

MARCH 2023



THE CHALLENGES FACING AMAZIGH WOMEN IN MOROCCO



ABOUT THE AUTHOR




Chaimae Haddoumi is currently pursuing a Master's degree in International Relations with a focus on the intersection of Politics, Sociology, and Culture. Her particular interests lie in advocating for women's rights, African studies, migration, and decolonization.

Moreover, she's passionate about promoting self-awareness and enhancing comprehension of how geopolitical, social, and cultural factors impact both individual and collective identities.

ABOUT POLITICS4HER

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Politics4Her is an intersectional feminist platform & youth-led movement advocating for the inclusive participation of young women and girls in politics. Politics4Her works to broaden dialogue and to bring international human rights into practice through advising policymakers and states by bringing international best ideas. Politics4Her strives to contribute to a more equitably governed world by democratizing national laws and legislations.

ABOUT THE PROGRAMME



The Young Feminist Scholars Programme is meant for any student who is extremely passionate about feminism and gender issues. The goal will be for each scholar to deliver a report specializing on a region in the world covering issues related to gender-based violence and/or women's political participation.

Our two criteria for our scholars are to identify as international feminists (regardless of their gender) and most importantly to be able to showcase leadership. Scholars get to work in research, writing, policy as well as communications advocacy. Our main goal is for them to explore these different fields and see what they are most interested in while offering them guidance and mentorship so that it potentially helps them launch their early career.

TRIGGER WARNING

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Please note that since this policy brief includes words and phrases that should be avoided, you may come across some that you consider discriminatory or that have been used historically to oppress certain people or groups. These may cause distress to people who have experienced discrimination on the basis of their identity. Given the nature of this policy brief, we understand that many of the issues it discusses are personal and emotive for many people. While naming oppressions is necessary to deconstruct them, we recognize that this can take a toll on those directly affected. Please take care in the reading of the policy brief and prioritize your well-being.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY


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The aim of this policy brief is to examine the situation of Amazigh women within North African societies, more specifically Morocco. **The Amazigh people**, language, and practices have **survived for over 5000 years**. Indigenous to the land, they **still face many forms of discrimination** across fields like identity, equal language recognition, access to education, or political participation. **The situation is even more aggravated for Amazigh women**. Through this brief, an overview of Amazigh culture and History as well as the social perception of these indigenous people will be provided for the reader to better understand the magnitude of the situation. The second section of this brief will then focus on the challenges Amazigh women go through in Moroccan society, marginalization, discrimination and lack of equal opportunities will be at the heart of this analysis. And lastly, policy recommendations will be explicitly made in order to ensure Amazigh Moroccan women's gender equality, indigenous rights, and social justice.



**Amazigh owes its
survival first and
foremost to
women**

Fatima Sadiqi is a Professor of linguistics and gender studies.
She has written extensively on Moroccan languages and Moroccan women's issues.



Morocco is a country that boasts an extraordinary blend of cultures and traditions, making it one of the most fascinating countries in the world. **The Amazigh** community is an integral part of this cultural diversity. They are **one of the oldest** indigenous groups in North Africa, with their history dating back over 5000 years. Despite their rich cultural heritage, the Amazigh people have long **faced discrimination in various forms**, including language, identity, access to education, and political participation. The official Amazigh language, Tamazight, was not considered a central and official language in Morocco until 2011, resulting in many Amazigh people being forced to use Arabic as their primary language.

In addition, **Amazigh women, in particular, face multiple challenges**, such as marginalization, discrimination, and lack of equal opportunities. For instance, Amazigh women have often been excluded from decision-making processes in their communities, despite the critical role they play in maintaining cultural traditions and heritage. They have also been subjected to discriminatory laws, such as the Family Code and the Moroccan Constitution. For instance, Article 6 of the Moroccan Family Code states that the husband is the head of the household, which has been criticized as reinforcing patriarchal gender roles and limiting the autonomy of women, including Amazigh women. This has made it challenging for them to gain access to education and healthcare services.

As a result, many Amazigh women have been unable to acquire the necessary skills to secure decent employment, leading to widespread poverty and inequality within the community.



Furthermore, the Amazigh identity is often marginalized in mainstream media, education, and public discourse, leading to the erasure of their unique cultural identity.

THE AIM OF THIS POLICY BRIEF IS

To provide a detailed analysis of the challenges faced by Amazigh women in Moroccan society, with a particular focus on language discrimination, access to education and healthcare, and identity erasure.

By examining these issues in greater detail, we hope to shed light on the extent of the problem and the ways in which they can be addressed.

Policy recommendations will be presented to ensure the promotion of indigenous rights, gender equality, and social justice, allowing Amazigh women to be fully integrated into Moroccan society, without having to abandon their unique cultural heritage.

METHODOLOGY

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The methodology used in this policy brief involved a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by Amazigh women in Morocco, a review of existing literature was conducted, including academic articles, reports by non-governmental organizations, and government publications.

This literature review provided important background information on the History, culture, and political context of the Amazigh people in Morocco.

To complement the literature review, two semi-structured interviews were conducted with Amazigh women activists and leaders.

The purpose of these interviews was to gain firsthand insight into the lived experiences of Amazigh women in Morocco and to identify the most pressing issues they face. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Additionally, quantitative data were obtained from official statistics and reports from the Moroccan government and international organizations.

This data provided information on the number of Amazigh women enrolled in schools and universities, their representation in political positions, and their access to healthcare services.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative data was used to provide a holistic view of the challenges faced by Amazigh women in Moroccan society.

The analysis of the data was used to inform the policy recommendations that are proposed in this brief, with the aim of promoting the rights and well-being of Amazigh women in Morocco.





TERMINOLOGY

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The term "Berber" has a complex and controversial history in North Africa. It has long been used to describe the indigenous peoples of the region, including those in Morocco who are known as the Amazigh. However, in recent years, there has been a growing awareness that this term is problematic and potentially harmful.


The roots of the term "Berber" can be traced back to the Arab conquest of North Africa in the 7th century. At that time, the Arabic word "barbar" was used to describe the non-Arabic-speaking people of the region. Over time, this word evolved into "Berber," which became the common term for the indigenous people of North Africa.

During the French occupation of North Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries, the term "Berber" was widely used by colonial powers to describe the indigenous peoples of the region. This was part of a broader effort to impose French culture and language on the population, and to undermine local customs and traditions.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition that the term "Berber" is outdated and potentially harmful. Many people in the Amazigh community see it as a pejorative term that reinforces negative stereotypes and erases their cultural identity.

Completely leaving the term behind is not yet a reality. Many people, including Amazigh Moroccans themselves, continue to use the term "Berber" as a way of identifying themselves and their cultural heritage. Additionally, the term is still used in academic and historical contexts to refer to the Amazigh people, and it may take time and continued education to fully shift away from its use.

However, it is important to acknowledge the history and connotations of the term and work towards promoting the use of more respectful and accurate language when referring to the Amazigh people.





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INSTEAD OF USING THE TERM "BERBER"

This policy brief uses the term "Amazigh," which is the term preferred by the indigenous people themselves. The term "Amazigh" means "free people" in their language, and it highlights their indigenous identity and their long-standing presence in North Africa. The use of this term is therefore a form of resistance against the erasure and marginalization of Amazigh culture and identity.

Furthermore, the use of the term "Berber" is often associated with a homogenization of the Amazigh people, erasing their diversity and unique identities. In reality, the Amazigh people consist of many distinct groups, each with their own language, culture, and history. By using the term "Amazigh," this policy brief acknowledges and celebrates the diversity of the indigenous people in Morocco and beyond.



HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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Their name

The Amazigh people, to some, have a rich and diverse cultural history that spans several millennia in North Africa. The term "Amazigh" means "free people" or "noble men," and the group has been known by various names throughout history such as "Imazighen."

Sub-cultures

There are several distinct sub-cultures within the Amazigh community, each with their own language, customs, and traditions. For example, the Tuareg are a nomadic tribe that have lived in the Sahara for centuries, while the Kabyle are a mountain-dwelling group in Algeria known for their strong sense of community and political activism.

Identity and recognition

Despite the challenges they have faced throughout history, the Amazigh people have managed to maintain their unique identity and cultural practices. They played a significant role in the history of Morocco, with notable figures such as Juba II, the Amazigh king who ruled over Mauretania and was married to Cleopatra Selene, daughter of the famous Egyptian queen. In modern times, the Amazigh people have fought for recognition of their language and culture.

THE CHOICE TO FOCUS ON MOROCCO

The choice to focus on the Amazigh people in Morocco specifically was made due to a variety of factors. In Morocco, the Amazigh people have been present for over 5000 years. Today, the country is home to the largest Amazigh population in North Africa, comprising nearly 40% of its total population, and their influence can be seen in the country's art, music, cuisine, and architecture. The traditional Amazigh music, which includes the use of various stringed instruments and drums, is still popular today, and the famous Gnawa music of Morocco has its roots in Amazigh culture.

The Amazigh style of pottery, which uses natural pigments and intricate designs, is a distinct feature of Moroccan ceramics. Additionally, dishes such as tagine and couscous, which are popular staples of Moroccan cuisine, have Amazigh origins.

This indicates that Amazigh people are a significant portion of Moroccan society, and therefore, their situation is relevant to the country's political, economic, and social landscape. Furthermore, Morocco has taken some steps toward acknowledging and recognizing Amazigh culture and language, as evidenced by the inclusion of Amazigh as an official language in the country's constitution. Despite these efforts, however, Amazigh people in Morocco continue to face various forms of discrimination, especially Amazigh women.

Therefore, focusing solely on the situation in Morocco regarding this indigenous group allows for a more targeted analysis of the situation and a more effective policy response.





**Challenges faced
by Amazigh
Women in Morocco**

1. LANGUAGE DISCRIMINATION

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One of the most significant standings in the way of the full integration of Amazigh women in Moroccan society is language discrimination. The Moroccan government has recognized Arabic as the official language, and this has resulted in the marginalization of Amazigh languages. Until recently, Amazigh was not considered an official language of Morocco, and many Amazigh names were banned or changed to Arabic names. This erasure of Amazigh language and culture has led to a loss of identity and discrimination against the Amazigh people.





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The language barrier is one of the significant challenges that Amazigh women face in accessing education and healthcare services. According to a study by the Moroccan Ministry of Education, only 10% of Amazigh-speaking children attend school, and the majority drop out early due to further language barriers as they progress in their academic path.

Furthermore, another report by the Moroccan Health Ministry shows that Amazigh-speaking patients are often unable to communicate effectively with healthcare providers, leading to inadequate healthcare services and medical errors.

To address these challenges, the Moroccan government recognized Tamazight, an Amazigh language, as a national language in 2011. However, the implementation of this policy has been slow, and the language still faces significant discrimination in public institutions, including healthcare and education.

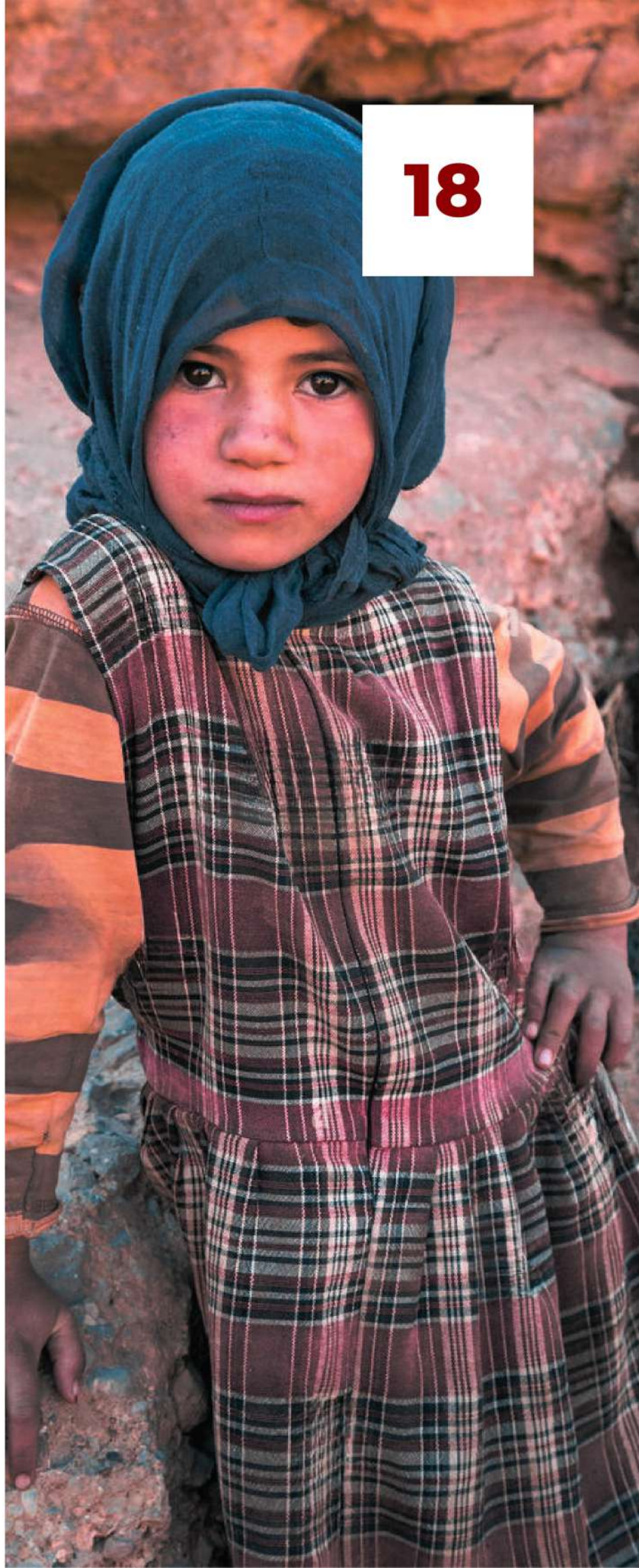
Amazigh women who do not speak Arabic fluently have a harder time accessing these services, which is detrimental to their health, education, and overall well-being.

2. ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The situation for Amazigh children in Morocco regarding education is alarming, particularly for girls. According to a report by the Moroccan Ministry of Education, Amazigh children have the highest dropout rate from school, with only 25% completing primary education. The rate of dropout is higher for girls than for boys, and girls often drop out due to poverty, early marriage, and the lack of access to education in their own language.

The literacy rate for Amazigh women is also concerning, with only 32% compared to 62% for Arab women, according to a study by the High Commission for Planning. This disparity is even more pronounced in rural areas, where many Amazigh people live in poverty and lack access to education.

Despite progress made by Morocco in increasing access to education, Amazigh children still face significant challenges in accessing quality education. They often encounter linguistic and cultural barriers in the classroom, struggling to understand instruction delivered in Arabic due to not speaking it as their first language. Additionally, textbooks and teaching materials are mostly in Arabic, exacerbating the problem. There is also a lack of teachers trained in the Amazigh language and culture.



THESE ISSUES ARE PARTICULARLY PROBLEMATIC

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for Amazigh girls, as they are at a higher risk of dropping out of school in rural areas due to economic constraints, early marriage, and societal norms that prioritize the education of boys, according to a study by the Moroccan Ministry of Education. Overall, more needs to be done to ensure access to quality education for Amazigh children, especially girls, in Morocco.





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3. ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Amazigh women in Morocco face significant challenges in accessing healthcare services. According to a 2018 report by the World Health Organization (WHO), access to healthcare is unevenly distributed across the country, with rural and remote areas, where most Amazigh communities live, being the most underserved. Many rural Amazigh communities lack basic health facilities, and those that are available are often understaffed and ill-equipped.

This situation is particularly challenging for Amazigh women, who face additional barriers due to cultural norms and gender discrimination. According to another study by the WHO, Amazigh women have higher rates of maternal and child mortality compared to Arab women. They are particularly vulnerable to health disparities due to their lack of access to quality healthcare services.

Cultural and linguistic barriers often prevent Amazigh women from seeking medical care.

Moreover, healthcare providers are often not trained in the Amazigh language and culture, which further hinders communication and trust between providers and patients. The situation is further complicated by limited access to reproductive health services and family planning services due to social stigma and lack of information. The Moroccan government has been implementing policies to improve healthcare in the country, but the situation remains inadequate for many rural communities, where the majority of Amazigh people live.



ACCORDING TO A REPORT BY THE WHO

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The maternal mortality rate in Morocco is 72 deaths per 100,000 live births, with a higher rate in rural areas. The report also highlighted the poor quality of healthcare services in many rural areas, where there is a shortage of qualified medical professionals and inadequate medical facilities. Amazigh women's access to healthcare services in Morocco remains a critical issue that requires urgent attention and action.



4. IDENTITY ERASURE

Identity erasure is a widespread challenge that Amazigh women face in Moroccan society. Due to historical policies aimed at assimilating the Amazigh people into Arab culture, the Amazigh identity and cultural heritage have been eroded, resulting in discrimination against the Amazigh people. This marginalization has particularly impacted Amazigh women, who face a double marginalization as both Amazigh and women. They are often excluded from decision-making processes and public spaces, leading to a lack of representation and participation in political and social processes.

The suppression of the Amazigh identity has also led to the loss of traditional roles and practices that were once essential to Amazigh women's identity, such as weaving, embroidery, and traditional medicine. Additionally, the imposition of Arab culture has led to the objectification and marginalization of Amazigh women, who are often depicted as exotic and hypersexualized in the media.

MOREOVER,

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the patriarchal norms and gender roles in many Amazigh communities also contribute to the erasure of Amazigh women's identities. Women are often expected to conform to traditional gender roles and are not encouraged to participate in public life or pursue higher education.

This socialization often leads to a loss of identity and self-worth for Amazigh women who are denied the opportunity to pursue their dreams and aspirations.



POLICY 25 RECOMMENDATIONS



Education

- **Increase** access to education, particularly in rural areas, for Amazigh girls and women by providing scholarships, building schools, and training teachers in Tamazight.
- **Promote** bilingual education and the use of Tamazight in public life.
- **Invest** in education infrastructure and programs that promote access to education for Amazigh children, particularly girls.
- **Train** teachers on how to teach in the Amazigh language and develop Amazigh language learning resources.
- **Integrate** Amazigh history and traditions into the national curriculum.





Healthcare

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- **Increase** the number of healthcare professionals and healthcare facilities in rural areas where many Amazigh people live.
- **Train** healthcare professionals in the Amazigh language to improve communication with Amazigh-speaking patients.
- **Expand** healthcare services in rural Amazigh communities, with a focus on women's health services.
- **Develop** culturally appropriate reproductive health services that address the specific needs and cultural norms of Amazigh women.





Identity

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- **Promote** the recognition of the Amazigh language as an official language in Morocco and ensure that Amazigh language instruction is provided in schools.
- **Promote** and **protect** the Amazigh language and culture by increasing the availability of Tamazight-language media and promoting the use of Tamazight in public life.
- **Promote** Amazigh cultural heritage and identity, including the recognition of Amazigh holidays, festivals, and traditions.
- **Combat** gender discrimination and promote women's empowerment in Amazigh communities.
- **Increase** representation of Amazigh women in **decision-making** processes at all levels, including government, politics, and civil society, through affirmative action policies and quotas for Amazigh women in elected positions.
- **Address discrimination** against Amazigh women in all areas of society, including employment, housing, and education.



ADDITIONALLY,

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Gender-based violence

- **Strengthen** laws and policies to address gender-based violence, including domestic violence and sexual harassment.
- **Improve** access to justice for victims.
- **Multiply** efforts to prevent and address gender-based violence, particularly against Amazigh women, by increasing funding for women's shelters, providing training for law enforcement officials, and launching awareness campaigns to promote gender equality and prevent violence against women.



Economic empowerment

- **Develop** policies and programs that empower Amazigh women economically, such as providing access to credit, training, and mentorship programs for entrepreneurship.
- **Implement** policies that promote gender equity in the labor market to ensure Amazigh women have equal access to employment opportunities.



The challenges faced by Amazigh women in Morocco are **multifaceted** and require a comprehensive approach to address them. These challenges include marginalization, discrimination, lack of equal opportunities, language discrimination, identity erasure, social exclusion, and gender-based violence. To promote gender equality, indigenous rights, and social justice for Amazigh women, policymakers must implement a range of policy recommendations. These include promoting linguistic diversity, investing in education and healthcare, addressing discrimination, empowering Amazigh women economically, increasing representation in politics, and promoting cultural heritage. By implementing these policies, Morocco can ensure that Amazigh women have equal access to essential services, can participate fully in social and political life, and have their rights as indigenous people protected and respected. Such efforts will contribute to a more just and equitable society for all, promoting the well-being and empowerment of Amazigh women in Morocco.





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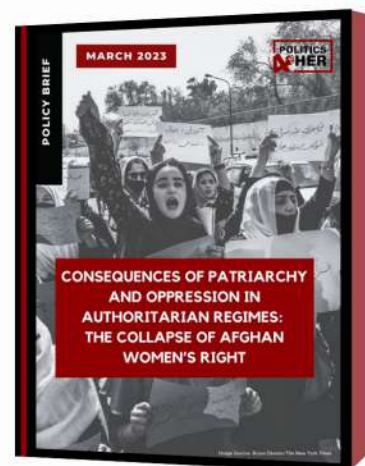
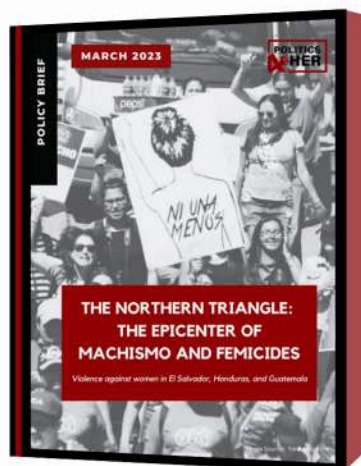
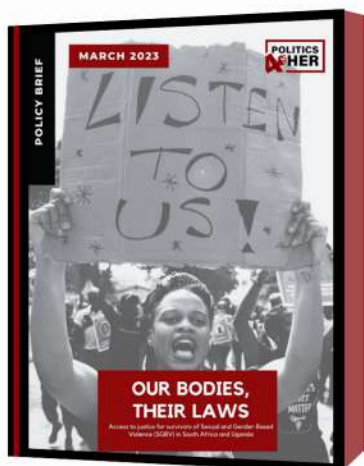


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13. Moroccan Amazigh demonstrate in front of the Moroccan parliament in Rabat on 23 April 2017 to denounce the death of a member of their community during recent clashes at the university of Marrakesh (photo: Reuters/Stringer)
14. Amazigh women of Telouet, Southern Morocco, in an ahouach performance. No Photo ID found.
15. A pupil holds a whiteboard during an Amazigh class in Rabat. Photo AFP - Abdelhak Senna
16. Alamy Stock - Photo ID: H197G8
17. Amazigh children playing - Photograph: Education for All
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OUR OTHER POLICY BRIEFS

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We are committed to assisting and providing resources for young women to become active participants of politics, international affairs and diplomacy. **Ideas matter, they shape the world we live in.** So, we strive to build a community to allow us to raise our voices, promote our ideas and share our vision, empowering women to be part of the change.



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