

-GRAPHIC SUMMARY OF THE REPORT -

Let everything come to light

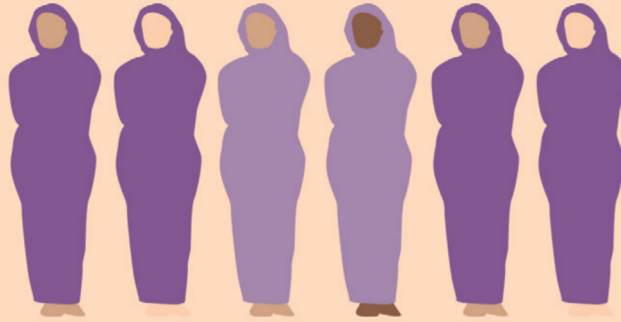
**VIOLATIONS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS
OF WOMEN IN OCCUPIED WESTERN SAHARA
(1975-2021)**

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 cope with it, their experiences in appealing for justice and their demands for reparation. This is a collaborative project involving a team of Sahrawi women human rights activists who have created the Sahrawi Women's Space in the Occupied Territory (EMSTO in Spanish), and the Hegoa Institute. This report has been developed with the support of Euskal Fundazioa-Asociación de Entidades Locales Vascas Cooperantes.



81 TESTIMONIES OF SAHRAWI WOMEN

victims of one or more human rights violations
committed by the Moroccan regime



The age range: 12-73
77 women are direct victims
4 give testimony as
relatives of victims



All these women fit the profile of human rights defenders, according to the definition set out in the UN's Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

59%

of Sahrawi women participate in an organization that is part of the Sahrawi people's rights movement.

DOCUMENTED HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

On average, the Sahrawi women have been the victims of between 6 and 7 kinds of human rights violations during their lives. The violence has taken place against women of all ages.



- 89% Violation of the right to life
- 90% Physical torture
- 90% Psychological torture
- 68% Sexual violence
- 91% Violations of liberty and personal security
- 27% Forced displacement
- 53% Violation of economic and labour rights
- 75% Violation of social rights (health and education)
- 91% Violation of cultural rights



VIOLATION OF THE RIGHT TO LIFE

Women have witnessed the **extrajudicial executions** of relatives or acquaintances, some at clandestine detention centres.

33% of the women have suffered **enforced disappearance**. Some have not returned, while those who survived and gave testimony for this study have spent periods detained-disappeared that range from several months to 16 years.

"I was abducted in 1980. There were two police cars and a gendarmerie car. I was 32, very young, at that time. They tortured us and took us from one clandestine detention centre to another. I spent 11 years disappeared, until 1991".

"When I was 16 they killed my mother. She was a nurse and she was taking part in the revolutionary struggle. She was threatened many times; they told her to stop what she was doing or, if she did not, she would suffer reprisals".



"They detained six people from our family and tortured all of us, starting with my uncle and continuing with the rest of us. They tortured my cousin so much they killed him. I saw how he was bleeding from the mouth and the nose, and how little by little he just went away".

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

"I was abducted in 1987. Two men dressed as soldiers came and told me they were from Security and they wanted to ask some questions for two or three minutes... 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 was detained-disappeared for four years".

TORTURE and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment



This serious human rights violation mainly occurred during the periods when the women were detained-disappeared at police stations, clandestine detention centres and prisons.

It also happened repeatedly in other contexts and places, for example, before and during demonstrations, gatherings and protests, in public spaces and in broad daylight.

"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".

"They put me in a room that looked like a butcher's; there were hooks and chains everywhere. There was a bed and they tied me to it. 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. There were 11 of us women in that situation. They hung us up and electrocuted us, sometimes on the ears, other times on the lips".

Practices of psychological torture seek to destabilize a person emotionally, creating such an extreme level of suffering that it can affect their mental faculties and their personality.

"I saw a lot of Sahrawi people there and I heard screaming because of the torture, I saw people hanging from their feet, it looked like the Inquisition, and they said to me 'if you don't talk, the same will happen to you".

"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".

"They kept me on my own, in a very small cell, for two years and six months".



PHYSICAL TORTURE

- 90% Blows with objects
- 88% Public scorn
- 60% Blows without objects
- 48% Punishments
- 36% Blindfolding and the use of hoods
- 26% Burns or cuts
- 16% Hanging in extreme positions
- 15% Asphyxiation by immersion in water
- 12% Application of electricity to the body
- 10% Forced labour
- 8% Use of animals for torture
- 5% Asphyxiation with a bag
- 3% Mutilations
- 3% Exposure to extreme temperatures

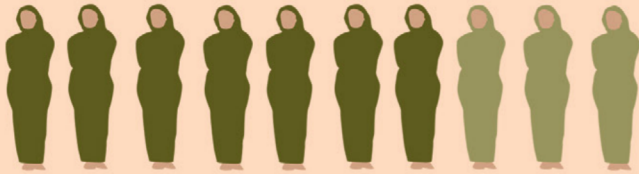
"I had my eyes blindfolded and I didn't know there were dogs there... They bit me and the guards laughed".

PSYCHOLOGICAL TORTURE

- 95% Insults
- 90% Threats
- 55% Obligation to be in the presence of or listen to the torture of others
- 37% Sleep deprivation
- 34% Deprivation of or insufficient food
- 34% Unhealthy conditions and/or deprivation of hygiene
- 34% Deprivation of communication
- 27% Slander
- 23% Overcrowding
- 22% Individual isolation
- 19% Death threats regarding relatives



SEXUAL VIOLENCE



Almost **7 out of 10** Sahrawi women have suffered sexual violence at the hands of the Moroccan security forces.

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

"I had my hands tied, then they started to make false accusations, then say obscene words and threaten to rape us. They took all my clothes off, they brought glass bottles and they threatened to rape me with them".

"They hit me so much on the side that I suffered a miscarriage. They hit my breasts and my belly, and as a result, the child was stillborn".



- 76%** Groping and touching
- 51%** Forced nudity
- 51%** Verbal aggression and/or jokes with a sexual content
- 51%** Blows to the breasts and/or genitals
- 27%** Threats of rape (either them or relatives)
- 13%** Torture during pregnancy
- 9%** Forced miscarriage
- 5%** Made to witness or listen to sexual violence against another person
- 4%** Rape
- 4%** Forced sexual photographs
- 4%** Electrocutation of the breasts and/or genitals
- 2%** Sexual slavery
- 2%** Rape with objects
- 2%** Sexual mutilation (breasts, genitals)
- 2%** Forced sterilization



VIOLATIONS OF LIBERTY AND PERSONAL SECURITY

"We are under siege in our own homes and we are not permitted to visit our own relatives and neighbours, we are confined, but it is a political confinement, not because of the pandemic".

"Now they are using new methods, which are defamation campaigns; they constantly publish false news about me".

"At demonstrations they beat us, they maltreat us; in no demonstration are we free from being beaten up".

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



- 81%** Being followed and watched
- 81%** Violations of freedom of expression
- 78%** Violations of freedom of meeting
- 78%** Violations of freedom of movement
- 69%** Raids
- 65%** Physical abuse
- 57%** Violations of freedom of association
- 42%** Abduction

- 39%** Destruction of property
- 36%** Defamation and attacks on a person's reputation
- 31%** Monitoring telephone calls and/or interfering with mail
- 27%** Seizure or confiscation of property
- 9%** Arbitrary imprisonment
- 8%** Arbitrary detention
- 4%** False accusations
- 1%** Forced divorce



FORCED DISPLACEMENT

- 77% Resettlement
- 59% Collective forced displacement
- 36% Expulsion
- 32% Confinements
- 32% Forced displacement as individuals
- 14% Forced displacement as a family

This serious human rights violation particularly affects the refugee Sahrawi population in Tindouf (Algeria), but it also affects the Sahrawi people in Western Sahara.

"I was expelled from El Aaiún and obliged to live in Dakhla. They prohibited me from returning to El Aaiún".



"They obliged me to leave Boujdour, and every time I came back they expelled me again. I had to wander between the countryside, Smara and El Aaiún. The occupation forces came in the early morning to the house of my aunt, in El Aaiún, and they told her that she would also have to leave the city".



VIOLATION OF ECONOMIC AND LABOUR RIGHTS

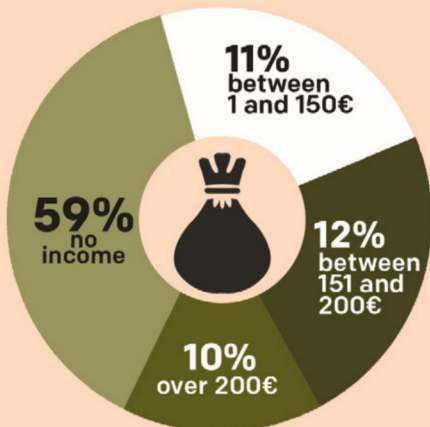
The policy of the Moroccan occupation promotes the socio-economic and labour exclusion of the Sahrawi population, which clearly affects women.

- 49% Labour discrimination
- 23% Harassment at work
- 21% Ban on working
- 16% Unjustified dismissal
- 12% Salary freezing
- 12% Increased precariousness at work
- 7% Deprivation of means of subsistence (the territory's natural resources)
- 7% Refusal of work permits
- 7% Withdrawal or threat of withdrawal of economic support

"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. In every Sahrawi family there are three or four members who do not work or earn anything".

"I have no work. I received a subsidy but three months ago they took it away, saying that I am an activist and that I participated in the Gdeim Izik camp".

"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".



!! In terms of the percentages of women without any kind of income, those with secondary studies (86%) and university studies (73%) are among the highest. In the context of the occupation, having higher levels of studies does not necessarily mean greater opportunities for employment or earning income.

Economic precariousness affects central aspects of their survival, such as the possibility of paying for basic food, as well as for their levels of personal autonomy.

VIOLATION OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

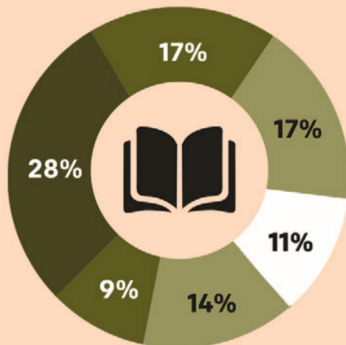
The women report violations of health and education rights.

56% Discrimination in medical attention

56% Refusal of medical attention

"They hit the women, and also my brother, and they broke my arm. An ambulance took us to hospital, but we didn't receive medical attention there".

"We cannot attend the hospitals because they are also police or army institutions. We do not trust the hospital staff at all. Our traditional medicine has saved us on many occasions".



28% no formal education

17% primary schooling

17% secondary schooling

14% university studies

11% secondary school graduate

9% Koranic School

43% Harassment at school

18% Threat of expulsion

15% Punishments

15% Marked down without reason

13% Forced to leave school

11% Expulsion from educational institutions

7% Refusal of grants



"The school that my 12-year-old daughter attends phoned me. When I got there I saw that my daughter was being interrogated and struck by the head teacher and other people. They took the two of us to the police station, and they took her to a place where they interrogated her again. 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".

"We have grown up without any access to anything, stigmatized by Moroccan staff at schools; they suspend us, they lower our marks, we cannot choose the degree we want. I am on the blacklist of young people who cannot get access to grants because we are the children of activists and because of our own activism".

"For four years they denied my right to study. That affected me a lot. Then I knew that as they could affect my economic situation, they could do the same with my academic education".

VIOLATION OF CULTURAL RIGHTS



!! The women report being subjected to an acculturation process since the occupation began.

%86 Prohibition of traditional Sahrawi homes (haimas)

%80 Prohibition of wearing or showing Sahrawi national symbols

%66 Threats for wearing traditional Sahrawi clothing

%58 Negation of Sahrawi history and identity

%51 Ban on giving new-born children Sahrawi names

%43 Prohibition of wearing traditional Sahrawi clothing

%30 Threats or harassment for speaking Hassaniya

%23 Hassaniya ban

"Since Gdeim Izik they do not allow us to set up haimas; they see it as a political threat".

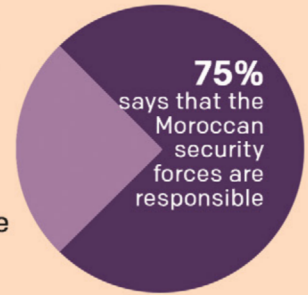
"They wanted to oblige me to speak like them, in their dialect, and I absolutely refused to, I told them that I am an old Sahrawi woman, that I have always spoken Hassaniya and I will continue to do so".

"We see that we have also been occupied culturally".

RESPONSIBLES FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

69% of the women are able to identify their perpetrators directly, all of them men who, in general, live in the occupied territory.

- 64% Police
- 25% Intelligence services
- 18% Auxiliary forces
- 11% Army
- 7% Gendarmerie



ALSO DENOUNCE

Moroccan settlers

21% of the women highlight the participation of Moroccan civilians in the violent acts.

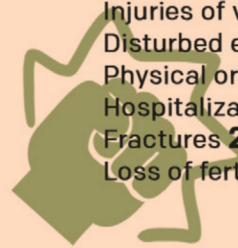
International actors Because of their silence in the face of the repression and because of complicity with the Moroccan regime due to geopolitical and economic interests.

IMPACTS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

The consequences of the political violence against the Sahrawi women are many and of a diverse nature (physical, psychological, emotional, family and socio-economic).

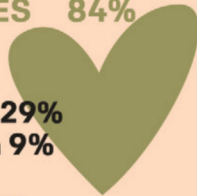
PHYSICAL CONSEQUENCES 91%

- 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%
- Loss of fertility 16%



PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL CONSEQUENCES 84%

- Fear 93%
- Depression 35%
- Negative thoughts 29%
- Loss of self-esteem 9%
- Shame 3%
- Suicidal thoughts 1%
- Feelings of having their life project cut short 1%



FAMILY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES 74%

- Impoverishment or deterioration in living conditions 75%
- Loss of educational opportunities 60%
- Separation from family 10%
- Social stigma 5%
- Loss of social recognition 2%
- Harm to sexual relations 2%



The impacts of violence have in many cases become chronic because of their level of seriousness and the lack of medical and/or psychosocial attention. In addition, they can also have consequences that have limiting or disabling effects on one or more dimensions of women's lives.

WAYS OF DEALING WITH VIOLENCE

In the midst of the violence described in this study, the women refer to a range of mechanisms for coping with its impacts and which they resort to as supporting factors.

- 74% Focussing on religion
- 71% Focussing on seeking family well-being
- 51% Relying on the support of their families, in emotional and material terms
- 48% Denouncing the violence
- 42% Organizing in order to defend the rights of the Sahrawi people
- 40% Giving life a meaning
- 17% Forming women's associations
- 12% Seeking psychosocial support
- 3% Staying silent

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The Sahrawi women have been refused their right to justice. No trials have taken place against members of the Moroccan security forces or Moroccan settlers involved in the acts of violence.



DEMANDS FOR REPARATION



Particularly independence, recovery of the territory and the end to the occupation.



Appealing for financial compensation, labour support, health care and measures that ensure access to education.



Particularly the prevention of violence against women, the protection of victims, initiatives to remember the victims and psychosocial support.



Particularly that those responsible for the violence be tried, and legal rehabilitation measures.

For Sahrawi women, **guarantees of non-repetition** are:

- The exercise of the right to self-determination
- Independence and the end to the occupation
- The protection of victims
- The return of the refugee population
- The liberation of political prisoners

"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".

