



MOROCCO

Area: 716,550 sq km (276661.502 sq. mi)

Population: 36,561,813 (July 2021 estimate)

Capital City: Rabat

Ethnic Groups: Arab-Amazigh (Berber) 99%, other 1%
(does not include the Western Sahara)

Languages: Arabic (official), Tamazight, Tachelhit, Tarifit, French.

Religion: Muslim 99% (predominately Sunni, < 0.1% Shia); Christian, Jewish, and Bahai 1%.

Life Expectancy: 73.56 years **Literacy:** 73.8%

Economy: wheat, sugar beet, milk, potatoes, olives, tangerines/mandarins, tomatoes, oranges, barley, onions automotive parts, phosphate mining and processing, aerospace, food processing, leather goods, textiles, construction, energy, tourism
Gini (Income Inequality) Index: 39.5 (2013 estimate); country comparison to the world: 66
Gender Inequality Index: 0.686; Rank 121.



Weaving the Earliest History

Located on the northwest corner of the African continent, Morocco holds a long history connecting it with Europe, the Levant, and other parts of North and West Africa south of the Sahara. A meeting place and a bastion of resistance, Morocco has been built from its experience of more than a thousand years of cultural encounters between the African continent and the world. Archaeological evidence shows Neolithic habitation with remains of pottery, funerary practices, cave drawings, and jewelry. During the 8th century BCE, the region's indigenous inhabitants began to interact with Phoenician explorers, who set up trade cities along the coast of North and Atlantic Morocco. At that time, the lands were known widely as Mauritania after the name of the indigenous people, the Mauri, who were part of the Mediterranean trade. When the Roman and, later, Byzantine empires established city-states in the region, Rome named the peoples of the land, "Barbarians," later Berbers. The name "Morocco" likely evolved as a distortion of the name given to the city of Marrakesh. One of the indigenous inhabitants who fought against Roman occupation was Tin Hinan (c. 4th century CE), who was credited as a warrior queen of the Tuareg.

In the late 7th century CE, Islam expanded into the region. Although the invading Arabs initially were unable to hold territory due to the local Tuareg resistance, both Muslim merchants and Berber (Amazigh) conversions allowed Islam to dominate. Trade and scholarship flourished. In the 9th century, female scholar Fatima al-Fihri is credited with establishing the madrasa that became University of al-Qarawiyyin, the oldest degree-granting university in the world.

Between the 11th and 16th centuries, Morocco continued to play a key role in the Mediterranean and adjacent lands. In 1086, the Almoravid ruler of Morocco invaded Spain and helped defeat the Christians, ushering in the era of al-Andalus, during which the Iberian Peninsula was ruled at times from the capital at Marrakesh. Moroccans also looked southwards. The famous world traveler Ibn Battuta (1304-1377 CE) was born in Tangier and his journeys exceeded those of Marco Polo. The Moroccan scholar Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406 CE) is remembered as the father of the science of history. His best-known work, Muqaddimah, was an extensive analysis of the rise and fall of civilizations. Morocco had become a prime center of learning in Africa, unrivaled for paper making and book copying before the later 16th century. Cities like Sijilmasa were crucial centers of the trans-Saharan trade, purveying various goods including books, gold, leather, salt, and captives. Sultan al-Mansur (1549-1603 CE) is credited with bringing Morocco into the modern era. Mansur rose to power in 1578, after defeating the Spanish. Mansur recruited some of the battle's captives not only to

reorganize and update his military, but also to revitalize his government. With these new connections, Mansur began sending out ambassadors and diplomats to both European and Ottoman leaders. He corresponded with Queen Elizabeth I of England about establishing a colony in the Americas.

The Colonial Era

In the era of European imperialism, Morocco became a target. By the 1906 Algeciras Conference, a coalition of European countries agreed that France should formally control the interests and territory of Morocco. The Treaty of Fez (1912) made Morocco a French protectorate, with Spain gaining control over Southern Morocco and the region known presently as the Western Sahara. Between the signing of the Fez treaty and the outbreak of World War I, Moroccan nationalist movements grew. However, colonial troops who had begun training to put down nationalist uprisings in Morocco were repurposed to assist France in fighting against Germany. Around 45,000 Moroccan troops and auxiliaries saw combat during the First World War and received multiple honors. At the outbreak of World War II, Mohammed IV, who had developed diplomatic ties with the Ottoman courts, found himself supporting France against Germany once more. The monarch refused the Ottoman/German requests to send Moroccan Jews to European concentration camps or abide by imposed racial laws.

Birth of a Democratic Nation State

Post-war nationalism included violent uprisings, especially centered in the industrial hub of Casablanca, and a coordinated diplomatic front that successfully lobbied Paris and the United Nations. On April 7, 1956, Morocco gained its independence from France. Mohammed IV, who had been exiled by the French earlier, returned and set up a Parliamentary constitutional Monarchy. In its long history, Morocco was a part of old-world globalization. Today Morocco welcomes tourists, researchers, investors, and corporations from around the world. The 2011 "Arab Spring," while touching on the borders of Algeria and Morocco, inspired a variant reform movement and early elections in the latter country, shaping new forms of activism. Morocco has utilized its identity as an Arab Nation, together with membership in the United Nations, to position itself as a diplomatic nation brokering peace. The country until recently was not a member of the African Union due to its stance towards Western Sahara, where generations of Sahrawi people have long struggled for independence. With the removal of Spain from the Western Sahara region in the 1970s, Morocco and Mauritania both claimed the former Spanish colony. Mauritania gave up its bid, but Morocco took the opportunity to claim the entire region and continues to occupy roughly 80 percent of the land. It appears that this situation may be resolved soon by an ongoing peace process. In 2008, due to increasing awareness of the impacts of climate change on Morocco, the government launched the Plan Vert (Green Plan). This initiative has included a revolutionary agricultural incentive that placed Morocco as the leading African nation to address environmental issues and promote renewable solar energy.

-----Written by Fredrick Hardyway (August 2021)

Further Reading

Dunn, Ross E., *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim Traveler of the Fourteenth Century*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

El Hamel, Chouki, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Miller, Susan Gilson, *A History of Modern Morocco*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Sadiqi, Fatima, *Moroccan Feminist Discourses*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Witulski, Christopher, *Focus: Music and Religion of Morocco*, New York: Routledge Publishing, 2019.

*CFAF Country Notes are provided to audiences through the CFAF Endowment Fund and are to be used for educational purposes only.