



A Web of Violence: The Systemic Erasure of Transgender People in Morocco

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Contents

1 Executive Summary

Introduction: The Paradox of a Pioneering Past and a Prohibitive Present 3

7 Methodology

Section 1: The Architecture of Erasure: Legal and Social Context

Section 2: The Right to Health: Institutional Abandonment and Underground Survival

Section 3: The Right to a Dignified Life: Socio-Economic Exclusion

Section 4: Navigating the State: Administrative Violence and Police Harassment

Section 5: Resistance, Resilience, and the Final Recourse of Migration

18 Conclusion and Recommendations

Bibliography 24

Executive Summary

This report documents the systemic human rights violations encountered by transgender and non-binary individuals in Morocco, who are ensnared within a pervasive “web of violence” —an interlocking system of legal, medical, social, and economic hostility. Drawing upon in-depth interviews with 17 transgender and non-binary individuals, the report illuminates a profound paradox: Morocco, once a pioneer in providing gender-affirming surgery for foreigners, now enforces a de facto prohibition on such care for its own citizens, resulting in a state of institutional abandonment.

The interviews reveal a stark reality characterized by a hostile legal and social environment. The weaponization of Article 489 of the Penal Code, which criminalizes same-sex acts, is employed to arbitrarily arrest and harass transgender individuals based on their gender expression. This situation is exacerbated by the complete absence of a legal pathway for gender recognition, rendering individuals legally non-existent and perpetuating a constant state of precarity in all interactions with the state, from updating identification documents to crossing borders.

This legal erasure is further mirrored by a de facto ban on gender-affirming healthcare (GAH). The report indicates an absence of GAH in both public and private sectors, with healthcare providers routinely denying care due to prejudice or fear, and, in some instances, attempting conversion therapy. This forces individuals into perilous, unregulated underground networks to access hormones and procedures, often accompanied by severe health risks.

The cumulative effect of this systemic exclusion results in profound socio-economic marginalization. Participants described experiences of intense bullying that compelled them to exit the educational system, severe discrimination in the labor market where mismatched identification leads to immediate termination, and a housing crisis characterized by familial rejection, homelessness, and landlord discrimination. For many transgender women, this systematic foreclosure of opportunities renders survival sex work as the only viable option, subjecting them to heightened levels of violence and exploitation.

In response to this oppression, the report highlights the resilience of the community through informal support networks and activism. Nevertheless, for many participants, the burden of systemic violence renders a dignified life in Morocco unattainable. Migration is perceived not as a choice, but as a desperate flight for safety, health, and the right to exist authentically.

The report concludes with a series of urgent, community-led recommendations. Central among these are calls for the Moroccan government to:

- **Repeal Article 489** of the Penal Code to terminate the criminalization of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals.
- **Establish a clear and accessible administrative process for legal gender recognition** based on self-determination.
- **End the de facto prohibition on GAH** by developing national clinical guidelines and ensuring that care is accessible through the public health system.
- **Enact comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation** that protects against discrimination in employment, housing, and education.
- **End state violence** by holding law enforcement accountable for abuse and harassment.

Introduction: The Paradox of a Pioneering Past and a Prohibitive Present

Transgender and non-binary individuals in Morocco are ensnared in a pervasive “web of violence”—an interlocking system of legal, medical, social, and economic hostility that results in their systematic erasure from public life (Interviews with participants, 2025). This report documents the lived experiences of these communities, arguing that the human rights violations they encounter are not isolated incidents of prejudice but are the direct outcome of a deliberate state policy of erasure, enacted through a criminalizing legal framework and the active persecution by state agents. Their testimonies constitute an undeniable record of the human cost of systemic erasure and serve as a powerful call for justice.

This contemporary crisis is framed by a profound and largely unrecognized historical paradox: Morocco was once a global pioneer in gender-affirming medical procedures (Bowers, 2017). From the 1950s through the 1970s, the Casablanca clinic of Dr. Georges Burou became an international destination for gender-affirming surgeries, attracting a clientele of European and American public figures (Bowers, 2017). However, an examination of available records reveals a conspicuous absence of Moroccan patients. This historical exclusion has cast a long shadow, forcing contemporary Moroccan transgender individuals to seek the very care pioneered on their soil in foreign countries, a journey many cannot afford (Ahdath, 2018). This paradox reframes the present-day reality not as a matter of medical incapacity or inherent cultural resistance, but as a deliberate and sustained policy of exclusion.

The foundational basis for this exclusion is an architecture of legal erasure that criminalizes non-normative identities. Article 489 of the Penal Code, which penalizes “lewd or unnatural acts with an individual of the same sex” with penalties of up to three years in prison and fines ranging from 120 to 1,200 dirhams, serves as the principal instrument of this oppression (Moroccan Penal Code, 1962; Human Dignity Trust, 2024). Although the text targets same-sex sexual conduct, its enforcement is weaponized against transgender individuals, whose gender expression is interpreted by authorities as an “unnatural act” or *prima facie* evidence of homosexuality. The scale of this legal persecution is stark: between 2017 and 2020, 838 individuals were prosecuted under this article (The Moroccan Coalition for Gender and Sexual Diversity, 2022). This criminalization is entrenched by the complete absence of legal gender recognition (LGR). Morocco provides no administrative or judicial pathway for individuals to change their name or gender marker on official documents (Equaldex, 2025; Outright International, n.d.). As one participant, Samira, stated unequivocally, “In Morocco, legal recognition of trans women is impossible. It’s impossible to change it, not with money, effort, or anything” (Interviews with participants, 2025). This policy of deliberate exclusion was further codified in 2021 when legislative amendment (Law 36.21) granted intersex individuals the right to modify their civil status but deliberately excluded transgender individuals (Equaldex, 2025).

This legal framework both reflects and reinforces a hostile social and linguistic landscape. Quantitative data reveals deeply entrenched societal conservatism: a 2016 global survey indicated that 61% of Moroccans believe that “gender is assigned at birth and always fixed,” while 72% deemed it unacceptable for a child assigned male at birth to dress and express themselves as a girl (ILGA and RIWI Corp., 2016). This hostility is legitimized by a linguistic void where affirming terms are not widely understood, and the public lexicon is dominated by derogatory slurs (Interviews with participants, 2025). This constitutes a form of structural violence, compelling individuals into a psychologically damaging act of self-mislabeling merely to be understood (Interviews with participants, 2025). This is exacerbated by sensationalist media that either neglects transgender lives or frames them through a lens of pathology, criminality, and hypersexuality (Barlamane, 2019; Interviews with participants, 2025).

This entire system of erasure stands in stark contradiction to Morocco’s own constitutional commitments and international obligations. The Preamble of the 2011 Constitution commits the Kingdom to “ban and combat all discrimination... for reason of sex... or whatever personal circumstance that may be” and affirms its “attachment to the Rights of Man as they are universally recognized” (Moroccan Constitution, 2011). Yet, in the absence of any explicit legal or regulatory framework for gender-affirming healthcare (GAH), a chilling effect permeates the medical establishment (Interviews with participants, 2025). This institutional abandonment leaves individuals with no recourse but to turn to

dangerous, unregulated underground networks for hormones and medical procedures. In light of this reality, this report will proceed in five sections, detailing the architecture of legal erasure, the crisis of medical abandonment, the resulting socio-economic exclusion, violent encounters with the state, and finally, the community's strategies of resistance and resilience.

Methodology

The findings presented herein are grounded in a qualitative, feminist participatory action research (PAR) methodology conducted between June and August 2025. This approach centers the voices and lived experiences of the community, positioning them as experts and co-creators of knowledge (Singh, Richmond, and Burnes 2013). Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process, particularly given the vulnerability of the study population (Adams et al. 2017).

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 transgender and non-binary individuals from diverse geographic, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds across Morocco. To build trust and ensure the safety of a community living under constant threat of surveillance and criminalization, participant recruitment was facilitated in collaboration with local transgender activists using a snowball sampling method. This was deemed the safest and most effective strategy for outreach. All interviews were conducted remotely via encrypted platforms to protect participant security.

The interviews, lasting between 30 and 60 minutes each, were conducted in a mix of Moroccan Arabic (Darija), Egyptian Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, Amazigh, and English, according to participant preference. A semi-structured guide addressed themes of identity, healthcare access, family relations, state encounters, socio-economic exclusion, and resilience, while maintaining flexibility for participants to introduce topics of personal significance.

All interviews were recorded with informed verbal consent, transcribed, and anonymized. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality, and all identifying details were removed. The data were then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and nuances across the narratives, which form the basis of this report's findings (Castleberry and Nolen 2018). Ethical oversight was provided by the Cairo 52 Legal Research Institute, adhering to protocols that comply with the Helsinki Declaration and are tailored to the security context of the region.

Table 1: Participant Demographics (N=17). Data compiled from all interview transcripts.

Characteristic	Category	N	%
Age	22-25	9	52.9%
	26-30	6	35.2%
	31-35	2	11.8%
Gender Identity	Trans Woman	6	35.3%
	Trans Man	3	17.6%
	Non-binary/Gender-queer/Agender/Bigender	8	47.1%
Highest Education	Middle School or less	3	17.6%
	High School/Technical/Diploma	5	29.4%
	Some University (Student/Dropped Out)	4	23.5%
	University Degree or higher	5	29.4%
Current Residenc	Morocco	14	82.4%
	Europe (Asylum Seeker)	3	17.6%
Living Situation	With Family	7	41%
	Alone/Independent	10	58.8%
Employment Status	Employed (Formal/Informal/Activism)	13	76.5%

Characteristic	Category	N	%
	Unemployed/Student	4	23.5%

Section 1: The Architecture of Erasure: Legal and Social Context

The foundational basis for anti-transgender violence in Morocco is an architecture of erasure, built upon a legal framework that criminalizes non-normative identities and a social fabric that renders them unintelligible. This system denies transgender individuals a distinct legal or social personhood, compelling them into a pre-existing and legally codified category of “deviance.” This legal and social invisibility is not merely a passive omission; rather, it constitutes an active process of marginalization that enables and legitimizes the violence detailed in subsequent sections of this report. This situation stands in stark contradiction to Morocco’s own constitutional commitments. The Preamble of the 2011 Constitution commits the Kingdom to “ban and combat all discrimination... for reason of sex... or whatever personal circumstance that may be” and affirms its “attachment to the Rights of Man as they are universally recognized.”

A Framework of Criminalization and Invisibility

The Moroccan state perpetuates anti-transgender violence through two primary mechanisms: the utilization of its penal code as a weapon and the complete refusal to provide a pathway for legal gender recognition. This legal reality violates the principle of equality enshrined in Article 6 of the Constitution, which states that “All... are equal before [the law],” and Article 19, which guarantees that “The man and the woman enjoy, in equality, the rights and freedoms of civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental character.”

Article 489 of the Penal Code serves as the principal legal instrument of this oppression. The statute criminalizes “lewd or unnatural acts with an individual of the same sex,” punishable by six months to three years in prison and a fine of 120 to 1,200 dirhams (Moroccan Penal Code 1962, art. 489). Although the text specifically targets same-sex sexual conduct, its enforcement is weaponized against transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, whose gender expression is interpreted by authorities as an “unnatural act” or prima facie evidence of homosexuality. This legal conflation of gender identity with sexual orientation is a deliberate strategy of erasure. It denies transgender individuals a distinct legal status, forcing their existence into the only available legal category of deviance. As police and society target individuals based on their gender expression, they justify this action by mapping non-conforming expression onto the legal prohibition of “unnatural acts.” This legal framework solidifies the social misrecognition of trans women as “gay men” and trans men as “butch lesbians,” erasing their actual identities and making it impossible to advocate for specific legal protections.

The testimonies of participants confirm this practice. Adil, a trans man, was arrested solely based on “how I looked.” Samira, a trans woman, was threatened by a local official who stated, “Leave or I’ll use the law against you,” upon noticing that her ID did not match her appearance. Fatima, a trans woman and activist, reported that authorities “arrest us under Article 489 [sic]—the one that criminalizes homosexuality—even when we’re not gay.” Between 2017 and 2020, 838 individuals were prosecuted under Article 489 (The Moroccan Coalition for Gender and Sexual Diversity 2022). This legal reality perpetuates the vulnerability of transgender individuals to arbitrary arrest based on their appearance.

This criminalization is further entrenched by the **impossibility of legal gender recognition (LGR)**. Morocco provides no administrative or judicial pathway for a transgender person to change their name or gender marker on official documents, such as the national ID card (*carte nationale d’identité*) or passport (Equaldex 2025). This legal void is not an oversight but a policy of deliberate exclusion. As Samira stated unequivocally, “In Morocco, legal recognition of trans women is impossible. It’s impossible to change it, not with money, effort, or anything.”

The state's intransigence is illustrated by the experiences of those who have attempted to navigate the system. Youssef, a trans man, had his court petition for a name change rejected due to judicial ignorance; the ruling erroneously stated that he was seeking to change from male to female, fundamentally misunderstanding his case. The rigidity of the system is so profound that even individuals with official documentation are denied recognition. Fatima recounted the case of an intersex individual with a birth certificate documenting their status who was still refused a name change, concluding, "Even people with intersex documentation are blocked." This policy of exclusion was further codified in 2021 when a legislative amendment (Law 36.21) granted intersex individuals the right to modify their civil status but deliberately excluded transgender individuals, thereby reinforcing their legal non-existence (Equaldex 2025).

For individuals like Sarah, navigating the reality of lacking access to legal gender recognition LGR often involves updating their identification photos to better reflect their current appearance. However, this process is fraught with challenges: "It took me six months just to update my photo, going back and forth, and facing harassment at every corner, with refusals to accept any photo that presented me as feminine, because I am a 'man,' not a woman." This measure of simply having an updated ID photo does not fully safeguard against harassment; nevertheless, participants indicate that it is preferable to having no update at all. Beyond the issue of criminalization, this report will later examine how the discrepancy between one's gender identity and official identification affects various aspects of life, including education, housing, employment, and travel. Fatima exemplifies this struggle, stating, "I was blocked from boarding a plane once without a clear reason other than that my ID does not match my appearance, and they accused me of being a fraud."

The Language of Rejection: Media and Public Discourse

The legal erasure of transgender identities is mirrored and exacerbated in the public sphere by a linguistic void and a hostile media landscape. The absence of affirming language in Moroccan Arabic (Darija) to describe transgender experiences constitutes a form of structural violence, impeding self-advocacy, isolating individuals, and creating barriers to public understanding and solidarity.

Participants consistently reported that neutral or affirming terms such as "trans" or "'abir/'abira" (transgender man/woman) are not widely understood. Instead, the public lexicon is dominated by derogatory slurs. As Youssef explained, "In Morocco, if you say 'trans,' they won't understand, but if you say a slur, they get it. The only word they recognize is 'zamel'" (a slur for a gay man). Other commonly understood pejorative terms include *mouta awil* (literally "transformed, referring to a transsexual person" but used to mean pervert) and *alwan* (colors, a slur for LGBTQ+ individuals). This compels individuals into a psychologically damaging act of self-mislabeling merely to be understood. Sofia and Samira both described being compelled to use the term *mutahawila*, which they find unattractive and inaccurate, simply to convey their identity to medical professionals or officials.

This linguistic violence is amplified by Moroccan media, which either neglects transgender lives or frames them through a sensationalist lens of pathology, criminality, and hyper-sexuality. Discussions in Moroccan media concerning "*altāḥawūlu aġjīnṣū*," the colloquial term for "transsexualism," predominantly emphasize moral and religious arguments, ultimately concluding that such medical interventions are impermissible (Barlamane 2019). Transgender women are frequently reduced to the singular narrative of sex work or misidentified as gay men, erasing the specificity of their identities. Layla noted that when the trans influencer Sofia Talouni appeared on television, the focus was entirely on "sex work, not about identity." This conflation was also evident in media coverage of a brutal 2022 assault on a trans woman in Tangier, where she was consistently misgendered as a "gay man." Samira characterized this media environment as a "vacuum in serious media coverage," where the "yellow press misrepresents us with humiliating terms" and portrays trans individuals "as monsters, as people to be feared."

In recent years, social media has emerged as a significant and influential channel for the perpetuation

of violence against marginalized groups. In April 2020, amid the COVID-19 lockdown, the influencer Sofia Talouni directed her 600,000 followers to utilize dating applications to identify and publicly disclose the identities of gay and bisexual men, igniting a violent online campaign (Sanae A. 2024; Human Rights Foundation 2025). This campaign of “outing” resulted in numerous individuals being expelled from their homes, subjected to threats, and at least one reported suicide. The incident highlighted the alarming fragility of online environments that were previously regarded as safer avenues for community engagement (Sanae A. 2024).

Societal Hostility and the Instrumentalization of Religion

The legal and media landscape reflects and reinforces deeply entrenched societal hostility toward transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Quantitative data provides a stark illustration of these attitudes. A 2016 global survey conducted by ILGA revealed that a majority of Moroccans possess negative perceptions of transgender individuals. Specifically, 61% of respondents affirmed the belief that «gender is assigned at birth and always fixed,» whereas only 19% disagreed. Moreover, 72% deemed it unacceptable for a child assigned male at birth to dress and express himself as a girl (ILGA and RIWI Corp. 2016).

This social conservatism is often justified through the instrumentalization of religious doctrine. Interview participants reported that religious arguments serve as the primary rationale for transphobia. Samira articulated, «Religion plays a key role in the hate,» noting the frequent citation of Qur'anic verses such as «we created you male and female» or hadith (prophetic traditions) to condemn non-normative identities. Layla, whose father was a religious scholar, asserted that «Religion is always used against us, to justify violence.» Nadia observed that individuals who typically disregard religious precepts «suddenly remember religion» when seeking to attack queer individuals.

However, this dominant hostile interpretation is not monolithic. Youssef, a trans man, recounted a pivotal experience in which he and his family consulted the Islamic Scientific Council. After explaining his situation, an advisor affirmed his right to transition, stating, «you have the right to take hormones, have surgery, and marry a woman... the only condition is that you live as a normative man.» This illustrates the existence of alternative, more tolerant or confused Islamic jurisprudential perspectives as this scholar may have thought that Youssef is intersex and therefore allowed to undergo surgeries or maybe have actual tolerance towards transgender people in the pathologization sense. Nevertheless, these interpretations are largely absent from public discourse in Morocco, which remains dominated by a rigid and punitive perspective. This selective appropriation of religious doctrine serves to legitimize social prejudice and provides a moral framework for the exclusion and violence confronted by the transgender community.

The stark contrast between Morocco's domestic legal and social framework and its international obligations is significant. The Preamble to the Constitution asserts that ratified international conventions take «primacy over the internal law of the country.» As a signatory to essential human rights treaties, Morocco is bound by principles of non-discrimination and the right to health and privacy. However, these commitments remain unimplemented, leaving transgender citizens without protection.

Table 2: Morocco’s Status on Core International Human Rights Treaties. Data compiled from multiple sources.

Treaty	Ratification Date	Relevant Articles and Interpretations	
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	3 May 1979	Art. 17 (Right to Privacy): The UN Human Rights Committee has consistently interpreted this article as safeguarding consensual same-sex relations and, by extension, gender identity and expression (UN Human Rights Committee, 1994).	Art. 26 (Non-Discrimination): Prohibits discrimination on any ground, including «other status,» which is understood to encompass sexual orientation and gender identity (UN Human Rights Committee, 2016).
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	3 May 1979	Art. 12 (Right to Health): Guarantees the right to the "highest attainable standard of physical and mental health," which includes access to gender-affirming healthcare without discrimination (UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2006).	
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)	21 June 1993	Art. 2 & 16: Obligates the state to prevent acts of torture and ill-treatment by state officials, including police abuse and violence in detention against transgender individuals (UN Committee Against Torture).	
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)	21 June 1993	General Recommendations: The CEDAW Committee has clarified that discrimination against women includes intersecting forms of discrimination, which applies to transgender women who face compounded discrimination based on both their gender identity and gender expression (UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2022).	

Section 2: The Right to Health: Institutional Abandonment and Underground Survival

The right to health for transgender individuals in Morocco is systematically violated due to a policy of institutional abandonment, which constitutes a direct contravention of Article 31 of the 2011 Constitution, obligating the state to “work for the mobilization of all the means available to facilitate the equal access of citizens... to healthcare.” The state’s failure to regulate, provide, or even acknowledge gender-affirming healthcare (GAH) effectively constitutes a de facto prohibition. This legislative

and institutional void does not create ambiguity; rather, it actively inflicts harm. It enables healthcare providers to deny care with impunity, fosters an environment of fear and misinformation, and compels individuals to resort to life-threatening, unregulated practices to affirm their identities. This state inaction manifests as a form of passive violence, directly causing physical and psychological suffering and forcing a community into secrecy regarding its most fundamental medical needs.

A Healthcare System Devoid of Care

Across all interviews, participants characterized the healthcare system as not merely inadequate but entirely absent concerning GAH. “This is the real crisis, the biggest disaster,” stated Omar, “There’s absolutely nothing officially available: no hormone therapy, no care, nothing.” This absence is not confined to the public sector; the private sector equally lacks services. There is a “complete absence of GAH within both the public and private healthcare sectors in Morocco.” This situation is in stark contrast to other countries in the region, such as Lebanon, where the private sector and non-governmental organizations have partially mitigated the void left by the state (Abdallah et al. 2023).

In the absence of laws or official policies permitting, regulating, or safeguarding access to GAH, a chilling effect ensues. Healthcare providers, operating in a vacuum of clinical guidelines and legal clarity, either refuse to provide services out of fear of legal or professional repercussions or exploit the legislative void as a pretext for withholding care based on personal biases. Fatima, an activist who has worked to educate medical professionals, succinctly summarized the situation: “Honestly, in Morocco, medicine doesn’t even recognize this issue.” This systemic neglect places the entire burden of care upon the individual and under-resourced community networks.

“Doctors Think It’s Sinful”: Provider Stigma and Medical Violence

When transgender individuals attempt to engage with the healthcare system, they are frequently met with hostility, ignorance, and medical violence. The testimonies collected for this report present a harrowing portrayal of a medical establishment steeped in socio-religious bias and lacking essential knowledge regarding transgender health.

Experiences of transgender individuals in Morocco range from outright denial of care to attempts at conversion therapy. Amina, a young trans woman, was denied even a basic consultation, recounting, “Doctors refused to see me because they think it’s sinful to help someone like me.” Jamila described being “mocked” and “treated as if I carried a disease” by physicians. This stigma is pervasive, even among mental health professionals, who should serve as sources of support. Samira’s psychiatrist dismissed her identity as “just a theory and not real” and employed the pathologizing term “transsexual.” Sofia’s family sought psychiatric assistance in hopes of “curing” her, only to discover that “even the psychiatrist didn’t understand... she understood nothing.”

In some of the most alarming cases, medical recommendations devolved into attempts at religious conversion. Fatima was advised by one doctor to “go see a fqih to read Qur’an over me.” Another simply stated, “we don’t do this kind of thing here,” while a third insisted, “you need a psychologist; this doesn’t exist. There are only men and women on this earth.” This consistent pattern of denial and pathologization has a profound impact, leading many, like Fatima, to conclude, “I got tired of trying. I realized I had to figure things out myself.” The few exceptions to this rule are telling; knowledgeable and affirming doctors, as noted by Youssef and Samira, are almost exclusively those connected to human rights organizations, highlighting that trans-competent care exists only at the periphery of the formal healthcare system.

Underground Survival: Self-Medication and Informal Networks

Faced with an impenetrable formal healthcare system, transgender individuals in Morocco are compelled to navigate a perilous underground system to access hormones. The most prevalent practice

is self-medication with unregulated and often inappropriate substances. Samira and Amina both described initiating their transitions by taking birth control pills, a practice known to carry significant health risks due to improper dosages and side effects. Amina also stated, “I tried eating foods with hormones because I couldn’t afford medication,” illustrating the desperation and lack of reliable information.

Hormones are acquired through clandestine channels. Youssef began his transition by obtaining testosterone through the “gym community,” a common informal source. However, the primary lifeline for many is activist-run networks. Samira explained that “some activists bring small quantities secretly to help selected individuals,” a process fraught with legal risks, as “if anyone is caught distributing hormones, they could face legal prosecution.” Omar also sourced his hormones initially through an “informal network” before connecting with an organization in a big city.

While this reliance on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and peer networks is life-saving, it creates a precarious and inequitable system of care. Access is not a right but a privilege dependent on one’s connections, geographic location, and the limited capacity of a few over-stretched, under-resourced groups. As Rania noted, access is “hard,” and the organizations are concentrated in major cities, leaving those in other areas with few options. This ad-hoc system, born of necessity, is inherently fragile. It cannot replace a state-run healthcare system and leaves the entire community vulnerable to disruptions in supply, activist burnout, or state crackdowns, perpetually one crisis away from a collective health emergency.

A Two-Tiered System: The Role of Class in Accessing Surgery

While gender-affirming surgeries are nearly entirely unavailable in Morocco, a few exceptions reveal a stark, two-tiered system of access dictated by wealth and connections. Complex procedures such as phalloplasty or vaginoplasty are non-existent. However, a small number of private surgeons will perform less complex procedures like breast augmentation or top surgery for those who can afford the exorbitant costs.

Dounia, a trans woman, underwent breast augmentation in Morocco with a private doctor who travels from France. The procedure cost her 6,000 EUR—a price she noted was significantly inflated compared to what a cisgender woman would pay, stating, “You pay a penalty for being trans.” She was only able to afford this through the support of a “sugar daddy.” Youssef, a trans man, had top surgery in a private hospital for a discounted price of \$2,000 (down from an average of \$4,000-\$6,000) because the surgeon was acquainted with his psychotherapist and was sympathetic to the economic precarity faced by trans individuals.

These cases are the rare exception. For the vast majority, surgery within Morocco remains an impossibility. Omar stated bluntly that for a Moroccan trans person “without money or family support, it’s basically impossible.” The only realistic pathway for most is seeking asylum in Europe, “where the state often covers surgeries.” This reality positions migration not as a choice but as a medical necessity for those unable to access Morocco’s exclusive and clandestine private healthcare market.

Section 3: The Right to a Dignified Life: Socio-Economic Exclusion

The legal invisibility and social hostility directed at transgender individuals in Morocco translate directly into systemic socio-economic exclusion. This exclusion is not a passive byproduct of prejudice but an active process of marginalization that obstructs access to education, employment, and housing, in violation of Article 31 of the Constitution, which mandates the state to facilitate equal access to “a modern, accessible education of quality,” “decent housing,” and “work.” This systematic denial of opportunity functions as a form of social engineering, designed to keep transgender individuals impoverished, invisible, and powerless. By impeding their ability to build stable lives, accumulate resources, or participate in the formal economy, the system ensures they remain in a state of perpetual precarity,

unable to mount effective political resistance. For many, particularly trans women, this path leads inexorably to survival economies such as sex work, where they face further violence and exploitation.

“My Life in Morocco Stopped”: Exclusion from Education and Employment

The exclusion of transgender individuals often commences within the educational system, which serves as a site of intense bullying and institutional discrimination. Participants described school environments so hostile that continuing their education became untenable. Amina recounted being “treated like a dog” by students, while “teachers would seat me in the back and didn’t care if I learned anything.” Layla and Rayan both spoke of enduring constant harassment, with Rayan describing how he was relentlessly mocked with the question, “Why are you like a girl?” This relentless abuse frequently leads individuals to drop out. Omar left school due to the pressure from his teenage peers—who “harass you, mock you, provoke you”—being “too much.” Zahra also dropped out directly “because of my gender identity” after facing “a lot of bullying and humiliation.” For others, the act of transitioning itself precipitates the end of their education. Samira stated simply, “When I started my transition, I had to stop going to university. My life in Morocco stopped.”

This truncated educational journey is compounded by severe discrimination in the labor market. Even for those with qualifications, securing or maintaining formal employment is nearly impossible. The primary barrier is the “ID check”—a moment of institutional crisis where the mismatch between a person’s gender expression and their legal documents leads to suspicion and termination. Samira described being let go from jobs as a cashier and waitress after employers discovered her ID, explaining, “When employers find out my documents don’t match, they get scared and let me go.” Youssef faced a similar issue after a month of training for a job; when asked for his national ID, which bore a pre-transition photo, he was forced to provide an alternative document and fabricate a “mistake in the name,” rendering his employment status precarious. This reality limits employment options to the few “safe” spaces available, primarily within NGOs and activist circles, though as Rania noted, this work is often “unstable and poorly paid.” For most, the formal economy remains entirely inaccessible.

“I Ended Up Homeless”: The Crisis of Housing and Familial Rejection

The struggle for socio-economic survival is profoundly exacerbated by the dual crises of familial rejection and housing discrimination. For many participants, coming out or becoming visibly gender non-conforming resulted in violent expulsion from their family homes, severing their primary source of social and financial support. Samira’s family “kicked me out because they couldn’t handle people’s judgment” when her transition became visible. Amina’s family, after years of denial, escalated to violent repression, eventually throwing her out of the house. At least five participants reported being expelled, rejected, or forced out of their homes.

This expulsion frequently results in homelessness and a desperate search for shelter within a profoundly discriminatory housing market. Landlords often refuse to rent to transgender individuals. Samira recounted an instance in which a landlord told her, “I can rent to drug addicts, but not to people like you.” Amina encountered repeated rejections, with landlords stereotyping her by stating she would “bring men and diseases.” This situation compels individuals to resort to precarious survival strategies. Samira described informal renting arrangements, where “the landlord can enter anytime and kick you out,” or utilizing a friend’s identification to secure a lease. Adil detailed the exhausting process of altering his voice, behavior, and even avoiding shaving to present as a woman to potential landlords. This constant requirement to perform a false identity in order to secure a basic human right exerts a significant psychological toll.

Socio-economic class serves as a significant determinant of housing security and safety. Individuals with greater financial resources are able to reside in more affluent neighborhoods characterized by greater anonymity and a reduced likelihood of neighborly interference in personal matters. For example, Karim consciously opted to inhabit a “relatively expensive area to have more security,” while

Ilham observed that her residence in an “upper-class neighborhood” provided her with a sense of protection. In stark contrast, individuals living in lower-income, “popular” neighborhoods often endure increased scrutiny and harassment. Malak articulated the necessity of consistently monitoring their appearance to conform to societal expectations of ‘normalcy’ in order to avoid provoking neighbors. This pressure is unrelenting, as harassment from neighbors is a frequent occurrence in these communities. Additionally, financial resources can facilitate the circumvention of discriminatory practices; Youssef noted that individuals with sufficient funds could incentivize brokers to “look the other way” in regard to discrepancies in documentation. Landlords may also exploit this vulnerability, as Rania indicated that a “landlord can demand double the rent.” Ultimately, as Jamila remarked, “without money you can’t live in better areas where people treat you with respect.”

Survival Economies: Sex Work as a Forced Consequence

For many transgender women, the cumulative failures of the educational, employment, and housing systems leave no alternative but to enter survival sex work. For some it might be a choice but for others it is a predictable outcome of systemic exclusion. Samira, after being denied jobs and housing, stated, «Night work was the only option left... It’s not a main job, it’s a survival backup job.» Layla began sex work after being forced out of her home by her mother, explaining, «We do it because it’s the only way to survive.» Amina, too, turned to sex work as a «last resort» after being expelled, stating, «Sex work saved my life; it helped me find a place to sleep and stay warm.» Dounia also currently works as a sex worker due to her inability to secure formal employment.

While serving as a means of survival, sex work exposes individuals to heightened levels of danger. Participants described a persistent threat of violence from clients, non-payment, legal harassment from police, and increased health risks, including sexually transmitted diseases, in an environment characterized by «no protection.» Nadia recounted a terrifying encounter with a «psychopath» client from whom she «barely escaped,» highlighting the life-threatening risks involved. This reality underscores the final turn in the web of violence: after being systematically excluded from all avenues of a dignified life, transgender women are compelled into a profession where they are exceptionally vulnerable to the very violence that the state and society already inflict upon them. Class privilege acts as a critical buffer against this entire cascade of socio-economic exclusion. As Rania articulated, there are two Moroccos: if you live in «Morocco» with money, you can adapt... if you live in «Morocco» without resources, migration is one of the best solutions.» Wealth facilitates access to safer neighborhoods, private healthcare, and a degree of social insulation, mitigating the harshest impacts of transphobia. For individuals lacking economic resources, however, the path of exclusion is direct and unforgiving.

Section 4: Navigating the State: Administrative Violence and Police Harassment

Encounters with the Moroccan state are neither neutral nor protective for transgender individuals; they are sites of active and often brutal violence. From routine bureaucratic interactions to direct encounters with law enforcement, state institutions function as primary enforcers of a cis-heteronormative order. This reality stands in direct opposition to constitutional guarantees, including the right to security of person (Article 21), the prohibition of infringements on physical or moral integrity (Article 22), and the right to privacy (Article 24). The mismatched identification document becomes a constant source of friction, transforming simple administrative tasks into high-stakes ordeals of humiliation and potential detention. Police officers, far from serving as protectors, frequently act as perpetrators of harassment, arbitrary arrest, physical abuse, and sexual violence, operating with total impunity. This creates a state of chronic fear, compelling individuals to avoid essential services and live under the constant threat of state-sanctioned harm.

The Daily Humiliation of Mismatched Documents

The state’s refusal to provide legal gender recognition inflicts a form of “administrative violence” — the

psychological and material harm caused by bureaucratic systems that deny an individual's existence. For transgender Moroccans, the national ID card becomes a source of daily dread. Every interaction requiring identification—at a bank, an airport, a government office, or during a police check—transforms into a moment of crisis.

Participants provided numerous examples of this bureaucratic hostility. Samira was informed by an official at the commissariat that “the system doesn't accept a feminine photo with a masculine name” when she attempted to update her ID photo. Fatima was detained for three hours at an airport due to a mismatch between her appearance and her passport photo. Officials told her, “this isn't your passport,” and only released her after taking her fingerprints to verify her identity. Youssef recounted being indirectly refused service at a bank; an employee, unwilling to return his bank card after viewing his ID, instructed him to return in two days, falsely claiming there was a “problem.” He only retrieved his card after escalating the issue to a manager and presenting a secondary ID with a more recent photo. These encounters are not mere inconveniences; they constitute degrading rituals of misrecognition that reinforce the state's message: you do not exist. This compels individuals into a state of social withdrawal, avoiding essential civic functions to evade inevitable humiliation and risk.

“If I File a Complaint, They'll Destroy Me”: Policing Gender Non-Conformity

The administrative violence of bureaucracy is matched by the physical and sexual violence perpetrated by law enforcement. Police officers in Morocco actively police gender non-conformity, targeting individuals for harassment and arrest based solely on their appearance. The testimonies collected for this report reveal a consistent pattern of abuse characterized by impunity.

Arbitrary arrests are commonplace. Adil was arrested multiple times, including once in Casablanca for “how I looked” while homeless on the street. Malak was arrested and detained for 48 hours with friends solely because they “looked non-normative” while walking in public. These arrests are frequently accompanied by physical and verbal abuse. Karim, a non-binary activist, was “beaten in the street” by police who interrupted a workshop in a public park. Malak described enduring “slaps to the face and insults” while in detention.

The violence is often deeply invasive and sexualized, particularly for transfeminine individuals. Adil recounted being interrogated by police about his genitals. He is also aware of officers coercing trans individuals into sexual acts under the threat of arrest, stating, “have sex with me and I'll let you go.” While in detention, Malak was housed with women and experienced “attempts at sexual assault” from other detainees, feeling that the guards “let it happen” and employed the threat of violence to coerce them. Amina described the horrific conditions for trans individuals in Moroccan prisons, where they are systematically abused and “raped by everyone in the room,” while guards treat them “like sinners who deserve torture.”

This systemic violence is met with complete impunity. The power imbalance is so pronounced that seeking justice is perceived as both impossible and dangerous. Adil's assertion, “If I file a complaint, they'll destroy me,” encapsulates the pervasive fear and the reality that the state's agents operate above the law. This constant threat exerts a profound psychological impact, fostering a state of hyper-vigilance. “Now every time I leave the house, I'm scared of police,” Adil confessed. This fear dictates everyday decisions, from clothing choices to modes of transportation, all in an effort to remain invisible to a predatory state.

Section 5: Resistance, Resilience, and the Final Recourse of Migration

In the face of this overwhelming web of violence, transgender and non-binary individuals in Morocco are not passive victims. They engage in a constant, dynamic process of resistance and survival, employing sophisticated strategies to navigate a hostile environment. This section explores the architecture of that survival, from daily acts of gender performance for safety to the vital lifelines of community

solidarity and activism. Ultimately, however, it concludes that for many, the cumulative burden of systemic erasure is unbearable, positioning migration not as a choice for a better life, but as a desperate flight for life itself—the final and most definitive act of resistance against a state that denies them the right to exist.

Strategies for Survival: Navigating a Hostile Environment

Survival in Morocco necessitates a continual and exhaustive performance of gender. Participants articulated the deployment of a spectrum of strategies, adapting their gender expression according to their immediate context and the perceived level of threat. These performances are not indicative of inauthenticity; rather, they are calculated acts of self-preservation and agency within a hostile environment.

One strategy involves the performance of the gender assigned at birth, a tactic employed to achieve invisibility and evade harm. Rayan referred to this as wearing a “mask with something stereotypical for our safety.” Such a conscious performance is often a prerequisite for accessing basic necessities. For instance, Adil described adopting a feminine voice, behavior, and appearance specifically to secure housing, a high-stakes act undertaken for survival.

Another strategy is the performance of a normative, binary transgender identity, commonly referred to as “passing.” This entails presenting oneself in a manner that is legible and acceptable to cisnormative society. Dounia’s experience is illustrative; she noted that the social harassment she encountered as a visibly gender non-conforming individual “decreased significantly” once she initiated hormone therapy and was able to present unequivocally as a woman. This suggests that society offers a fragile, conditional acceptance to those who conform to a recognizable binary while penalizing ambiguity.

A third approach involves the assertion of a non-normative identity, consciously rejecting the pressure to conform to either cisgender or stereotypical transgender standards. Individuals such as Nadia and Rania described their expressions as “different” or “artistic,” thereby refusing to be easily categorized. This assertion of an authentic self serves as a form of resistance; however, it can incur costs, including exclusion and judgment even from within the queer community, which sometimes enforces its own rigid beauty standards and expectations. Nonetheless, this approach remains limited, as gender non-conforming individuals still must present themselves in a manner that can be interpreted as either female or male by broader society.

Community as Lifeline: Formal and Informal Activism and Solidarity

In the absence of state protection and social acceptance, community becomes the essential infrastructure for survival. Formal and informal activist collectives function as critical lifelines. These groups, often operating underground and with limited resources, provide indispensable material aid, including smuggled hormones, emergency shelter for those fleeing familial violence, and financial support for marginalized community members.

Equally important, they create what Zahra termed a “second home” or “heaven on Earth”—rare safe spaces where individuals can shed the exhausting “mask” of performing for safety and exist authentically among peers who understand their reality. These spaces are crucial for building solidarity, sharing information, and fostering the psychological resilience necessary to endure the daily violence of the outside world. However, this activism is fraught with challenges. Activists face heightened state surveillance, harassment, and the constant threat of arrest, as demonstrated by Karim’s experience of being beaten and detained during a workshop. The immense pressure leads to activist burnout, and internal tensions over strategy, funding, and identity politics can sometimes fracture solidarity. While this community resilience is a testament to the strength and ingenuity of transgender Moroccans, it also serves as a profound indictment of state failure. The community is compelled to provide the basic

services and protections that the state is obligated yet refuses to offer.

“Migration is the Only Solution”: The Exodus for Safety and Selfhood

For a significant number of participants, the combined weight of legal erasure, medical abandonment, social hostility, and economic exclusion renders a dignified life in Morocco impossible. Migration emerges not as a preference but as the only viable path to safety, health, and selfhood. This pursuit is not of an «Eldorado,» but rather a flight from an unlivable reality.

The testimonies present a chorus of desperation and resolve. Samira, now in Belgium, stated, «Without legal recognition, I can’t live in Morocco. This is not a life; it’s a prison. Migration is the only solution.» Amina, also a refugee in Belgium, echoed this sentiment: «I had no rights, no safety, no access to anything; I had to leave.» Sofia, who waited until she reached Belgium to begin her transition, asserted, «I will never return to Morocco... In Morocco, I was wearing a mask. Here, I’m free and happy.» Migration represents the ultimate act of resistance against the constant need to perform a false identity for survival. It is a powerful assertion of the right to exist authentically. It is the only means to access life-saving medical care, achieve legal recognition, and escape the constant threat of violence. While some, like Karim and Nadia, express a deep attachment to their homeland and a desire to «fight the battle» in Morocco, they are the exception. For most, the web of violence is too dense, and the cost of survival is too high. The forced exodus of its transgender citizens constitutes the gravest indictment of the Moroccan state’s failure to protect its own people.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report has documented the lived experiences of transgender and non-binary individuals in Morocco, revealing a systemic and interlocking “web of violence” that operates at every level of society. The violations detailed are not isolated incidents of prejudice but are the direct result of a deliberate state policy of erasure, enacted through a criminalizing legal framework, a de facto prohibition on healthcare, and the active persecution by state agents. This system of institutional abandonment and social hostility denies transgender individuals their fundamental rights to health, safety, dignity, and life, compelling them into a state of perpetual precarity and forcing many to conclude that migration is their only path to survival.

The resilience and ingenuity of Morocco’s transgender community—demonstrated through their creation of support networks and their daily acts of resistance—serve as a testament to their strength. However, this resilience should not be mistaken for a solution; it is an indictment of a state that has abdicated its most basic responsibilities. The priorities articulated by the participants in this study form a clear mandate for action. Their collective call is not for special privileges but for the fundamental human rights and dignities afforded to all citizens. Morocco’s international human rights commitments are not abstract principles; they are binding obligations that demand immediate and concrete action. Based on the priorities identified by the community and the findings of this report, the following recommendations are proposed:

To the Government of the Kingdom of Morocco:

- **Repeal Discriminatory Legislation:** Immediately repeal Article 489 of the Penal Code. This has been identified as a critical priority by participants like Layla and Adil to end the criminalization of consensual same-sex relations and cease its weaponization against transgender and gender non-conforming individuals based on their gender expression.
- **Establish Legal Gender Recognition (LGR):** Create a clear, accessible, and transparent administrative process for LGR. This has consistently been identified as the most important reform needed to enable a dignified life in Morocco, allowing individuals to change their name and gender marker on all official documents.
- **Ensure Access to Gender-Affirming Healthcare (GAH):** End the de facto prohibition on GAH by developing and implementing national clinical guidelines for comprehensive care, in line with international best practices. This directly addresses the urgent need for safe medical care voiced by participants like Jamila and Omar. This includes ensuring hormone therapy, surgical procedures, and mental health support are accessible and affordable through the public healthcare system.
- **Enact Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Legislation:** Adopt and enforce robust anti-discrimination laws that explicitly include gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation as protected grounds. This aligns with Karim’s call for broad protective laws covering employment, housing, and education, areas where nearly all participants detailed severe exclusion.
- **End State Violence and Ensure Accountability:** Issue immediate directives to all law enforcement and judicial bodies to cease the harassment, arbitrary arrest, and abuse of individuals based on their gender identity or expression, as detailed in the testimonies of Adil, Malak, and Karim. Establish an independent oversight mechanism to investigate all allegations of police misconduct and ensure accountability for perpetrators.
- **Promote Public Education and Media Reform:** In response to priorities set by Sofia, Zahra, and Rania, the Ministries of Education and Communication should launch public awareness campaigns to combat societal stigma. This includes integrating education on gender diversity into school curricula and establishing media codes of conduct to ensure respectful and accurate representation of transgender individuals.

To Medical and Legal Professional Bodies in Morocco:

- **Mandate Comprehensive Training:** Integrate mandatory training on the health and human rights of transgender and gender-diverse individuals into the curricula of all medical, nursing, psychology, and law schools.
- **Issue Professional Directives:** The national orders of physicians and psychologists should issue clear ethical guidelines affirming that providing non-discriminatory, gender-affirming care is a professional obligation and that attempts at conversion therapy constitute medical malpractice.

To the International Community, including the United Nations and Partner States:

- **Utilization of Diplomatic and Human Rights Mechanisms:** It is imperative to consistently advocate for the human rights of transgender individuals in all bilateral and multilateral discussions with Morocco, including during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The Moroccan government should be urged to implement the community-led recommendations detailed in this report.
- **Provision of Direct Support to Grassroots Organizations:** It is essential to enhance direct, flexible, and sustained financial and technical assistance to transgender-led and community-based organizations in Morocco that provide life-saving services.
- **Ensuring Safe and Accessible Pathways for Asylum:** The systemic persecution experienced by transgender individuals in Morocco constitutes valid grounds for asylum. It is crucial to ensure that refugee and asylum procedures are accessible, humane, and informed by a comprehensive understanding of the specific forms of violence from which these individuals are fleeing.

To Mainstream Human Rights and Feminist Organizations:

- **Adopt a Comprehensive Intersectional Approach:** Mainstream feminist and human rights organizations must transcend conditional solidarity and fully incorporate the rights and specific needs of transgender and non-binary individuals into their central advocacy agendas. This necessitates the cessation of relegating trans rights to a “secondary priority” and ensuring that trans voices, particularly those of trans women and non-binary individuals, are prioritized in campaigns for legal and social reform, including amendments to the Family Code and Penal Code.
- **Establish Truly Inclusive and Safe Environments:** Organizations should critically assess and reform their internal practices to guarantee safety and accessibility for all individuals. This involves removing bureaucratic obstacles, such as the requirement for identification that may not align with a person’s gender identity, and implementing mandatory training for staff on appropriate pronoun usage and respectful terminology to mitigate instances of misgendering and gossip during events.
- **Utilize Platforms to Amplify Trans Voices:** Established organizations with greater resources and public platforms bear the responsibility of elevating the voices of trans individuals. This requires moving beyond superficial inclusion and actively collaborating with trans-led groups, sharing resources, and ensuring that trans individuals represent themselves in media engagements and advocacy forums, rather than being represented by others.

To Transgender-Led and LGBTQ+ Collectives:

- **Enhance Internal Solidarity and Inclusivity:** It is imperative to address the internal divisions, rivalries, and stigma that persist within the community. Groups should facilitate internal workshops and dialogues to cultivate greater understanding and acceptance of diverse identities, including non-binary and gender-fluid individuals who often report feelings of exclusion within queer spaces. Additionally, it is essential to actively combat intra-community stigma.

- **Broaden Outreach to Vulnerable and Isolated Communities:** Activist groups, frequently concentrated in major urban centers, should devise targeted strategies to engage the most marginalized members of the community. This includes individuals residing in rural areas, those with limited education or internet access, and those lacking connections to existing activist networks. Such efforts will counter the tendency for support to be restricted to “familiar faces” and ensure that resources, including hormones and safe housing information, reach those most in need.
- **Foster Broader Coalitions and Coordinate Advocacy Efforts:** To mitigate the risks of burnout and the depoliticizing effects of “NGOization” (competition over funding), groups should prioritize the establishment of strategic coalitions. By coordinating advocacy on critical issues such as the repeal of Article 489 and the establishment of legal gender recognition, a more unified and formidable front can be presented to both the state and the broader public.
- **Create and Disseminate Knowledge Resources:** In light of the pervasive lack of accurate information, trans-led groups should continue to develop and share accessible resources in local languages (Darija, Amazigh) that elucidate gender identity, safe transitioning practices, and legal rights. This peer-to-peer education serves as a vital form of community care and empowerment in the absence of institutional support.

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القاهرة ٥٢

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