to achieve it forever. (060)

Some of the women whose cases were accepted by the Independent Arbitration Office received small amounts of **compensation**, regarding which they made a negative assessment, as insufficient, as not being accompanied by other reparation measures, and, essentially, because the damage suffered is irreparable.

They give me compensation that amounts to nothing, a small financial contribution, but that does not return to me the four years I was disappeared, without my family, I missed my daughter's childhood. It has not given me back my health, or my relatives who died under torture. That compensation

is not what I ask for, my only compensation would be self-determination and independence. (059)

The compensations were poor and came late. What they gave us does not compensate for a single night of suffering under Moroccan torture. (060)

Moroccan occupation cannot repair the damage they have inflicted on me. It cannot repair the separation of families, the separation of my daughter, just a few days old, from her father; the separation from my parents, when I needed them most. That my mother and my father died without me seeing them, in a refugee camp, with me here. Amends cannot be made for that... (079)

Calls to the international community are also present in the women's demands for reparation and guarantees of non-repetition, despite the widespread feeling among the Sahrawi people of having been abandoned.

I call on international bodies, on governments, on associations, on the whole world to defend freedom, that they see what Morocco does in the occupied Sahrawi territories. Neither Morocco nor any other country has sovereignty over our land. We want the international community to deal with our question. (043)

We ask those associations that protect human rights to do something for all Sahrawis under Moroccan occupation who suffer so much violence. Let a mechanism be created for the observation and protection of human rights in the occupied territories. Here the torturer has impunity and continues to torture. We want there to be an end to everything that is happening to us, the abuse and violence by the occupation. And I think it will only end with the independence of Western Sahara. (029)

I want all organizations that fight for freedom to support the Sahrawis who suffer under the Moroccan occupation, and that they defend us in all international forums. We had so much hope in the United Nations, but they have done nothing... (047)

I will continue to resist, working peacefully and in a civilized way, because I belong to a people that does not like war or violence. I hope that this document or record be seen in various countries, that they join our people, denounce our

suffering and the violence against women, who are the ones who are most at risk since the revolution against the Spanish colony in the 1970s. I hope that they join in solidarity with the Sahrawi people, that they record it so that humanity knows it. (005)

I ask for just compensation, that our natural resources be returned to us, that the perpetrators and criminals be put before justice and that they shed light on the cases of those who disappeared; there were deaths in the prisons and today their families know nothing, they were enforced disappearances. We want international protection; the UN and MINURSO have not protected us nor have they looked out for the human rights of Sahrawis in the occupied territories. Morocco has hurt us so much, it has exploited us and pillaged our resources as if they were its own, and they are invaders. (055)

I ask international human rights organizations to come, to be witnesses of what is happening to us, that they help us to have the freedom of expression so we can say what is happening to us; they should not listen to the Moroccans who speak in our name. (079)

9. Summary of the investigation's results



This study documents the violations of human rights committed against Sahrawi women in Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara, those responsible, the consequences of this violence, the ways in which women try to contend with it, their experiences in appealing for justice and their demands for reparation. The investigation is based on 81 testimonies of Sahrawi women who have been direct victims of one or more human rights violations during the period between 1975 and 2021, in the context of the Moroccan occupation. They participated in in-depth interviews and filled in surveys, and supporting documentation has been collected regarding the human rights violations reported.

The testimonies collected reveal systematic and uninterrupted patterns of violence suffered by Sahrawi women since the beginning of the occupation of their territory, in 1975, up to the present day, with very serious violations of their fundamental civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

Of the 81 cases, 77 women gave their testimony as direct victims and 4 as relatives of victims, with ages ranging between 12 and 73. The majority of the women who have given their testimony (58%) were born in the city of El Aaiun. 59% participate in an organization that is part of the Sahrawi people's rights movement and almost all, whether or not they currently are members of a specific group, identify with activism in favour of self-determination and the defence of human rights.

On average, **each Sahrawi women interviewed has suffered under the Moroccan occupation 6.7 kinds of human rights violations**, including: violations of liberty and personal security (91%), violations of cultural rights (91%), physical torture (90%), psychological torture (90%), violations of the right to life (89%), violations of health and education rights (75%), sexual violence (68%), violations of economic rights (53%) and forced displacement (27%). All the serious human rights violations suffered by the Sahrawi women are classed in the regulations of International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law.

- 89% of the Sahrawi women report **violation of the right to life** as direct or indirect victims. As direct victims, many of the incidents are related to crimes of torture and attacks on liberty and personal security. As indirect victims, the women have witnessed the **extrajudicial executions** of relatives or acquaintances, some at clandestine detention centres. Among the violations of the right to life, 33% of the women have suffered **enforced disappearance**. Some people continue to be disappeared, while those who survived and who have been able to give their testimony in this investigation were disappeared-detained for periods that range from months up to 16 years. They have passed through different clandestine detention centres, such as the MICCP, RIB, Kalaa Maguna, Agdez and others, with frequent transfers, without anyone knowing their locations and being subject to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishments.
- 90% of the Sahrawi women interviewed for this study have been subject to different forms of **torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment** by Morocco. The torture has taken place during periods of disappearance-detention of the women, and in locations such as prisons or clandestine detention centres. Furthermore, this serious human rights violation also appears repeatedly in other contexts and locations, for example, before, during and after their participation in demonstrations, gatherings or protests, in public spaces and in broad daylight.
- The forms of **physical torture** applied to the Sahrawi women have been many and in some cases have been very extreme. Those which have been identified are: **blows with objects** (90%), **public ridicule** (88%), **blows without objects** (60%), **punishments** (48%), **blindfolding or the use of hoods** (36%), **burns or cuts** (26%), **hanging in extreme positions** (16%), **asphyxiation by immersion in water** (15%), **use of electricity on the body** (12%), **forced labour** (10%), **use of animals** (8%), **asphyxiation with a bag** (5%), **mutilations** (3%) and **extreme temperatures** (3%).
- The forms of **psychological torture** applied to the Sahrawi women include: **insults** (95%), **threats** (90%), **obligation to be in the presence of or listen to the torture of others** (55%), **sleep deprivation** (37%), **deprivation or insufficient food** (34%), **unhealthy conditions and/or deprivation of hygiene** (34%), **solitary confinement** (34%), **slander regarding relatives** (27%), **overcrowding** (23%), **individual isolation** (22%) and **death threats**

regarding relatives (19%). These practices seek to destabilize a person emotionally, creating such an extreme level of suffering that it can affect their mental faculties and their personality.

- 68% of the Sahrawi women have suffered **sexual violence** at the hands of the Moroccan security forces. The types of sexual violence identified have been: **groping and touching** (76%), **forced nudity** (51%), **verbal aggression and/or jokes with a sexual content** (51%), **blows to the breasts and/or genitals** (51%), **threats of rape** (either them or relatives) (27%), **torture during pregnancy** (13%), **forced miscarriage** (9%), **made to witness or listen to sexual violence against another person** (5%), **rape** (4%), **forced sexual photographs** (4%), **electrocution of the breasts and/or genitals** (4%), **sexual slavery** (2%), **rape with objects** (2%), **sexual mutilation** (breasts, genitals) (2%) and **forced sterilization** (2%). All these crimes have affected adult women and also children and adolescents. This crime of *lèse humanité* has occurred constantly since the beginning of the occupation, in 1975, and the three periods with the highest levels of sexual violence are: 1985-1989 (17%), 2005-2009 (17%) and since 2015 (25%). Although it is probable that the real extent of this crime is greater than that registered in this investigation, the results obtained contribute to determining the scope and systematic nature of the practice of sexual violence as part of the repressive policies of Morocco against Sahrawi women.
- 91% of the Sahrawi women have been victims of **attacks on liberty and personal security**. The crimes recorded are: **being followed and watched** (81%), **violations of freedom of expression** (81%), **meeting** (78%), **movement** (78%) and **association** (57%), **raids** (69%), **physical abuse** (65%), **abduction** (42%), **destruction of property** (39%), **defamation** and attacks on a person's reputation (36%), **monitoring** telephone calls and/or interfering with mail (31%), **seizure or confiscation of property** (27%), **arbitrary imprisonment** (9%), **arbitrary detention** (8%), **false accusations** (4%) and **forced divorce** (1%).
- **Forced displacement** has affected 27% of the Sahrawi women interviewed. This is a kind of human rights violation that is linked to the refugee population in the camps of Tindouf (Algeria), but which also affects the population of occupied Western Sahara, in some cases as relatives of displaced persons, but also as direct victims. The categorization of the incidents related to forced

displacement in the occupied territories can be carried out by identifying: **resettlement** (77%), **collective forced displacement** (59%), **expulsion** (36%), **confinements** (32%), **forced displacement as individuals** (32%) **and as a family** (14%), and to the experience of **bombardments** during the forced displacements (14%)

- 53% of the Sahrawi women report **violations of their economic rights**, such as: **labour discrimination** (49%), **harassment at work** (23%), **ban on working** (21%), **unjustified dismissal** (16%), **salary freezing** (12%), **increased precariousness at work** (12%), **deprivation of means of subsistence** (the territory's natural resources) (7%), **refusal of work permits** (7%) and the **withdrawal or threat of withdrawal of economic support**, such as the National Promotion Card (7%). The economic repression particularly affects Sahrawi women who participate in activities defending the rights of the Sahrawi people. The policy of the Moroccan occupation promotes the socio-economic and labour exclusion of the Sahrawi population, which clearly affects women. The majority (59%) have no monthly income, which has consequences for central aspects of their survival, such as the possibility of paying for basic food, as well as for their levels of personal autonomy.
- 75% of the Sahrawi women have had their **social rights** breached in a significant way, particularly their rights to **health and education**. The data indicate that, most frequently, the women experience **discrimination in terms of medical attention** (56%) or the **refusal of medical attention** (56%). There are also high levels observed of situations of **harassment at school** (43%), followed by **threats of expulsion** (18%) or **expulsions** (11%) from educational institutions. Other forms of violence against women in the school setting are: **punishments** (15%), **having lower marks given** without reason (15%), **being forced to leave school** (13%) and the **refusal to give grants** (7%).
- **Violations of cultural rights** have affected a very high proportion of the Sahrawi women (91%). Cultural repression is expressed in various forms: the **prohibition of traditional Sahrawi homes** (*haimas*) (86%), the **prohibition of wearing or showing Sahrawi national symbols** (80%), **threats for wearing traditional Sahrawi clothing** (66%), a **negation of Sahrawi history and identity** (58%), a **ban on giving new-born children Sahrawi names** (51%), a **ban on wearing traditional Sahrawi clothing** (43%), **threats or**

harassment for speaking Hassaniya (30%) and the prohibition of speaking Hassaniya (23%). Lastly, 7% of the women report being subjected to **forced acculturation** by the occupation.

- In terms of those **responsible** for the human rights violations, **75% of the Sahrawi women point to the following Moroccan security forces:** police (64%), intelligence services (25%), auxiliary forces (18%), army (11%) and gendarmerie (7%). Very often, the Moroccan agents operate in civilian dress, and the victims also report combined operations by various security forces. **69% of the women are able to identify those who perpetrated the violations directly**, all of them men who, in general, live in the occupied territories. Although the main responsibility falls to agents of the Moroccan security forces, in certain cases there has been collaboration –by action or a failure to act– by the Moroccan colonists. In this way, the victims highlight **the participation of Moroccan civilians in the incidents of violence (21%)**, particularly in attacks on liberty and personal security and in violations of the right to work, health, education, cultural identity and access to justice. Apart from direct perpetrators, the testimonies also indicate the responsibilities of international actors in the human rights violations, as a consequence of the silences and complicities with the Moroccan regime.
- The **consequences** of the human rights violations documented in this investigation are physical, psychological and emotional, family and socio-economic. The impacts of the violence have often become **chronic, due to their seriousness and a lack of medical and/or psychosocial attention** in the wake of incidents. Furthermore, on occasions these impacts have resulted in consequences that have **limited, or rendered impossible**, one or a number of dimensions of the women's lives.
- 91% of the women have suffered **physical consequences**, such as: **chronic pain (70%), disturbed sleep (59%), illnesses (57%), injuries** of various kinds (54%), **disturbed eating patterns (39%), physical or sensory disability (38%), hospitalizations (32%), fractures (28%) and loss of fertility (16%).**
- Furthermore, 84% of the women suffer from **psychological and emotional consequences**, such as: **fear (93%), depression (35%), negative thoughts (29%), loss of self-esteem (9%) shame (3%), suicidal thoughts (1%) and feelings of having their life project cut short (1%).** Other psychological

impacts mentioned are **pain due to the loss of relatives** and feelings of **humiliation and having their pride and dignity affected**.

- What is more, 74% of the women report **family and socio-economic consequences**, including: **impoverishment** or deterioration of living conditions (75%), **loss of educational opportunities** (60%), **family separation** (10%), **social stigma** (5%) and the **loss of social recognition** (2%), and **harm to sexual relations** (2%)
- In the midst of the violence described, the women refer to a range of mechanisms for coping with its impacts and which they resort to as **supporting factors**. The most frequent are: **focussing on religion** (74%), **focussing on seeking family well-being** (71%), **relying on the support of their families**, in emotional and material terms (51%), **denouncing** the violence (48%), **organizing** in order to defend the rights of the Sahrawi people (42%) and **giving a meaning to life** (40%), often in a way that is related to their political struggle on behalf of the Sahrawi people. **Organization into women's associations** appears in 17% of cases, 12% say that they have sought **psychosocial support**. Lastly, 3% have chosen to **stay silent** as a mechanism for dealing with the violations.
- In terms of the victims' **access to justice**, **78% of the women have reported** the incidents to different authorities within the Moroccan administration. Despite the reports made and the high level of identification of the direct perpetrators, **there is total impunity**: no trials have taken place against members of the Moroccan security forces or Moroccan colonists involved in the human rights violations. Consequently, the Sahrawi women have been *de facto* denied their right to justice and, as victims, are in a situation of **complete powerlessness**.
- The **demands for reparation** for the human rights violations committed by Morocco are of various kinds. They include measures of a political kind (58%), such as **independence**, **recovery of the territory** and the **end to the occupation**. As socio-economic reparation (58%), the women advocate actions such as **financial compensation**, **labour support**, **health care** and **educational measures**. With regard to the victims (44%), the women propose measures such as the **prevention of violence against women**, the **protection and memory of victims** and **psychosocial attention**. As legal-

judicial measures (36%), the women have demanded that **those responsible be tried** for the human rights violations, and measures of **legal rehabilitation of victims**. To a very large extent, the women survivors of Moroccan violence see as a guarantee of non-repetition the exercise of the **right to self-determination** of the Sahrawi people, a matter that is closely linked to **independence** and the **end of the Moroccan occupation**. Other actions demanded are the **return of the refugee population** and the **liberation of political prisoners**.

Appendices



Appendix 1. Interview form

Interview details
Testimony no.:
Date and place of interview:
Duration of the interview:
Interviewer's name and signature:

Victim's details					
Name		Surnames			
Other names or nicknames		Identity card no.			
Date and place of birth		Current age			
Form of contact		Place of residence			
Marital status					
<input type="checkbox"/> Married	<input type="checkbox"/> Single	<input type="checkbox"/> Widow	<input type="checkbox"/> Divorced	<input type="checkbox"/> Separated	
Do you have children?			If so, how many?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No		<input type="checkbox"/> Female	<input type="checkbox"/> Male	
Education					
<input type="checkbox"/> No formal education	<input type="checkbox"/> Primary	<input type="checkbox"/> Secondary	<input type="checkbox"/> Baccalaureate	<input type="checkbox"/> University	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)
Profession or trade			Current occupation		
Monthly income (own)					
<input type="checkbox"/> 0 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 to 50 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 50 to 100 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 100 to 150 €	<input type="checkbox"/> 150 to 200 €	<input type="checkbox"/> Over 200 €
Do you participate in an organization?					
Name		Type		Your position/role	
Are you providing documentation concerning this case? Yes__ No__					
If so, what documents?					

INFORMED CONSENT
Have you understood the goal of this interview and do you freely and voluntarily agree to give your testimony? Yes__ No__
Do you authorize the recording of this interview? Yes__ No__
Do you authorize the publication of details or images showing your identity? Yes__ No__
Interviewee's signature

Type of human rights violations

1. Right to life

Extrajudicial execution
Collective extrajudicial execution (massacre)
Enforced disappearance
Attack on the right to life

2. Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Physical torture

Blows without objects	Public ridicule
Blows with objects	Use of drugs
Blindfolding and/or use of hoods	Burns or cuts
Hanging and/or extreme positions	Use of electricity on the body
Asphyxiation by immersion in water	Use of animals
Asphyxiation with a bag	Forced labour
Punishments	Extreme temperatures
Others (specify)	

Psychological torture

Individual isolation	Insults
Threats	Sleep deprivation
Deprivation of or insufficient food	Being in the presence of or listening to the torture of others
Unhealthy conditions and/or deprivation of hygiene	Slander about relatives
Overcrowding	Threats of death (or others) concerning relatives
Solitary confinement	Forced to listen to loud music
Others (specify)	

3. Sexual violence

Rape	Rape with objects
Forced nudity	Blows to the breasts and/or genitals
Forced photographs with sexual content	Electrocution of the breasts and/or genitals
Forced to witness or listen to sexual violence against another person	Groping or touching the body
Verbal aggression and/or jokes with a sexual content	Sexual mutilation (breasts, genitals)
Sexual slavery	Threat of rape and/or sexual violence (of them or relatives)
Forced prostitution	Forced sterilization
Forced pregnancy	Torture during pregnancy
Trading of people for sexual exploitation	Forced miscarriage
Others (specify)	

4. Liberty and personal security

Arbitrary detention	Restrictions on the freedom of expression
Arbitrary imprisonment	Restrictions on the freedom of meeting
Abduction	Restrictions on the freedom of movement
Followed / watched	Restrictions on the freedom of association
Monitoring of telephone calls and/or interfering with mail	Defamation, attacks to reputation (in the press, social media)
Raids	False accusations
Destruction of property	Destruction, seizure or confiscation of goods
Forced divorce	Physical abuse (with violence or abuse of strength or power)
Others (specify)	

5. Forced displacement

Individual	Family
Collective	Confinement
Expulsion	Resettlement
Anti-personnel mines	Bombardment

6. Economic rights

Labour discrimination	Refusal of bank loans
Harassment at work	Threat of withdrawal of the National Promotion Card
Unjustified dismissal	Withdrawal of the National Promotion Card
Negation of work permits	Obstacles to promotion at work
Ban on working	Salary freezing
Precariousness at work	Ban on joining trade unions
Others (specify)	

7. Social rights (education, health)

Harassment at school	Falsification of marks
Refusal of grants	Punishments at school
Threats of expulsion from school	Forced to leave school
Expulsion from school (temporary or permanent)	Negation of medical attention
Discrimination in medical attention	
Others (specify)	

8. Cultural rights

Threats or harassment for wearing traditional clothing	Ban on registering Sahrawi names
Ban on wearing traditional clothing	Prohibition of traditional Sahrawi homes (haimas)
Threats or harassment for speaking own language	Prohibition on showing national symbols
Prohibition of use of own language	Negation of history and cultural identity
Others (specify)	

Table—summary of type of human rights violations, place and date		
Type of violation (Mark with x whatever is appropriate)	Place (Where the incidents occurred)	Date (Day/month/year; in as much as remembered)
1. Right to life		
2. Torture or other cruel treatment		
3. Sexual violence		
4. Liberty and personal security		
5. Forced displacement		
6. Economic rights		
7. Social rights		
8. Cultural rights		

Those responsible

Is the person or persons responsible for the incidents of violence known?

Yes__ No__

Sex: Man__ Woman __

What are their names?

Do they have other names, nicknames, aliases?

If the person responsible is known, which group they belonged to at the time of the incidents?

Police

Army

Intelligence services

Auxiliary forces

Gendarmerie

Civilian

Others (specify)

Do you know what that person's rank or position was at the time of the incidents?

Do you know where this person currently is?

Consequences of the violence

Physical consequences

Fractures	Physical or sensory disability
Chronic pain	Hospitalizations
Injuries	Illness
Addictions	Loss of fertility
Disturbed eating	Disturbed sleep
Others (specify)	

Psychological or emotional consequences

Depression	Repetitive negative thoughts
Loss of self-esteem	Suicidal thoughts
Fear	Life project cut short
Shame	
Others (specify)	

Family and social consequences

Social stigma	Harm to close relationships (separation, abandonment)
Loss of educational opportunities	In sexual relations
Deterioration in economic conditions (impoverishment)	Loss of social recognition
Others (specify)	

Forms of dealing with the violence

Reporting it	Staying silent
Focussing on family	Giving it a meaning
Focussing on religion	Organizing in order to defend your rights
Seeking psychosocial support	Organizing in women's associations
Economic and emotional support of the family	
Others (specify)	

Access to justice

Was the incident(s) reported to an authority? Yes__ No__

If so, to which authority?

Moroccan authority	IER (Morocco)	National Council on Human Rights (Morocco)	National Court (Spain)	Working Group On Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (UN)	Committee Against Torture (UN)	Others (specify)
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Have the incidents been investigated by any judicial authority?

Yes__ No__ Doesn't know __

If so, what judicial authority?

What has the response been?

Reparation

Political measures	Victims support measures
Legal-judicial measures	Others (specify)
Socio-economic measures	

What guarantees of non-repetition are proposed?

Final observations (interviewer)

Appendix 2. Interview script

- Presentation
- Explanation of the interview's goal and procedure
- Informed consent

1. Incidents of violence and those responsible

What happened to you?

When?

Where?

Who was/were responsible?

Why do you think this happened?

2. Consequences of the violence

How did these incidents affect you (physically, psychologically)?

What changed in your life at the family and social level?

3. Coping/recovery

What did you do, or how have you tried to deal with the consequences?

4. Access to justice

Did you report the incidents? If so, what happened afterwards?

Have the incidents been investigated?

What response did you receive?

5. Reparation

What would be necessary in order to repair (at least in part) the damages that have been caused to you?

Who should do this?

What are your demands so that the incidents do not repeat themselves?

This report documents human rights violations against women committed by Morocco in the occupied Western Sahara. The investigation is based on 81 in-depth interviews with Sahrawi women of all ages who have been victims of Moroccan repression. Their testimonies reveal patterns of systematic, uninterrupted and unpunished violence against them since the beginning of the occupation, with serious repercussions in their lives. This study aims to contribute to bringing everything to light, as an essential part of the defence of the rights of the Sahrawi people.