Morocco has undertaken a series of reforms targeting the status of women. Yet the country’s Global Gender Gap Index score remains extremely low, at 143 out of 153 nations, and far behind other countries in the Maghreb region. The country has continued to fall in the rankings since 2006, despite measures to combat gender discrimination, such as the adoption of the Gender-Sensitive Budget in 2002, the adoption of the quota system in politics and other sectors, the family code reform, and the institutionalization of gender parity in the country’s 2011 constitutional reforms. The feminization of key sectors such as education, health, and justice have clearly failed to reduce the gender gap and address the lack of women employed in those sectors.

**WOMEN IN ACADEMIA IN MOROCCO**

The gender gap in academia is particularly important. Moroccan universities have greatly helped to orchestrate fundamental changes in society. Academics train, shape, and form the elite of the country across sectors. The presence of women in higher education is, therefore, likely to change social norms. The feminist movement, for example, owes much to female academics pushing to transform institutions through research, teaching, and board representation. Yet research shows that Moroccan universities severely lack female representation at all levels.

It was not until 2002 that a woman was appointed president of a university in Morocco: Rahma Bourqia became the first, at Université Hassan II in Mohammedia. Presently, only two universities in Morocco are governed by women out of more than 20: Université Hassan Premier Settat is headed by Khadija Essafi and Université Hassan II Casablanca is headed by Aawatef Hayar. Such positions are perceived as political, so excellence and distinction are not the only criteria for selecting a president. Very often, women lack leverageable support from political parties. Additionally, no quota system exists within the selection process, as is the case with decision-making positions in other sectors. These aspects weaken women’s applications. Research conducted at Université Mohammed Premier in Oujda depicts particularly high levels of marginalization for women, reflected not only in their low representation (20% of the entire faculty), but also in their absence from governing bodies at the university. Only three women (0.35%) hold positions in the medical school and on university boards, demonstrating the barriers that female faculty face in obtaining leadership positions.

Discrimination against women in academia is not limited to appointments in key positions; it is present from recruitment until the end of their career. Official statistics from the Ministry of Higher Education’s annual report show that women are often excluded from pursuing this career.
even though girls succeed throughout high school, female enrollment numbers drop significantly as gendered career patterns start to emerge. The issue continues in the transition from undergraduate to graduate school: women compose almost half of all enrolled students in undergraduate education across disciplines, but these figures drop significantly at the graduate level and especially at the doctoral level, as shown in Table 1. No comprehensive study has been conducted to understand the reasons why female graduates are discouraged from pursuing doctoral studies. The fact that this is not addressed as a serious policy problem shows that the issue of gender inequity in academia is far from being resolved.

Patterns of exclusion continue post-graduation: fewer female candidates receive permanent jobs in academia, as shown in Table 2. In general, women in higher education are not well represented. The low proportion of entry-level assistant professor positions highlights the unequal consideration that female applicants receive from hiring committees.

Further, the promotion path statistics reflect the pattern of discrimination and barriers to advancement that women face as university professors. For instance, in 2018–19, women at the associate rank (habilitation) number 62 in the 35 to 39 age range, compared to 242 men. This outcome is disheartening, as this age range is considered the most productive and competitive period for academics. In the absence of a clear study, one could speculate that a pattern of self-censorship exists, as women are made to feel less qualified than men and do not apply for promotions. One could also interpret the lack of female participation in research as the result of a preference for a secure job where the pressure to publish is not so high. Many female academics may also be unable or unwilling to set aside family priorities for the sake of job advancement. As a result, by the time women reach their mid-50s, they are largely disadvantaged in terms of promotion. Thus, we can see clearly the contours of the glass ceiling, as women constitute barely 21.36% of faculty nationwide. The limitation of the ministry’s annual report is that it never publishes statistics on women in high ranking academic positions, which would inevitably show the meager number of women represented in such positions.

### Table 1 — Number of Graduates by Field and by Cycle (2017–2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disciplines</th>
<th>Undergraduate</th>
<th></th>
<th>Master</th>
<th></th>
<th>Ph.D.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy, law &amp; social sciences</td>
<td>17,911</td>
<td>18,153</td>
<td>2,961</td>
<td>2,316</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>13,339</td>
<td>14,166</td>
<td>1,332</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>6,569</td>
<td>6,161</td>
<td>1,684</td>
<td>1,530</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science &amp; technology</td>
<td>1,860</td>
<td>2,216</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical School</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>1,083</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental school</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering school</td>
<td>1,639</td>
<td>1,355</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business school</td>
<td>908</td>
<td>1,488</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Ministère de l’Enseignement Supérieur (Ministry of Higher Education), L’enseignement supérieur en chiffre, 2019
THE COST OF WOMEN’S ABSENCE IN DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS IN MOROCCAN ACADEMIA

INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS TO ADVANCEMENT

The assumption that the changing laws and the presence of women down the pipeline in academia will inevitably yield access to decision-making positions is simply false. Women are still stuck in lower positions, even 60 years after independence and decades after major reforms. Many women have become unmotivated and show no interest in seeking decision-making positions. Research also shows that women are victims of internalized stereotypes and thus are more likely to face barriers when entering male-dominated jobs for the first time. This research highlights the pressure women experience in these positions, as they face issues adjusting to an environment entirely defined by men, where their performance is closely watched and they are constantly required to prove themselves. The assumption that men are chosen on merit is equally refutable: many women in academia are as qualified as their male counterparts, if not more. Because of the lack of political will, however, women’s presence in leadership positions remains aspirational.

Indeed, bureaucracy becomes a tool to stifle the determination and persistence of female faculty who hold or wish to hold influence. Examples include administrative authorities closing female faculty-led programs, especially gender studies programs, or refusing to allocate funds and resources for such programs. Even students of these programs are affected by these actions, through delays in receiving diplomas and scholarship rescindment. As a result, only four gender studies master’s programs in Morocco are still functioning, out of eight originally, and out of 13 gender research units, five have been closed. Additionally, the meager state support for research means female academics often have to fund their own research. This adds a significant financial constraint that exacerbates the ability to balance the teaching load with research and family. As research structures are male-dominated, female faculty rarely lead a research team; they are often unable to gather the number of members required for accreditation, so they are forced to join existing teams where their input goes unnoticed. Female faculty are also rarely called on to lead thesis defense juries or appointment commissions and are not elected as members of their institutions’

TABLE 2 — STATISTICS OF PUBLIC TEACHING STAFF NATIONWIDE (SEGREGATED BY AGE, SEX, SENIORITY)

| Age Range | M | M | F | M | M | F | M | F | M | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | Total |
| 25–29     | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 37 | 16 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 5 | 48 | 21 |
| 30–34     | 0 | 0 | 27 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 49 | 25 | 566 | 227 |
| 35–39     | 5 | 4 | 242 | 62 | 66 | 39 | 905 | 277 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 82 | 36 | 1,300 | 418 |
| 40–44     | 230 | 115 | 564 | 136 | 88 | 41 | 894 | 259 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 137 | 82 | 1,914 | 633 |
| 45–49     | 581 | 169 | 680 | 191 | 51 | 7 | 682 | 189 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 152 | 79 | 2,147 | 635 |
| 50–54     | 1,351 | 313 | 489 | 116 | 27 | 5 | 516 | 176 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 105 | 40 | 2,489 | 651 |
| 55–59     | 2,172 | 464 | 307 | 90 | 2 | 0 | 400 | 131 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 110 | 37 | 2,993 | 723 |
| 60–64     | 1,750 | 312 | 142 | 41 | 2 | 0 | 346 | 112 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 31 | 9 | 2,274 | 474 |
| 65+       | 491 | 50 | 36 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 129 | 23 | 2 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 670 | 78 |
| Total     | 6,580 | 1,427 | 2,487 | 649 | 236 | 92 | 4,399 | 1,377 | 3 | 1 | 14 | 1 | 681 | 313 | 14,400 | 3,860 |

SOURCE Ministère de l’Enseignement Supérieur (Ministry of Higher Education), L’enseignement supérieur en chiffres, 2018–2019
NOTE *Other = Non-research teachers (Engineers, high-school teachers, primary school teachers, administrators, etc.)
scientific committees. The weak and patriarchal infrastructure at universities also means most faculty offices are shared by at least three or more colleagues, the majority of whom are male. Consequently, female faculty members are often confined in a tight space with male colleagues, which forces them to desert their offices out of discomfort.

Female faculty avoid confrontation with the administration due to these practices and resign themselves to focusing on teaching classes, thereby reinforcing the perception that they are unqualified to assume responsibilities beyond teaching. In a university-wide survey among female faculty in 2013, 52.2% of female faculty prioritized their homes and family over their career, 13% refused to answer the question, 34.8% prioritized their career, and 47.8% experienced work–related depression. The survey also revealed a feeling of loneliness among female faculty who face intimidation and lack of support.

Further, the attacks on ambitious female faculty result not in expressions of solidarity among female colleagues, but in animosity or even jealousy towards the victims. In the absence of a culture that recognizes female excellence, women in academia become victims of their own ambition; they are seen as enemies and isolated from other colleagues.

As a result of these systemic issues, female faculty limit their presence on campus to the classes they teach and their voices are not heard when developing institutional policies.

CONCLUSION

The absence of women from decision–making positions in universities will have a negative impact on future generations, as they will internalize the extant patriarchal system. This issue will have a widespread impact on Morocco’s development, as studies have shown that human capital wealth is greatly reduced by gender inequality.

Aware of the psychological constraints and the numerous injustices female faculty face in Morocco, a group of academics created the Association of Women University Professors in 2016 at Université Mohammed Premier in Oujda. The association’s objective is to promote the contribution that female faculty make to academia and to call for greater representation of women in university decision–making positions. The creation of the association is the first of many necessary steps toward resolving the issue of gender inequality in academia, but there are other important steps that could be taken at the governmental level to help further this agenda. These include:

- Align strategies toward gender equality at all levels of higher education management.
- Introduce a mandatory quota system in university governing bodies.
- Form the university’s general budget with a gender–sensitive lens.
- Create safe campuses for women.
- Create a national coalition of women in academia in Morocco.

ENDNOTES


### ABOUT THE SERIES

This brief is part of a series on “Women’s Grassroots Mobilization in the MENA Region Post–2011.” The briefs were presented at workshops in Rabat, Morocco and Amman, Jordan in February and March 2020 hosted by the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis and the American Center for Oriental Research and involving scholars and activists from Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Turkey, Palestine, and Jordan. The workshops were funded with the generous support of the Kelly Day Endowment as part of the Baker Institute’s program on Women’s Rights, Human Rights and Refugees.

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**Soumia Boutkhil, Ph.D.,** is a professor, Fulbright scholar, and director of the Gender, Society, and Human Development Master’s of Arts Program at Université Mohammed Premier in Oujda, Morocco. Her research focuses on women and gender studies, postcolonial literature and theory, feminist theory, North African studies, Francophone literature, and Arabic studies.

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