

# **SAHARAWI YOUTH: NAVIGATING RESILIENCE AND SEEKING NEW HORIZON**





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**WITH THE COLLABORATION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS OF THE SADR OF ALAVA AND THE MINISTRY OF YOUTH AND SPORT OF THE SADR.**

**AND FINANCED BY THE PROVINCIAL COUNCIL OF ALAVA AND THE CITY COUNCIL OF VITORIA-GASTEIZ.**



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*Their valuable contribution has been instrumental in gaining a deeper and more realistic view of Sahrawi youth and the challenges they face. Thanks to their time, knowledge and shared experiences, we have been able to develop a rigorous and informed analysis, which will be key for improving understanding and support for this community.*

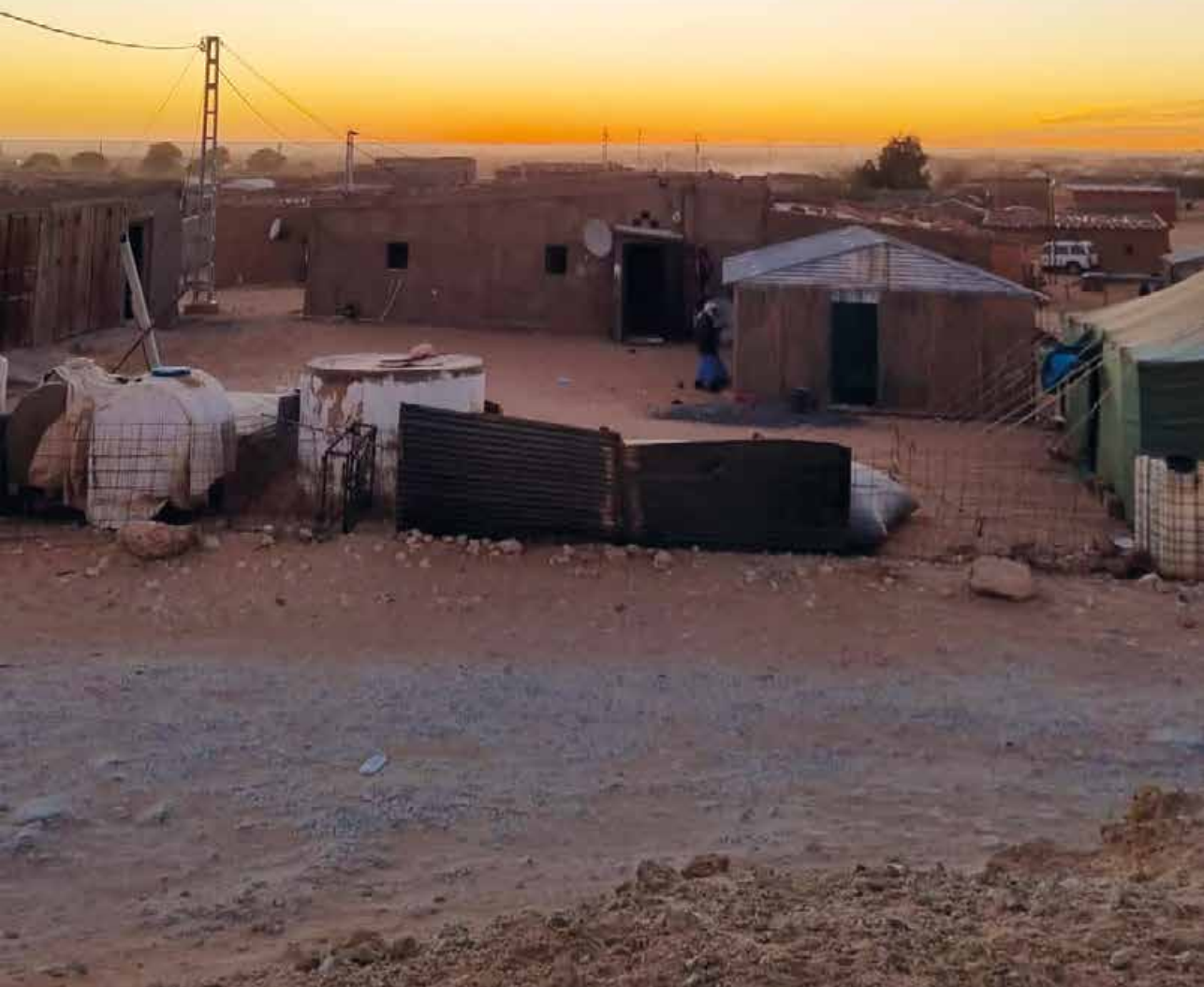
*We hope that the results of this diagnosis can be used to move forward in the search for just and lasting solutions.*





# 1

## INTRODUCTION







# Introduction

The situation of youth in the Sahrawi refugee camps in Tindouf is an issue of vital importance on both a humanitarian and a sociological level. Since their establishment in 1975, these camps have been a refuge for thousands of Sahrawi people displaced due to Morocco's illegal occupation of Western Sahara. However, difficult living conditions and a lack of opportunities present significant challenges, especially for young people, who represent a considerable proportion of the population in these camps.

Sahrawi youth in Tindouf face a series of problems ranging from limited access to education and employment, to lack of future prospects and vulnerability to other social problems. Attending to this group's needs is crucial, since they are not only the present but also the future of the Sahrawi community.

To address these issues effectively, it is essential to have an accurate picture of the social reality of Sahrawi youth, based on objective and reliable data. Sociological studies play an essential role in the collection and analysis of reliable information about the living conditions, needs and aspirations of young people, providing a clear and comprehensive view of the situation. This knowledge not only allows for the design of more effective interventions, but also facilitates the sensitization of the international community and the formulation of appropriate public policies.

To this end, the Association of Friends of the SADR of Alava has been contributing to the precise identification of needs and the formulation of effective public policies since 2014, when the first sociological study focusing on the situation of the youth in the Sahrawi refugee population camps in Tindouf was conducted. This study was led by Dr. Carlos Vilches, professor at UPNA (Public University of Navarra).

The data obtained in Dr. Vilches' diagnosis pointed to the urgent need to establish a comprehensive framework that could coordinate and give coherence to the different policies and actions that are being carried out, so that they work together to improve the present conditions and future expectations of the Sahrawi youth.

Consequently, in 2017 and 2018, the National Youth Commission of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), coordinated by the Ministry of

Youth and Sports, was tasked with developing the *Youth Plan 2019-2022*. This project was financed by the Provincial Council of Alava and supported by a team of professors and experienced consultants from the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU): Xabier Aierdi, José A. Oleaga (now president and vice-president, respectively, of the Begirune Foundation) and Gorka Moreno.

The aim of the Youth Plan 2019-2022 was to elaborate a strategic framework which, based on the needs and demands detected, put forward a series of recommendations for political action, simultaneously providing a guide for future work in the area of youth for SADR institutions.

The Youth Plan 2019-2022 was presented to the Sahrawi community in the Tindouf camps by the SADR Government, in the presence of Mr. Brahim Gali, Secretary General of the Polisario Front and president of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. The presentation was carried out by the Minister of Youth and Sports, as well as technical staff from the Sports Directorate of the RASD Government and the aforementioned team from the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU).

During the period covered by this plan, different initiatives have been undertaken by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and its Youth Directorate, aimed at revitalizing and improving the situation of young people living in the Tindouf camps. However, the execution of this plan has been greatly conditioned by two key events: the Covid pandemic and its effects, not only health-related but also financial, mainly in 2020 and 2021; and the end of the truce between the Polisario Front and Morocco in November 2020. These circumstances have greatly hindered the development and performance of the Youth Plan.

In 2021, the Association of Friends of the SADR of Alava commissioned the Begirune Foundation to carry out an interim evaluation of the Youth Plan 2019-2022, on the understanding that it could be extended to the years 2023 and 2024, in the absence of a new plan. In addition to the evaluation itself, the aim was also to provide analytical and evaluation tools to the technical staff of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, responsible for the SADR Youth Plan. This task was also financed by the Provincial Council of Alava and the Vitoria-Gasteiz City Council.

For this mid-term evaluation of the Youth Plan 2019-2022, the SADR Government's Youth Directorate was charged with collecting information,

under the direction of a Begirune Foundation technical team, since flights to the camps were suspended and it was not possible to visit them.

The technical team of the Youth Directorate in the camps was responsible for conducting interviews and discussion groups, as well as assessing the actions contained in the plan with the people from the different ministries responsible for its initiation and development.

In order to train the Youth Directorate's technical team, a series of online workshops were conducted by technical staff from the Begirune Foundation.

Among the most relevant findings of the Evaluation Report prepared the Begirune Foundation was the verification that at least 43.2% of the actions included in the plan had been carried out (58.2% of the actions which the technical team was able to assess). It is important to highlight the context in which the plan was developed. The conditions on the ground in the Tindouf camps are highly complex and, as mentioned above, the time period beginning in 2020 was particularly complicated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resumption of hostilities between the Polisario Front and Morocco. Thus, both the execution rate of 43.2% (or 58.2%) and the effort made during those years by the SADR ministries to promote the Plan were assessed as positive results.

The Evaluation Report was presented in the Tindouf camps, on the occasion of the 3rd Sahrawi Youth Conference, held in the *wilaya* of El Aaiun (Tindouf camps), from 13 to 15 November, 2022. During the conference, the situation of the Sahrawi youth, their needs and the challenges they face were discussed, reaching the conclusion that it is necessary to update the diagnosis of the situation of the Sahrawi youth, as a preliminary step for the development of a new Youth Plan.

The Association of Friends of the SADR, with funding from the Provincial Council of Alava and the Vitoria-Gasteiz City Council, offered to collaborate with the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the SADR Government to collaborate in the implementation of a process leading to a new Strategic Framework and Sahrawi Youth Plan.

To this end, the association asked the technical team of the Begirune Foundation to carry out the design and implementation of the project. The foundation formed a working group which included, in addition to their own technical staff, researchers from the Ikuspegi Basque Immigration

Observatory and a technician from the Youth Directorate of the Basque Government.

The project as a whole is made up of three phases: 1) the elaboration of an updated diagnosis of the situation of the Sahrawi youth; 2) the realization of a final Evaluation Report of the Youth Plan 2019-2022; and 3) based the diagnosis and evaluation phases, the elaboration of a new Youth Plan 2025-2030.

The report at hand pertains to the first phase: the Diagnosis of the Situation of Sahrawi Youth.

# Objectives and methodology

Undoubtedly, the strength of a plan rests on the realization of an accurate diagnosis of the social reality within which the new Plan is intended to operate. The last diagnosis of the situation of the Sahrawi youth, from 2014, has been a document of great value. However, the amount of time - and important events - that has passed since then warrants a fresh investigation on the matter.

As mentioned above, between the months of September 2014 and May 2015, a team coordinated by Dr. Carlos Vilches, from the Public University of Navarra (UPNA), carried out a participatory sociological study that gave rise to the report "The situation of the Sahrawi refugee population." This project was financed by the Provincial Council of Alava. The investigation subsequently led to the 2017 publication of the report *"Refugee Youth in the Sahrawi Camps: Trapped in the Uncertainty of Limbo."*

It is a document of great scientific value, based on rigorous and serious research mainly in the Tindouf camps, which outlines the situation of Sahrawi youth at that time. However, this diagnosis needs to be updated to assess the current situation, as well as the problems, needs and challenges of the Sahrawi youth today.

Specifically, with this research we have pursued and obtained the following objectives:

- To know the current problems that concern and influence Sahrawi youth.
- To understand the processes that are occurring in the social reality of the SADR and their effect on youth.
- To study the feelings, ideas, challenges, aspirations and desires of the Sahrawi youth.
- To analyze what factors (sex, level of education, social status, employment, home conditions, etc.) affect Sahrawi youth and in what way.
- To obtain information about the life of Sahrawi youth in the SADR and outside the SADR.
- To identify the main preoccupations, narratives, experiences and other aspects of the Sahrawi youth, in order to study their issues and perspectives.
- To determine the effect of sex/gender in Sahrawi society and take into account gender perspectives throughout this diagnosis.

We have done all this taking into account the multiple dimensions of: family and home, employment, work, leisure, health, identification processes, participation, self-image, social and family education, training, military integration, new technologies, *Intifada*, sports and leisure activities, migratory movements, drug use, etc.

To establish the work methodology that we have adopted for this diagnosis of the situation of Sahrawi youth, we have taken into account the circumstances that currently exist in the Tindouf refugee camps.

Knowing that carrying out field work in the camps comes with particular challenges, all actions have been planned accordingly and have been coordinated between the research management team—formed by staff from the Begirune Foundation, Ikuspegi and the Youth Directorate of the Basque Government—and a work team made up of technical staff from the Youth

Directorate of the SADR Government on location in the Tindouf camps. These teams have been in permanent coordination with the Association of Friends of the SADR in Alava and the SADR Government Ministry of Youth and Sports.

The design of the diagnostic research includes a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies working with two target groups:

1. Key informants in relation to the Sahrawi youth in the Tindouf camps: we conducted a qualitative survey based on the technique of focused interviews.
2. Young people of both sexes, between the ages of 15 and 45<sup>1</sup>, residents of the Tindouf refugee camps: we have carried out a quantitative survey, through the personal survey technique and a qualitative survey, based on the techniques of discussion groups and participatory workshops (Philips 66 style).

While the interviews were carried out by the group of professionals from Begirune, Ikuspegi and the Youth Directorate of the Basque Government, the survey work, the discussion groups and the workshops were carried out by the Youth Directorate team of the SADR Government.

In order to guarantee the quality of information collected, the research team from the Begirune Foundation, Ikuspegi and the Basque Government trained the team from the Youth Directorate of the RASD Government to SADR Government to adequately perform the tasks of field manager (a person in charge of controlling and supervising the proper completion of the surveys), and of organizing and leading discussion groups and workshops.

To this end, in October 2023, part of the research team from Begirune, Ikuspegi and the Basque Government's Youth Directorate traveled to the Tindouf camps to carry out training modules with the SADR Youth Directorate

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1 In the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, the definition of youth extends from 15 to 45 years of age. Although it is unusual for the age range to be so broad in the study of youth, in the case of Sahrawi society this fact can be attributed to the combination of socioeconomic challenges, the prolonged situation of refuge and conflict, and an inclusive approach in youth policies to support a broader group of the population in their development and participation in society. In the 2014 study, the focus was on the situation of youth between the ages of 15-30. On this occasion, the Ministry of Youth and Sports requested a broader age range of up to 45 years old.

team on various methodological issues for the collection of quantitative and qualitative information:

- A training module with the field manager and the team of interviewers: to enhance this module, and with the main objective of collecting quality information, the research team of Begirune, Ikuspegi and the Basque Government prepared a Survey Manual, where each of the survey questions was explained in detail—the information sought, the way in which to administer the question and how to collect the answers. This module also explained the dynamics of information collection, the route system with quotas by age and sex in each *wilaya* and the distribution of the surveys among the different *dairas* of the *wilayas*;
- A training module for organizing and holding focus groups: likewise, during this stay in the camps, a seminar was held with the team from the SADR Government's Youth Directorate to work on the strategy for organizing the focus groups, as well as on how to facilitate discussion in order to obtain the maximum amount and quality of information;
- A training module for organizing and holding the workshops: this module covered the strategy for organizing the workshops and how to run them in order to obtain the maximum amount and quality of information.

## Interviews

We have conducted a series of documentary interviews with key informants, mainly people from the political sphere and people in charge of different institutions and associations. We have also sought and interviewed young people who have a broad knowledge of the situation of their peers, due to their work with social organizations or labor issues.

A total of 31 interviews have been carried out with experts from the following institutions or entities:

**TABLE 1. LIST OF ENTITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INTERVIEWED**

1	Prime Minister
2	Home Office
3	Ministry of Youth and Sports (Minister)
4	Ministry of Youth and Sports (Youth Director)
5	Ministry of Youth and Sports (Head of the Youth Plan)
6	Ministry of Education and Vocational Training
7	Ministry of Justice and religious affairs
8	Ministry of Health
9	Ministry of Social Affairs and Emancipation of Women
10	Ministry of Culture
11	Ministry of Economic Development
12	Sahrawi Popular Liberation Army
13	National Secretariat of the Polisario Front (Head)
14	National Secretariat of the Polisario Front (Secretary of Research and Studies)
15	National Secretariat of the Polisario Front (Civil Society Officer)
16	National Secretariat of the Polisario Front (expert)
17	UJSARIO (Youth Union) (General Secretary)
18	UJSARIO (Youth Union) (Head of Militia and Head of Culture and Sports)
19	UNMS (National Union of Sahrawi Women) (General Secretary)
20	UNMS (National Union of Sahrawi Women) (member)
21	UESARIO (Student Union)
22	Young Women's Organization
23	CONASADH (Sahrawi National Commission for Human Rights)



24	Grupo NOVA Sáhara Occidental (organization for the promotion of non-violence)
25	Scout and Children's Organization
26	Sahrawi feminist group
27	Wilaya Auserd governance
28	Ecology Expert
29	Imam wilaya El Aaiun
30	Nidal Sáhara Association
31	Diaspora

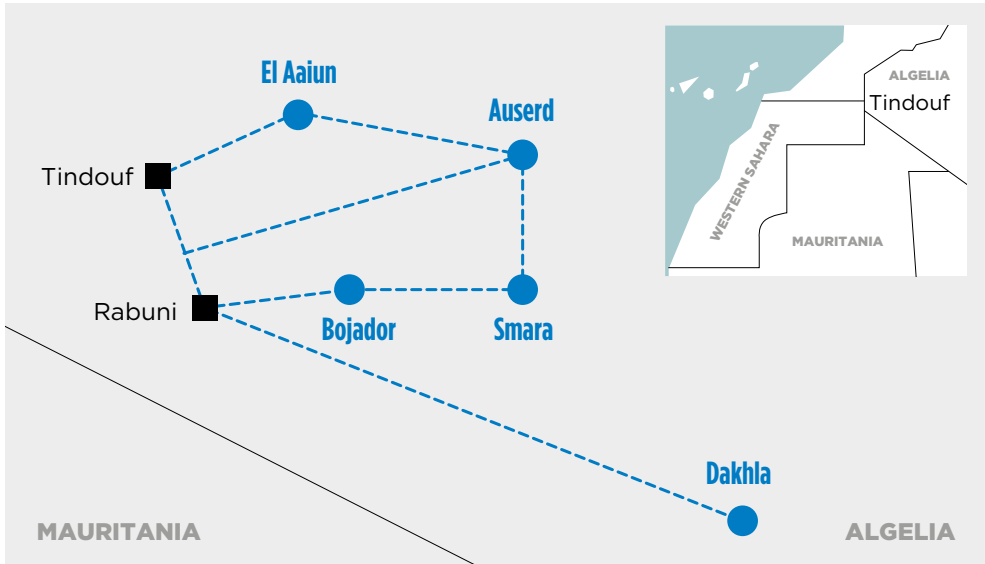
These focused interviews were carried out by the technical team of the Begirune Foundation, Ikuspegi and the Youth Directorate of the Basque Government on location in the Tindouf camps in May 2023. These conversations covered topics such as the social reality of youth in the camps, the actions and measures that have been implemented in recent years aimed at youth and the challenges and needs to be addressed by a new youth plan.

## Survey of Sahrawi youth

We carried out a quantitative survey that has collected the opinions of 1,000 young people in the SADR. In order to obtain representative results, the survey employed a stratified probability sampling by proportional allocation, taking into account quotas of sex and age, as well as wilaya and दौरا of residence.

With this sample size we work with a maximum sampling error of +/-3.10% for the entire sample and with a maximum sampling error of +/-6.92% for each of the wilayas (with 200 surveys in each of the five wilayas: Auserd, Smara, Dakhla, El Aaiun and Bojador). We work with a statistical confidence level of 95% (in the worst case scenario where  $p=q=0.5$ ).

**GRAF 1.** Wilayas of Tindouf camps



Subsequently, we have weighted the sub-samples of each wilaya according to the size of its population when obtaining global data and conclusions from the sample and referring to the Sahrawi youth in the Tindouf camps as a whole. Although there is no official census of the number of people residing in each of them, we have based our calculations of the sub-samples and their sampling error figures on the following population figures:<sup>2</sup>

**TABLE 2. APPROXIMATE SIZE OF THE WILAYAS**

	POPULATION	DAIRAS
Smara	50,700	7
Dakhla	19,500	7
Bojador	16,500	3
Auserd	36,400	6
El Aaiun	50,500	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>173,600</b>	<b>29</b>

2 These figures are available on the website “Una mirada al Sáhara Occidental” (“A look at Western Sahara”) <https://saharaoccidental.es/sahara/campamentos-refugiados-saharauis/>

Thanks to this survey, prepared by the technical team of the Begirune foundation, Ikuspegi and the Youth Directorate of the Basque Government, together with the technical team of the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Friends of the SADR Association of Alava, we have obtained quantitative information regarding the situation of Sahrawi youth in the camps. In the questionnaire (see annex) we have addressed issues such as the social reality of youth in the camps, the actions and measures that have been implemented in recent years, expectations and needs of the youth, the challenges to be addressed by a new youth plan and, as far as possible, potential actions to be undertaken in the future to improve the social reality of youth in the camps.

The type of questionnaire was a semi-structured personal survey, with both closed previously-coded questions and open questions for the consideration of the respondents. The survey was conducted in homes, with households selected randomly in order to cover the entire area of the wilayas and dairas.

The fieldwork was carried out, as mentioned above, by a team of surveyors from the Youth Directorate of the SADR Government, supervised and controlled by a field manager. It was carried out between November 2023 and January 2024.

After the surveys were completed, a Basque data processing company recorded the information and generated a database for subsequent statistical processing. For the process plan and the tabulation, carried out by the research team of Begirune, Ikuspegi and the Youth Directorate of the Basque Government, we have used the standard univariate and bivariate descriptive statistics (frequencies, horizontal percentages, vertical percentages, parametric and non-parametric tests, mean differences, chi square test), as well as the relevant multivariate analyses, once the first descriptive analysis of the information obtained had been carried out.

## Discussion Groups

In addition to the quantitative information collected in the survey, a qualitative methodological approach was carried out through the focus group technique, initially, and subsequently through participatory workshops.

We have carried out 10 “Group dynamics” with young Sahrawis between 15 and 45 years old. We have carried out two for each wilaya.

Group dynamics, or the classic discussion group, consists of a group dynamics technique, composed of around 6-10 people, that reproduces an informal meeting in a room, trying to ensure that the conditions under which the meeting takes place under which the meeting takes place reproduce as closely as possible discussions that occur in everyday life.

The dates, places and composition of the discussion groups were what we present in table 3:

**TABLE 3. DISCUSSION GROUPS**

DATE	WILAYA	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
13/11/2023	Aaiun	6 men
13/11/2023	Aaiun	6 women
13/11/2023	Auserd	5 men
13/11/2023	Auserd	5 women
05/12/2023	Smara	6 men
13/11/2023	Smara	6 women
15/11/2023	Bojador	7 men
15/11/2023	Bojador	6 women
17/11/2023	Dakhla	6 men
17/11/2023	Dakhla	7 women

There were two groups per wilaya, one of them made up of women and the other of men, trying to bring together different ages and profiles, so that they are representative of the composition of the camp youth.

The group dynamics were carried out by the staff of the SADR Youth Directorate, after receiving training from the research team of Begirune, Ikuspegi and the Basque Government. They were carried out between November 2023 and April 2024 in the camps.

These discussions were translated by a professional Sahrawi translator, Bachir M. Rayaa. The subsequent analysis of the information was carried out by the technical staff of the Begirune foundation, Ikuspegi and the Youth Directorate of the Basque Government.

They addressed issues such as the social reality of youth in the camps, the actions and measures that have been implemented in recent years aimed at youth and the challenges and needs to be addressed by a new youth plan.

As a complement to this phase, we have carried out a group dynamic with young people who have immigrated to Spain, also between the ages of 15 and 45, to collect their perspectives, experiences, proposals and opinions. This meeting took place in Vitoria-Gasteiz in February 2024.

## Open workshops

In addition to the discussion groups, several open calls were also made in each of the wilayas for the holding of participatory workshops that could be attended by any young person who so wished. These workshops, as in the groups described above, covered issues such as the social reality of youth in the camps, the actions and measures that have been implemented in recent years and the challenges and needs to be addressed in a new youth plan.

Five workshops of these characteristics have been held (participatory workshops based on the Philips 66 technique to run work groups composed of a significant number of attendees), one in each of the wilayas.

The dates, places and composition of the discussion groups are shown in Table 4:

**TABLE 4. OPEN WORKSHOPS**

DATE	WILAYA	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
14/11/2023	Aaiun	2 women and 8 men
14/11/2023	Auserd	16 women and 10 men
14/11/2023	Smara	9 women and 5 men
16/11/2023	Bojador	9 women and 8 men
17/11/2023	Dakhla	12 women and 6 men

The participatory workshops were carried out by the staff of the SADR Youth Directorate, after receiving training from the research team of the Begirune Foundation, Ikuspegi and the Basque Government. They were held between November 2023 and April 2024.

The information obtained in the workshops was translated by a professional Sahrawi translator, Bachir M. Rayaa. The subsequent analysis of the information was carried out by the technical staff of the Begirune Foundation, Ikuspegi and the Youth Directorate of the Basque Government.

These workshops enriched the quality of the information collected during the process and allowed for the participation of people with diverse profiles.

Workshops, interviews and discussion groups were supervised in all cases by the Begirune Foundation, Ikuspegi and Youth Directorate of the Basque Government team.

Through these methodological tools we have inquired not only about the situation of the Sahrawi youth but also about their opinion of the previous plan in terms of opportunity, adequacy, development of the actions, possibilities for improvement, etc.

# 2

## THE STARTING POINT







# An unfinished national liberation process

It does not seem possible to begin talking about Sahrawi youth without first going into the context in which this youth developed, grew up, ceased to be young and gave way to a new youth, which in turn was replaced by another. Each generation lived out their youth in very different socio-political and economic contexts and had to deal with very different problems--in their youth and in their mature years. However, in addition to points of rupture between generations there are also lines of continuity. Therefore, we propose in what follows to look back and contextualize the situation of young people in the past and the present. It is important to address the process of Sahrawi national liberation and the process of internal social revolution that Sahrawi society experienced in order to understand the current situation of youth.

In 1973 the Polisario Front was created, as a continuation of other previous national liberation movements, marking the beginning of what is known today as the Sahrawi conflict. Spain abandoned the territory of Western Sahara in 1975, after allowing its invasion by Morocco and Mauritania. But who were the Sahrawi people? Before the Berlin Conference of 1844, in which the European powers divided up the African continent, the western fringe of the Sahara was populated mainly by shepherds who spoke the same language, Hassaniya.

The social organization of these nomadic shepherds was structured around two principles: the principle of division and that of stratification. On the one hand, each person belonged to a political group that recruited its members by birth or through pacts that entailed a whole set of rights and obligations<sup>1</sup>.

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1 This form of political organization has traditionally been called “tribe” or, in the case of Northern Africa, Kabyle. However, “tribe” is a vague term with pejorative connotations, so we prefer not to use it. When it appears in the text through the words of an informant or scholarly sources, we will place the term in scare quotes.

On the other hand, a Hassaniya person could belong to different status groups: from military and religious elites to tributaries, artisans, slaves and freed slaves. There was no single name that encompassed the different groups and status groupings by which this population defined itself. The elite and tributaries were referred to jointly as *asbīdān* (white), a category from which artisans, slaves, and freed slaves were excluded. In addition, a distinction was made between “black” Hassaniya, *Sūdān*, and black people from outside the Hassaniya-speaking region, *Kwār*.

In pre-colonial times, these political groups, of different sizes and subdivided into sections and subsections, had established a distribution of resources, mainly water and pasture, through power relations. Each group had a differentiated priority right of access to these resources. The most vulnerable groups, without the strength to claim resources, paid a tribute of protection to the strongest or dominant groups. Membership in the political group was established through agnatic kinship, that is, through a male line of descent from a common ancestor. In practice, this membership was established both by birth within a group and by the recruitment of a person to the political group through a pact. As for the status groups the rules of marriage forbade liaison with a person belonging to a group of lower rank. In the specific case of artisans, there was a prohibition against marriage outside their own status group. This whole set of rules and prohibitions thus reinforced the stratification of this population. However, it must be emphasized that in practice this membership system was characterized by flexibility.

The governance of each political group, the resolution of conflicts and disputes, and the appropriation and distribution of resources was carried out through political institutions such as the *jamā'ah*, a council made up of the wisest and most respected members of the group, the *shaykh*, a kind of leader figure, and the *aitarba'in*, an intertribal consultative and decision-making body.

Under Spanish rule and at the time of decolonization, this membership system lost its flexibility and became much more rigid under the effects of colonial policies. For example, as in many processes of colonial domination in Africa, the surveys carried out by the colonial administrations converted into fixed and immutable identities what in practice had been much more complex relationships that allowed for mobility and transformations within the social structure. When the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) set out in the 1990s to register voters in the context of an eventual referendum on self-determination, it did so, on the



basis of proven membership to a “tribe,” a requirement that had operated in the colonial era.

During the Berlin Conference in 1844, Spain claimed the region between Cape Bojador and Cape Blanco (Ras Nouadhibou). In 1885, the construction of Villa Cisneros (present-day Dakhla) and the establishment of factories in Río de Oro and Bahía Blanca began. In 1900, France and Spain divided this territory unequally and signed subsequent treaties in 1904 and 1920. Finally, the northern limit of Western Sahara was set at parallel 27° 40'. Spain then divided its colonial possessions into two independent administrative districts, Río de Oro in the south and Saguia al Hamra in the north, uniting the two in 1958 to form the Spanish province of Spanish Sahara.

The beginning of the current conflict was triggered when Spain left the territory in 1975 after allowing Morocco and Mauritania to invade it. A decade earlier, the United Nations had urged Spain to hold a referendum on self-determination in Western Sahara. In 1975, the International Court of Justice had established that neither Morocco nor Mauritania could carry out territorial annexations that would prevent such a referendum. In spite of this, and only

a few days after the invasions, Spain signed with Morocco and Mauritania the Madrid Tripartite Agreements by which it ceded to both countries the administration of Western Sahara.

On May 10, 1973, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro, known as the Polisario Front, was created in the Mauritanian town of Zuerat, with the aim of fighting for the independence of the Sahrawi people. After the signing of the Tripartite Agreements, the Polisario Front proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in 1976. In 1979 the Polisario Front forced Mauritania to withdraw and in 1991 signed a ceasefire with Morocco. After eighteen years of war and in an international political context marked by the end of the Cold War, peace was sought with the promise of the United Nations to organise a referendum on self-determination.

In 1991, the Peace Plan was approved, negotiated by both parties, and approved by the Security Council. The Peace Plan included the holding of a referendum on self-determination within six months. The census for this referendum would be, with minor updates, the one drawn up by Spain in 1974. But shortly after MINURSO made the census public in 2000, Morocco took a position accusing the UN of partiality and stating that it would never accept a referendum of self-determination for the Sahara.

Subsequent attempts to resolve the conflict, carried out in particular by former US Secretary of State James Baker (Baker Plans I and II), failed despite the fact that they favoured Morocco's interests. That was the end of the negotiations. Since then, the Security Council resolutions have been urging the parties to resume negotiations, ignoring the existence of the Peace Plan. The impossibility of implementing this Peace Plan approved by both parties is due to Morocco's refusal and the unconditional support of France, the United States and Spain, which prevent the Security Council from imposing its implementation.

During the war period, a large part of the Sahrawi population fled across the Algerian desert. Since 1976, they have been living as refugees in the refugee camps in the Algerian Hamada<sup>2</sup>, close to the city of Tindouf. This population,

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2 Stony desert in western Algeria.

around 173,600<sup>3</sup> people, is spread over five camps: Smara, El Aaiun, Auserd and Dakhla (names of the main towns in Western Sahara), a settlement created from the National School for Women now called Bojador<sup>4</sup> and the administrative town of Rabuni. Unlike other refugee camps which are under the supervision of the United Nations, the camps are managed and controlled by the Polisario and SADR.

Another part of the Sahrawi population lives between what is known as the occupied territories and the liberated territories. The former territory of Spanish Western Sahara, approximately 260,000 square kilometres, is now divided by a wall known as the “wall of shame.”<sup>5</sup> The territory to the west of this wall, 75% of the total, is controlled by Morocco and is where the main resources (the Bu Craa phosphate mines, the fishing bank in the waters south of Tarfaya and possible oil and natural gas deposits), infrastructure and towns are located. To the east, under the control of the Polisario Front, lives a nomadic population. There are small settlements, the largest being Tifariti.

In accordance with international law, the exploitation of the resources of the territory controlled by Morocco has to be carried out with the consent of the Sahrawi people. This was established by the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in February 2018. However, the European Union negotiates with Morocco in breach of the CJEU and international law.

It should not be forgotten that Morocco has a position of strength vis-à-vis the European Union and Spain derived above all from the policies of externalization of borders that the EU has developed in recent decades.<sup>6</sup> These policies, largely based on others controlling borders for them, inevitably lead to the instrumentalization of migration as a powerful political weapon, which can influence EU policy and obtain concessions from the EU. This was evidenced when in 2021 Morocco facilitated the irregular entry into Ceuta of more than 10,000 people in the space of two days. The Alawite country

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3 This population of 173,600 people is distributed among the camps as follows: Smara: 50,700; El Aaiun: 50,500; Dakhla: 19,500; Auserd: 36,400; and Bojador: 16,500. By sex we are talking about 49% of women and 51% of men. All this according to UNHCR data, as of March 2017. But we have to take into consideration that UNHCR makes a census of vulnerable civilian population, so there is part of the population, such as the military, which is excluded from it. In addition, the significant mobility of the population must be taken into account. For all these reasons, the numbers are probably on the low side.

4 Before the February 27th camp.

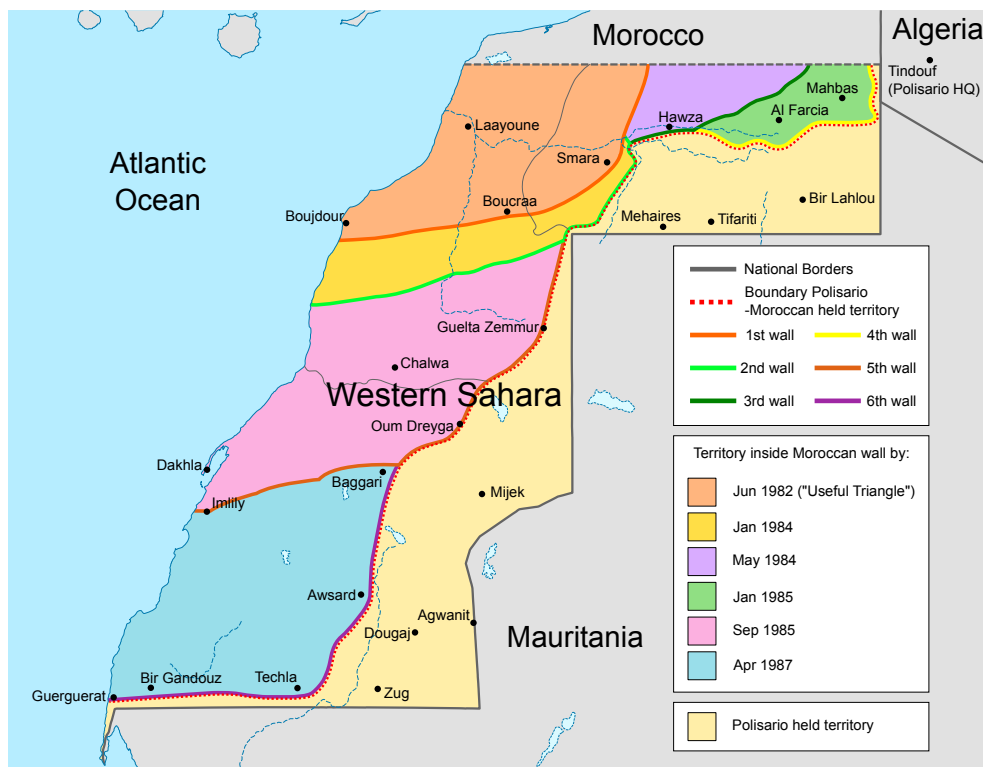
5 In reality, the current wall is the result of the perimeter formed by the various walls built by Morocco between 1980 and 1986 with Israeli engineering, Saudi financing and U.S. weapons. They are sand and stone constructions mined on the outside.

6 In addition to the support, since the beginning of the conflict, of the United States and France.



was acting in retaliation for the hospitalization of Polisario leader Brahim Ghali, a fact that they considered a betrayal on the part of Spain. Beyond the specific issue, Morocco also used the situation to force the declaration of a favourable Spanish position with regards to Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara.<sup>7</sup>

In this context, the rest of the Sahrawi population resides in nearby countries, mainly Algeria and Mauritania, and others in Europe, especially Spain and Italy.



FROMWESTERN\_SAHARA\_WALLS\_MOROCCAN\_MAP-EN.SVG; \*WESTERN\_SAHARA\_WALLS\_MOROCCAN.PNG; USER:ROKEWESTERN\_SAHARA\_LOCATION\_MAP.SVG; NORDNORDWESTDERIVATIVE WORK; MOTTY (TALK)DERIVATIVE WORK; ROBOT8A(TALK) - WESTERN\_SAHARA\_WALLS\_MOROCCAN\_MAP-EN.SVG, CC BY-SA 3.0, FILE:WESTERNSAHARAWALLS MOROCCAN.PNG - WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

7 In June 2022, the Spanish president Pedro Sánchez, recognized the Moroccan autonomy proposal as the "most serious, realistic and credible" basis for resolving the conflict. The autonomy plan for Western Sahara, "Moroccan initiative for the negotiation of a statute of autonomy for the Sahara," was presented by Morocco in April 2007, a proposal that has antecedents in 1985, 2001 and 2003.



A crucial final consideration for this study is that the entire Sahrawi population moves between these geographical points. Therefore, to understand the dynamics and processes of the Sahrawi population today, and particularly the youth, one must take into account both this mobility and the fact that the social space of this population is built in and through all these geographical points. The economic, social and political life of the Sahrawi people is articulated in a *transnational social space*.

## A process of internal social revolution

The appearance on the scene of the Polisario Front meant, in parallel to the fight for national liberation, a process of internal social revolution to create and constitute a national subject. This involved a whole series of transformations and changes to pre-revolutionary Sahrawi society. In 1975, all the different Sahrawi political groups and the young leaders of the Polisario Front signed the National Union pact. By this pact the previous political organization was abolished and the Sahrawi people were constituted as the basis of the Sahrawi political nation. The claim by this people of a common right to national sovereignty over the territory of Western Sahara inevitably entailed the disappearance of the former unequal rights of different groups over pastoral resources, which in turn meant the end of the payments and transfers that marked the hierarchies between them.

Caratini (2006) points out that one of the most striking and groundbreaking aspects of this process was the fact that it was carried out by young people,



who for the first time were in a position of power vis-à-vis their elders. This fact broke with one of the structural principles of pre-revolutionary Sahrawi society: the principle of the pre-eminence of the elders.

As we have pointed out, in traditional Sahrawi society, each group was constituted by ties of kinship, through the paternal line, deriving from a common ancestor of great prestige. It was a system where the political identity of the group was based on common patrilineal descent. In each group, decisions were made by an assembly of men. But although in principle all men were equal in rights, social relations were hierarchical under the authority of the oldest person. Thus, within each family, the pre-eminence of authority of the oldest male relative was the norm.<sup>8</sup> This rule, as Caratini points out: *"...was so assumed that anyone who would have wanted to repeal it was prevented by the force of a feeling of discomfort and even irrepressible shame. Nomadic education had forged in the psychic structure of individuals a mechanism of self-repression of drives, which made the refusal to submit to their elders exceptional"* (2006: 6). This author finds the explanation of this norm or, if you will, habitus in a social organization that, in the absence of the State, had to guarantee peace and social cohesion.

Who were these young people who were responsible for carrying out the struggle for independence and who were recognized as the legitimate representatives of the Sahrawi population? They were a generation born in the 1940s and 50s, and who, for the first time, left their immediate environment to be educated in the Spanish educational system or in schools and universities in the Maghreb. This generation matured surrounded by an anti-colonialist and socialist ideology and with its own project of national liberation in which to reconcile the Arab forms of socialism and the values of its nomadic society. In this sense, traditional social structures represented an obstacle to the unity of the Sahrawi people. The young people opposed the peace option of the former leaders; the confrontation between the youth and the elders was both strategic in nature - peace or war - and socio-political - nation or "tribe" - (Ruiz Miguel, 2022). However, the nationalist sentiments of the youth did not eliminate their continuing strong feelings of belonging to a lineage or political group that, ultimately, sustained relations of solidarity and a sense of hospitality that they wanted to maintain.

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8 This hierarchy also occurred in the case of women who were under the authority of older relatives, especially those on the paternal side. Only a person's relationships with relatives on the mother's side were not hierarchical.

The abolition of the traditional social structure meant that people could no longer refer to their groups of origin. Ancestors, or rather the idea of descent and belonging through individual bloodlines, were to be forgotten. In addition to the abolition of the traditional system, and in the name of the principle of equality and freedom, slavery was abolished and equal rights were granted to men and women. In addition to the right to vote, from that moment on, women's consent was required for marriage, the dowry disappeared,<sup>9</sup> along with the practices of female genital mutilation and the force-feeding of girls.<sup>10</sup>

However, the relationships between the process of dismantling and undoing that system and the construction of state power are complex. Although at first the "tribe" was prohibited, over time the social relations built into the traditional system proved valuable for the construction of state power. This apparent and complex contradiction has been analysed in depth by Wilson (2016), who explains it through the image of a *palimpsest*, a manuscript that preserves traces of another previous writing, but that has been expressly and continually reinterpreted to give rise to what now exists. The relationships of the traditional social system were in some way recycled to create a new project of sovereignty, that of state power. In the beginning, it is true that the traditional political organization was seen as an obstacle to consolidating that power. This view led to its prohibition and the need, at that time, to erase its existence. However, the old *jamā'ah* council was later deliberately reconfigured in order to claim a democratic heritage that legitimized the new power. In the long run, and in the context of the camps, we have also seen how the commodification of the economy and voting in elections have, at times, given rise to the prevalence of traditional loyalties over revolutionary objectives. Therefore, we cannot suppose a simple opposition between traditional social relations *versus* relations of state power. In fact, Wilson (2002) concludes that both types of relationships can coexist and overlap.

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9 In reality, despite the fact that many texts speak of dowry, what existed was a complex network of exchanges between the groom's family and the bride's family. And, in any case, a major part of these exchanges was constituted by *elsadāq*, which is a compensation for the bride (delivery of goods from the groom's family to the bride's family), which among other things makes the children born to the woman a full member of the husband's filiation group.

10 The practice of force-feeding girls between the ages of five and nineteen was carried out to increase the chances of marriage in a context where large bodies are a sign of wealth, desirability and fertility. Although the practice was eradicated, the stereotype about the female body prevails, leading some women to resort to the use of corticosteroids to gain weight and to use creams that discolor the skin. This is pointed out by Vilches and Esparza (2017), who warned in their diagnosis about the effects on women's health. The health and psychology teams of each wilaya work to prevent these practices.



# The Tindouf refugee camps

## Times of War

The hasty settlement of the Algerian Hamada in the midst of the war and the flight of the civilian population in the seventies were organised through the creation of three large camps or *wilayas*: The Aiiun, Smara and Dakhla, with Auserd subsequently forming in 1985. Each of these *wilayas* was divided into several *dairas* or municipalities. Each *daira* was subdivided into four neighbourhoods or groups of tents, *haimas*. In each neighbourhood, the female population was divided into neighbourhood committees (education, health, production, food distribution and justice). The persons in charge of these neighbourhood committees formed the committees of *dairas* (municipalities) or *wilayas* (regions). The persons in charge of the regional committees, in turn, designated who would represent them at the national level. This organizational structure guaranteed horizontal coordination - grassroots committees at the *wilaya* level - and vertical coordination, between the regions and the top of the State. Subsequently, an administrative centre was created in Rabuni, where the bodies of the SADR ministries and, currently, also the humanitarian organizations on the ground are centralized.

Undoubtedly, women were the main protagonists in this process of social and political organization. As the war required all capable men, the women were the ones who took charge of civilian life, assumed responsibilities and implemented organization in the camps. Caratini (2006) mentions how the assumption of all these tasks by women had a line of continuity with the previous nomadic way of life, in which it was not strange for women to stay alone and manage daily life in the absence of men.

In 1974 the Polisario Front promoted the creation of the National Union of Sahrawi Women (NUSW) which, among multiple activities, organised a training centre for women, the *27 February School*.<sup>11</sup> In addition to heading

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<sup>11</sup> Present-day Bojador.

the committees, women were in the majority in the General Workers' Union and the National Youth Union, organizations with a pyramidal structure that transcended the committees. At this time there were still no women who held positions in the Government, but undoubtedly the role of women was absolutely central from the beginning, both in relation to the material development of the camps and in the construction and maintenance of family and social ties, so necessary in a context as extreme as that of the refugee camps (Dubois et. al. 2011). This significant change brought about a new social and public definition of women that overlapped with their traditional role within the group, that is, a new formal structure versus the historical informal structuring.

In these early years, the Polisario laid the foundations of an education and health system that guaranteed access to these services for the entire population<sup>12</sup> and created the political and administrative structure that continues today. In the case of training, already in 1977 there was a three-year educational program. Since the 1980s, the educational system has been structured with kindergartens, primary education and secondary education—with a vocational training branch as well as a baccalaureate. The baccalaureate was – and still is- normally carried out in Algeria or in the boarding centres that were built. University education is studied abroad thanks to collaboration agreements with countries such as Algeria, Libya and Cuba. This entire structure allowed for the training of a generation of young Sahrawi university students who, upon returning to the camps, joined the existing services there: schools, hospitals, ministries, etc. (Dubois et. al., 2011).

Economically, in relation to income, the SADR depended on international aid for subsistence and the maintenance of the State. This aid was initially of a markedly political nature, but following the changes in international politics that took place at the end of the 1980s,<sup>13</sup> the leading role was assumed by international humanitarian organizations, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Program (WFP). Over time, the participation of non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs) from European countries such as Italy and Spain has also increased.

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12 In ten years they went from an illiteracy rate of 72.55% to universal schooling, including the female population, from 3 to 16 years old. In the field of health, the population self-organised, and a prevention system was established, with hygiene and nutrition measures (Dubois et al., 2011).

13 In particular, Algeria was going through a crisis that would later lead to a civil war; Libya was establishing an alliance with Morocco; Cuba was withdrawing because of the U.S. embargo; and the countries of the East were in the throes of transformation.

With regard to humanitarian aid, one must also take into account the sense of transience that the Sahrawi population itself attaches to a situation that it hopes will change so that it can return to its original territory. More stable or longer-term cooperation projects were not welcomed insofar as their implementation would obscure their situation as a refugee, nomadic and temporary population. Moreover, the war context in which they found themselves marked the priorities and efforts of both the population and the Polisario.



## Neither peace nor war

With the Ceasefire of 1991, the Sahrawi population glimpsed the possible and imminent return to their land. Some of the infrastructures began to be dismantled in the camps and UNHCR began to evaluate the possible costs of the displacement of the population to their areas of origin (Caballero Macarro, 2015). However, it soon became clear that the ceasefire did not mean return and that the process of organizing the referendum would be arduous and complicated. This entailed significant feelings of impotence, discouragement and frustration among the population.

One of the logical consequences of the ceasefire was the return of men to the camps. Until that moment women had been responsible for the organization and management, and the return of men meant an increase of their presence in decision-making bodies.

Another phenomenon that began in this decade was the introduction of money from abroad into the camps through different means: pension payments from Spain for those who had worked for the Spanish state before 1975; money transfers through the girls and boys who were beneficiaries of the Vacations in Peace program;<sup>14</sup> the money that was introduced with the visits of the host families of this program to the camps; the remittances that began to be sent by people who migrated and settled in other countries.

These inflows of money helped many families who from then on were able to supplement the basic food basket provided by humanitarian aid. This basket would be reduced with the passage of time and the outbreak of other international conflicts. In fact, monetary income from abroad is so important that the WFP (World Food Program) designates families that lack it as “very vulnerable households” (Caballero Macarro, 2015). It was inevitable in this context that this monetary income generated a process of socioeconomic differentiation and inequality that became intertwined with previous ones such as gender and skin colour.

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14 In 1979, the first arrival of Sahrawi children to Spain took place through the collaboration between the Polisario Front and the PCE. The objective was to separate them from the harsh living conditions in the desert, especially during the summer months, and at that time from a context of war. The success of the experience led to the creation of the Vacations in Peace program in the mid-1980s, through which Spanish families host boys and girls no older than 12 years of age during the summer months, taking responsibility for accommodation, maintenance and part of their education.

The introduction of money in the camps generated new economic activities, mainly commercial operations, service provision and construction. The commercial activity that began in the 90s is currently the most important economic activity. Small stores with food and sanitary products began to appear in the camps when money began to arrive. The *marsans* (markets) also burst onto the landscape of some of the wilayas, where the variety of products is greater, including clothing, ornaments, meat, cosmetics, crafts, ornaments, etc. Alongside these markets have also appeared a growing number of restaurants, vehicle repair shops and service stations, hair salons, etc.

The traditional activity of the Sahrawis, basically livestock farming, continues to be carried out, but more so in the liberated territory. In the camps, these activities are limited to the possession by each family of a few goats and, in some cases, dromedaries. Industrial or agricultural work is scarce, although there are different projects underway. There are artisan initiatives led by women, under the auspices of the National Union of Sahrawi Women and international cooperation.

As for basic infrastructure, changes also begin from this decade onwards: from sets of haimas and containers as living quarters, to new infrastructures for public and private use. In addition to private investment, development cooperation has also stimulated civil construction. The evolution in the architecture of Sahrawi domestic structures reveals the emergence and increase of social inequalities and their impact on social relations. You can see groups of haimas and small adobe houses, as well as prefabricated concrete block walls and zinc sheet roofs. The appearance of locks after the introduction of money is a significant aspect, as Caratini (2006) points out. And with them, walls and doors to close, which turned an open, outward-facing family socializing space into a private and protected space. This could be the beginning of a change in which family logics would predominate over community or collective logics.

In relation to the labour market, the study by Trasasmontes (2011) shows the difficulty of carrying out an analysis when statistical sources are lacking. Employment opportunities are limited to the public sector and cooperation organizations. But since the public sector budget is practically non-existent, the possibilities of this type of employment are very limited. According to this researcher, in the last decade there has been an increase in the active population linked to the increase in development cooperation, largely motivated by economic incentives. Public employment is of utmost relevance



in education and health, but the lack of means and incentives has caused many of the people with high levels of qualifications to migrate abroad.

Despite the difficulties in defining the concept of unemployment in the camps, the author concludes by pointing out three issues. On the one hand, this unemployment affects the most vulnerable population to a greater extent: young people, women, the disabled and the black population. On the other hand, this situation generates significant levels of frustration and hopelessness. And lastly, it leads to the loss of highly qualified people, who seek work in other countries, which in the literature on migration is known as the “brain drain.”

Indeed, there is an entire generation, the so-called “Second Polisario Generation,” which was educated in the 1980s in countries such as Cuba, Algeria, Libya or Syria, and returned to the camps in the nineties, and contributed, with their knowledge and work, to the training of a body of highly qualified officials. However, over time with no solution to the conflict in sight, as well as the absence of income and the harsh situation of the camps, this youth, who had already experienced exile with years of training abroad, have seen their dreams and expectations frustrated. Faced with this new situation, the Polisario Front relaxed its mobility policy and let many of the best-trained professionals go abroad. This group is currently between 40 and 55 years old. This controlled diaspora was aimed at the formation of the administrative bureaucracy of what was meant to be an independent nation-state. But this state, today, is located in a field of indeterminacy or in a *non-place*.

In addition to this migration group, according to the classification of Gómez Martín (2010), we can find other groups of Sahrawi migrants in Spain:

- a. Young Sahrawis who come from the occupied territories who have a low educational level and are without papers;
- b. Complete families that come from the camps in Tindouf or Mauritania;
- c. Sahrawi adolescents, who come from the camps and who, after participating in the “Vacations in Peace” program, have managed to stay in Spain;
- d. Elderly and sick people who enter the country for medical reasons and then try to settle;

- e. Delegates of the Polisario Front in the Autonomous Communities and staff of the SADR government, who exercise diplomatic duties without enjoying express recognition by the Spanish state.

The way the Polisario Front has viewed population movements has varied over time. In the early years, leaving the camps was interpreted in terms of abandonment, betrayal and selfishness, as those migrants were seen as acting exclusively for personal benefit. Perhaps for this reason, there is an implicit promise to return to the camps when necessary and to take the cause of the Sahrawi people with them to new spaces. The fact is that, as Caratini (2006) points out, the Sahrawi camps are perhaps the only case among refugee population camps in which the population that leaves always returns. Young Sahrawis who have moved to other countries return to visit their families, to whom they regularly send a large part of their income.

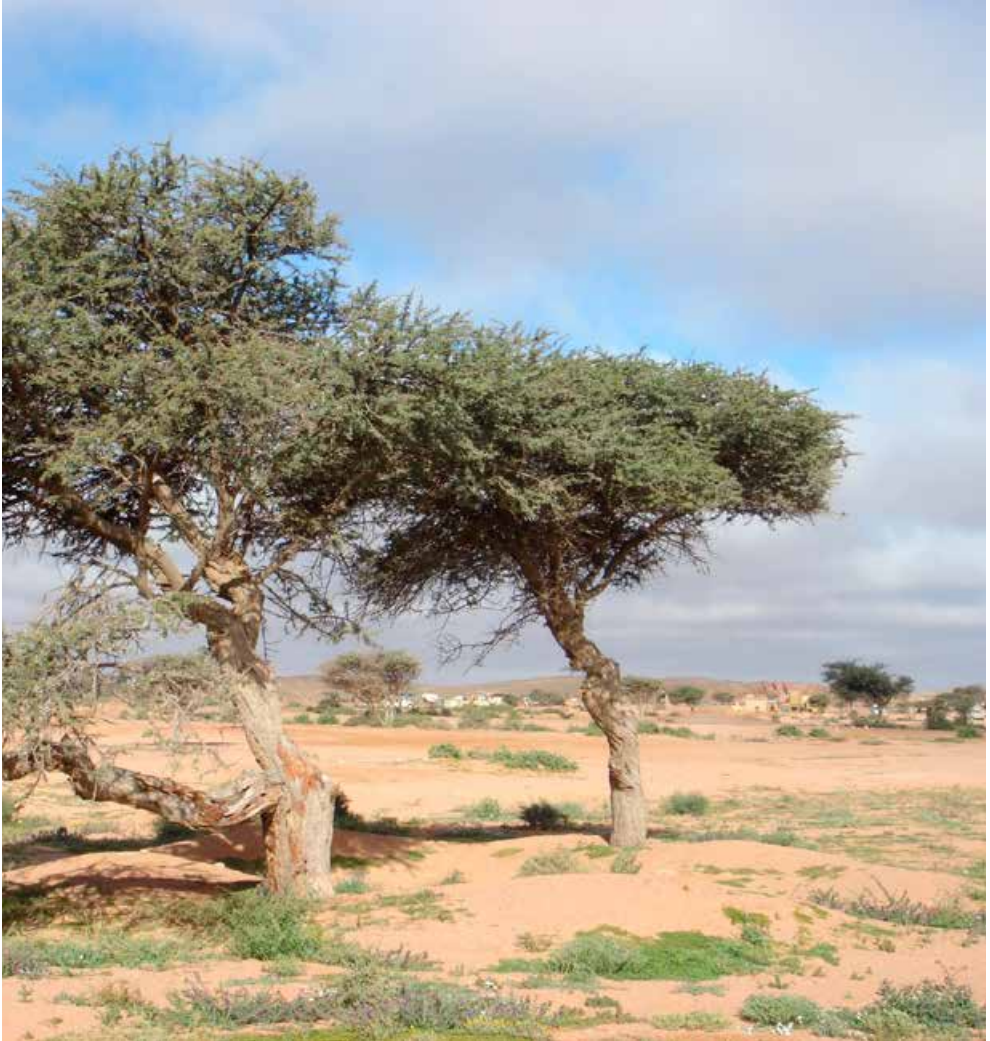
These economic remittances are, today, the major income source for many families that have been able to improve their lives and access non-essential goods. It is very difficult to know the volume of remittances, given that money transfers occur through informal channels, generally through family, friends or other trusted people. This lack of formal structures, Trasasmontes (2011) points out, is an obstacle for planning the channelling of resources. This task would imply holding savings in banks, but the absence of a financial system makes that impossible.

## War again

In November 2020, the Polisario announced the breaking of the ceasefire by Morocco and announced the return to military activity. This was in response to the attack carried out by Moroccan forces at the Guerguerat border crossing,<sup>15</sup> which links Mauritania to the territory occupied by Morocco in Western Sahara .Since then, there has existed a low intensity conflict

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15 Since 2015-2016, conflicts had occurred in Guerguerat and La Güera. It should be noted that this geographical point is key given that, although it cannot be used by Morocco as established in the Peace agreements, the export of products that are illegally extracted from Western Sahara to Africa follows the route that goes from Dakhla to Mauritania through this point. On October 21, 2020, Sahrawi civilians from the camps traveled to this area, between the Moroccan wall and the border with Mauritania, and blocked circulation in an effort to prevent the export of products obtained by Morocco in the illegally occupied territory. Ignoring the warnings of the Polisario Front, Morocco crossed the wall, attacking and dispersing Sahrawi civilians. That same day, November 13, the Polisario Front announced the return to war.



situation, with artillery attacks against Moroccan positions along the wall by the Polisario Front, and Moroccan drone attacks, which have caused numerous civilian casualties.

The reactivation of the armed conflict has generated an important mobilization by Sahrawi youth, both among the young population in the camps and in the diaspora populations, who have applied to join the Polisario militias. Likewise, the population residing in the liberated zone, around 15,000 people, has been displaced by the new situation to the camps in Tindouf or to Mauritania.

# Sahrawi youth: two stories

*“What is the Sahrawi situation? All questions have the same answer: How to open horizons”*

Young person, Auserd

If the category of youth is usually constructed in specific economic, political and social contexts, the unique situation of the Sahrawi population demands that we keep these contexts more present than ever. We have already seen how the principle of pre-eminence of the elder structured Sahrawi society until the 1970s, when a group of young revolutionaries broke this principle. The rupture that entailed having to transform into a modern society, in search of its own process of sovereignty through a national liberation movement, brought with it the emergence of political categories that were foreign to the previously existing stratified cultural structures. Although a *replacement structure* was generated, the previous structure was also reinforced and never disappeared. Sometimes, this mixture between the old and the new occurs is never resolved in favour of one or the other, and it is unclear where one ends and the other begins.

But who are the young Sahrawis? What ages does this population group comprise? For the purposes of the present diagnosis, the population between 15 and 45 years old will be considered. Obviously, it is a very wide age range that encompasses tremendously different life situations. A 16-year-old teenager has little to do with a 35-year-old man. This broad consideration of the age range is not due so much to biological issues as to the structure of Sahrawi society itself. The passage from adolescence and youth to maturity is conditioned in most societies by the structure of motherhood/fatherhood. But other types of variables, socio-labour and socio-cultural, are interposed in those classifications that seem to be more adjusted to the becoming and development of the human being.

The first diagnosis of the Sahrawi youth, carried out in 2017, took the age range for the study to be between 15 and 30 years. The present study adopted the administratively defined age range of 15 to 45. Along with this administrative

criterion there is a social criterion, of a customary nature, consisting of the socio-cultural age that is normally delimited in all societies by the transition from singlehood to marriage.

It is probably the *particular* labour and economic situation of the camps that explains this administrative criterion. Youth are unable to enter the practically non-existent labour market and thus obtain economic independence. Other factors that influence the use of this criterion stem from the priorities that the Polisario Front assigns to military and administrative experience. Finally, as will be seen throughout the study, these age groups also reveal a latent conflict of interest that is occurring between the different generations.

**TABLE I. ESTIMATED POPULATION IN CAMPS**

AGE	POPULATION	MEN	WOMEN
18-49	78,600	40,000	38,600
15-17	9,300	4,600	4,700
<b>Total population</b>	<b>173,600</b>		

The latest data we have on youth puts the total population between 18 and 49 years of age at 78,600.<sup>16</sup> The group between the years of 18 and 49 is made up of 38,600 women and 40,000 men. Between the ages of 15 and 17, there are around 4,700 women and 4,600 men.

When addressing the situation of Sahrawi youth in the camps, through the testimonies of the different people interviewed, we can affirm that the context of living and growing up in refugee camps is the central element from which any type of analysis must be based

*We must be aware of the situation of exile experienced by youth. (...) They are forced to confront two concepts that are contradictory: that of living, since they are here, and also that of liberation, that of the struggle for their existence (Secretary General of the Polisario Front).*

16 UNHCR Report, March 2017. See: [file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/UNHCR\\_Tindouf-Total-In-Camp-Population\\_March-2018%20\(1\)%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/HP/Downloads/UNHCR_Tindouf-Total-In-Camp-Population_March-2018%20(1)%20(1).pdf). This census is carried out on the vulnerable civilian population, so there is a part of the population, such as the military, that is excluded from it. To this must be added the important mobility of the population.

*The Sahrawi youth have a characteristic that makes them special and differentiates them. I mean that they were born in special circumstances and that they still have to live in those circumstances. For example, the war, or that they grew up with their parents absent or that because of their studies they are never at home... (Secretary General of the Polisario Front).*

In addition to all the material difficulties derived from this situation in terms of survival, there is the breakdown of a collective idea that the space and time of the camps was transitory. All of this means that, when asking in general terms about youth, what predominates is frustration, along with a lack of hope:

*The first thing I feel, and I think all young people feel, is disappointment. People are fed up and disappointed. Above all, when we talk about issues and activities that involve interaction with outside others. When there is some type of collaboration and it is something internal between the Sahrawis, we can overcome the difficulties. But when external agents are present, it becomes difficult for us to continue. I think that right now the youth is totally disappointed. Many times we are left waiting for the result of some process that, for whatever reason, does not arrive. And above all, when we are collaborating with someone but we don't know how things are going or what will be achieved (NUSW-National Union of Sahrawi Women).*

*Sahrawi youth do not have job opportunities; they are frustrated and can sometimes lose the will to live. They have lost trust in others... (Ministry of Economic Development).*

*These few resources and few opportunities in the camps also affect young people on an emotional level, and they end up hopeless about everything, about the UN and about the international community. And also, about our government, which we consider to be responsible for our situation and which should improve the situation of these young people. Especially when it comes to work (NOVA Group, Western Sahara).*

The government points out the progress that, in relation to youth, has been made in these years as well as their insertion into the government administration. This work, however, is “incomplete” due to its voluntary nature:

*At the highest levels of the government, things have been done for youth, to guarantee that young people, women and men, are in decision-making areas and in places of government and governance. And the same thing happens in the appointments of ministerial departments and positions. The general secretaries, directors and in the different positions of the ministries, we are always hiring young people (...) although we could not call it work at all, because they have the characteristic of being voluntary (...) here work is conceived as a matter of filling space and free time, while striving to achieve the essential objective and the real work, which would be achieving self-determination... (Secretary General of the Polisario Front).*

Undoubtedly, this is the reality for some of the youth in camps, for those who are “employed” in public work. But, along with this population, we have another population that figures less in the discourse of the institutions and that tries to survive as best it can:

*We have to differentiate two types of youth in the camps. The first is the one that is a little more active in political issues, participating in activism or in public work in general, be it political, social or cultural. This is a minority. And the second is the more typical youth who are not active in public work, who try to make a living as best they can and who are the vast majority (NUN Sahara Association).*

In the account about youth in camps there are, in general terms, two views or approaches depending on which generation one belongs to. For those who belong to the generation that carried out the revolution, that is, those born in the 40s and 50s, the concept of youth immediately refers to one’s own lived experience. They were protagonists of a historical moment that also broke with the traditional principle of pre-eminence of the eldest in Sahrawi society:

*Youth is a large part of society and has been the base and creator of the Sahrawi revolution. In the 70s they were 18, 20 or 23 years old and now they are the ones who lead, but at the time they were young and this has been built around them (Ministry of Justice).*

The lived experience and the importance and effect of the fact that young people protagonised that historical moment seems to eclipse the current youth—and their life circumstances—to the extent that when we ask about youth, the first reference is to those who participated in the revolution and

the war. This reference, enormously symbolic, prevents a clear analysis of existing social situation because it downplays social processes that have been operating in Sahrawi society. Youth is considered a historical category, when at least two generations have followed after the war generation. These generations are representative not only of different age groups, but of entirely different historical experiences and changes that are more profound than what the authorities—and wider Sahrawi society—tend to recognize.

Furthermore, when discussing today's youth, the fact that they are children of revolution and war is always emphasized. They are the children of a process in which they did not play any active role. And, ultimately, it is emphasized that they are passive beneficiaries of everything that was obtained in terms, for example, of education and health. From that starting point, they are told





they must be patient and their material aspirations, to which they orient their lives, are viewed in a negative light. In the statements made about today's youth, we encounter a profound collision between absolute and relative deprivation. The absolute deprivation of the war generation means that deficiencies are seen as inevitable. Meanwhile, the following generations experience material and positional deficiencies that are difficult to control.

*The majority of the young people we are trying to work for were born after 1991. Right now they will be more or less 29 or 30 years old. They were born in a period without peace and without war. When they grew up and opened their eyes they saw peace, tranquillity and even comfort and they thought that was what there was, that they were not going to experience war (...) they only thought of a normalized State, of independence and that our only obstacle to liberation was the referendum that was going to be held soon (...) and they begin to have material aspirations such as having a car, a job and certain comforts. And they thought that they were going to return to their land and their family home to carry out their life project (Ministry of Culture).*

Furthermore, from this perspective, the situation of youth is subordinated to the goals of the National Liberation Movement. That is to say, it is the resolution of the conflict and the achievement of political objectives that constitute the priority for the older generations, who currently form part of institutional positions. The particular political context in which Sahrawi society lives means that youth, their conditions and needs, occupy a subordinated position that would not apply in conditions of normality.

*It is a matter of order, to solve one problem you have to solve the other one first (...) The first priority is to resolve the conflict. And the second is money. Logically, the needs of the young population should be a priority (...) but in this context they cannot be a priority. The priority sectors should be education, health, water and food (...) What I mean is that there is nothing left for the other priorities, where youth would be. We have to satisfy the priority needs to then be able to solve the secondary needs. Youth is in the secondary area, but we want to bring the problems of youth to the priority area. But we can't (President's Cabinet).*

Among the Sahrawi authorities there is a clear awareness that youth is stagnant and will continue to be. On the one hand, it is flatly stated that

youth are in the “secondary area.” On the one hand, the intention is there to give them “priority.” However, the conclusion is “...but we can’t.” This recognition of the situation has a tragic tone, because the different interests of the concurrent generations cannot be brought together.

From this discourse or approach, there is nothing left but to appeal to the patience and responsibility of youth, to the continuous effort they have to make in a situation of unresolved conflict. As we have pointed out, when the idea of youth appears in the dialogue, they are referring to the youth of those who carried out the war and the revolution, and the importance that this fact had is underlined. This emphasis on a generation that ceased to be young decades ago cancels out to a certain extent the young people who make up today’s youth. The continuous demands on today’s youth are supported by the principle of pre-eminence of the elders or the gerontocracy, which remains as a socio-cultural principle that stratifies Sahrawi society. As Caratini emphasizes, although the principle of pre-eminence of the elderly or gerontocracy was formally abolished by the revolution, this goal was not achieved: “touching the complex set of signs and obligatory behaviours that govern relationships between generations (...) Giving up transmitting this code would have meant for the Sahrawi the abandonment of all forms of respect towards others” (2006: 16). This principle legitimizes a discourse that demands from today’s youth a role that, in the current difficult situation and considering the time that has passed since that revolution - three generations- appears ever less possible to fulfil.

*Maybe the problem is that young people are not making the necessary effort to be considered by society. What they need is the awareness of being trained, of being firm and of being useful in order to change society (...) they have to be willing. And that disposition means unconditionally (...) I want to participate in the Sahrawi struggle, but I want to look for better conditions elsewhere (...) you have to be here, come and fight unconditionally, within the situation we have (President’s Cabinet).*

However, the unconditional support that this informant points out is what young people do not accept, and logically cannot accept, because it means embracing indeterminate ideals, experiences they have not lived in the flesh. And it means assuming their exclusive function as an appendix because of a definition of the situation that they do not completely share, and in which they have no say. They are required to have a willingness that “means unconditionally.”

In this context, the resigned position of the “second Polisario generation,” which was sent to study in other countries and has a solid education, is very significant. This generation keeps the memory of the previous one but shares some of the objectives of the next. It is in an in-between position. It was the generation of a modernization that is not going to take place for the time being. The semi-voluntary nature of public work does not have enough strength to retain this generation that, whenever possible, migrates to other countries. This “brain drain” has its consequences, both in the field of health and education. It is true that emigration is due to material issues, but we must also consider, as Caratini points out, the distrust that the authorities developed towards this generation. These became “*the elders who have no intention of putting young people into positions of power*” (2006:18).

This situation is what the following generation closely observes. As we will see later, they are greatly affected by the experience of seeing that the effort made by those who went abroad to study has not produced the expected results at the labour and administrative management level. So why study at all? Why invest time and effort in acquiring knowledge that will never translate into social positions or work? In this situation, it is not surprising that over the generations, work has been losing the meaning it had in the past and that today it has no more meaning than its monetary value. This is even more so in an economy that, as we have seen, has become commoditized since the 1990s, generating material comforts and status for many families.

The other view or approach is that of the population that we have characterized as youth in the present study, and which is heterogeneous. We could say that it is made up of the so-called “second Polisario generation”, who are between 40 and 55 years old, young people between 20 and 40 years old and, finally, adolescents and young people from 15 to 20 years old.<sup>17</sup> This large group of population is the one that has recently begun to arouse interest, in part because, as an informant points out, it is beginning to be difficult to manage such a large volume of population:

*Attempts to specifically analyse the situation of young people have recently begun (...) Youth is a time bomb that is increasingly difficult*

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17 The combining of these different age groups is, in the first place, unviable. Secondly, it risks hiding the truly existing problems. Thirdly, there is a problem of a magnitude not yet assessed with the population under 30 years of age, which is probably the most ignored age group.

*for society and the government to control. And as a consequence, war could break out in a disorderly manner initiated by the young people themselves. I believe that the world has tried to respond to this warning and has done so through credits and micro credits and with some increase in training opportunities for young people (Ministry of Youth and Sports).*

Based on the previous testimony, we find ourselves with a double conflict, although the two are of different natures. On the one hand, the foreign conflict, against the occupation forces, which is the priority for the elders and the ruling elites. On the other hand, the internal conflict, due to the difficulty of structuring internal cohesion when loyalties are increasingly weakening and when the incorporation of new generations is hardly possible.

From here, the migratory movements of Sahrawi youth that are allowed by the government are seen as an escape valve to an increasingly complicated situation for an age group that, according to their testimonies, is frustrated and unmotivated.

*A youth without job prospects or possibilities for growth and development (...) youth is the victim of a limbo situation about which not much has been done from within and much less from outside (Ministry of Youth and Sports).*

We are, then, faced with two views or two approaches towards the Sahrawi youth. That of the elders, who on the one hand value and praise the youth who continue to be involved in the national liberation process by “working” in the public sector under difficult conditions or fighting on the front and, on the other hand, judge those who choose to satisfy their own economic needs, whether by emigrating to other countries, or by working in the “private” sector. However, these two types of young people are not mutually exclusive categories. As we will see, neither those who opt for emigration and the satisfaction of material needs break with the political cause, nor do those who dedicate themselves to it renounce complementing their work in other jobs that provide greater economic returns.

For its part, the bulk of the population included in the *youth* category - half of the total population in camps - waits impatiently in a situation in which the lack of opportunities or confidence in the conflict resolution processes, as well as a sense of abandonment by the authorities, is all intensifying. This situation is transmitted to younger people and adolescents who, in a context



of globalization, find themselves increasingly trapped in a space-time that they believe they will only be able to overcome through mobility, in the form of diaspora or relative separation.

Now, within the framework of these two approaches that we have outlined to try to understand the position of Sahrawi youth, what are intergenerational relations like?

What has happened in a society that breaks down and decides to dispense at a very specific historical moment with the principle of pre-eminence of the elders but that, simultaneously, maintains it in practice up to the present moment? Is this an intergenerational conflict?

Regarding this series of questions, there is something about which many of the people interviewed agree, and that is the lack of trust that has been established between generations. Perhaps because the first generation feels that there is no commitment or work on the part of the youth, who still have to earn the respect and consideration of their elders:

*We miss elements of trust. We want to give them a project that brings them closer to us (...) We, as an entity, as a State, give it to them in confidence and try to get them to give us something back and occupy certain positions (UJSARIO).*

*It is not an abandoned youth that has not been trained and formed and which you can trick. They know how to read between the lines. They question everything and you have to have a clear answer. "I don't want to live like this for another forty years and I want to find a way to avoid it." They say it that clearly and you have to make them see reason (Governor).*

*Dialogue is not difficult, what is difficult is for one to convince the other. Neither the young man can convince and change the conviction of the father nor can the father change the conviction of the young man. Because we have given everything, but we have not yet gained anything. And the young want to earn everything before giving anything" (President's Cabinet).*

It seems that the positions are unmovable, and they show that the younger generations perceive from their elders an offer of no future or, at least, a stalemate that is difficult to resolve. Meanwhile, older people observe that they are not receiving due respect from the youth. As Vilches and Esparza pointed out in their diagnosis, adults demand a return for the effort they made in the past to obtain what they have today. And this return translates into commitment and duty: *"It is not a tone of reproach, but rather a demand for greater responsibility for the collective future from one's own particular cultural situation and intergenerational respect"* (2017: 34). Behind this discourse there is also implicitly the question of the change of status and roles between generations. It is a replacement that older people contemplate from their point-of-view, but that young people understand feel must be carried out from the perspective of today's youth:

*There may be willingness [of the first generation] and it may be voluntary or induced (...) this willingness can also be imposed by ideological and electoral conditions (...) But you also have to be careful with replacements. Because if the replacement, no matter how young they are, has been manufactured and moulded in the environment of the current situation, they will not contribute or have the perspective they should have, that of the new generation (Ministry of Youth and Sports).*

From some of the perspectives of young people, the relationship with elders is complicated and even conflictive. The principle of pre-eminence of the elder manifests in all its clarity:

*Young people can't speak. What the older person says is what matters. The older person is the one in charge. Young people do not have the right to say that this is not so, that it is not correct (Scout and Sahrawi Children's Organization).*

*There has also been a loss of trust in the authorities, and I don't want to speak on the political side, but it is very pronounced with young people, because young people now have a vision contrary to the authorities, and they see that there are no rights but there are duties (Young male, discussion group 35/39, Auserd).*

*A face-to-face dialogue is necessary and I think that is where the cultural factor of respect for the elderly comes in. Because many times we do not dare to say something to our elders, even though they are co-workers. I think this needs to be changed somehow. Even among the women themselves. I believe that there is knowledge and learning that is not shared because there is not that equal dialogue, on the same level. It is like there is a "generational struggle" (NUN Sahara Association).*

This informant mentions the idea of "generational struggle." Other informants point out the existence of an "intergenerational conflict" and many people speak of the necessary "intergenerational dialogue." It seems that a dialogue capable of articulating intergenerational relationships more fluidly and with less friction requires, first of all, recognition of the other and mutual listening:

*There must be greater participation, but first, better listening. And I believe that society, no matter how self-protected, supportive and unified it may be, lacks the recognition of the other. And I say this both at a generational level and even at a gender level (...) It is very good to make young people listen, but it is more important to make non-young people listen to young people (Ministry of Youth and Sports).*

Debate or exchange of opinions and interests are only possible in a politically independent society, to the extent that the internal conflict needs to be addressed after the disappearance of the external conflict. But the disappearance of this latest conflict does not seem easy.

# Mindsets

If there is a word that is often heard when talking about the situation and the problems faced by the Sahrawis in the Tindouf camps, it is “mentality.” Many of the changes that are considered necessary can only occur if there is a change in mentality; young people have another mentality; the problem is that as a society they have a “transitional mentality”, etc. By “mentality” we are referring to the set of beliefs and customs that make up the Sahrawi population’s way of thinking, judging reality and acting. Of course, this set of beliefs and customs does not form a static block over time, on the contrary. There has been a long process in which the collective mentality, which was never univocal, has been transformed, maintaining threads of continuity, but also important breaks and ruptures. We are not talking about a struggle between mentalities, but rather visions that adapt to conflicting interests, circumstances and future projects.

There seems to be an agreement among the people interviewed that it was after the 1991 ceasefire that things began to change in the camps. The return to life in peace and the introduction of money in the camps, with the consequent development of an informal economy, led to the emergence of individualism and the awareness of needs that the war situation had placed in the background:

*In the 90s and 2000s there was a transition with the ceasefire of 1991. From 1975 to 1991 all the men were in the army and the young people were abroad studying. But with peacetime life, people begin to think and realize that they don’t have a house, a car, air conditioning, or television... They realize that they have nothing. And they start to think about that (Ministry of Economic Development).*

*It all started with the informal economy. When the economy began to sink, uncontrolled growth began. People saw that those who have been able to advance quickly have done so, but there was no control (...) now everyone has to solve their own problems. And perhaps they have forgotten, or we have forgotten, that there is a common challenge (...) we have not been able to resolve the conflict to have a collective society. And this has finally forced each one to solve their problems individually (President’s Cabinet).*



We have previously described how in the 1990s commercial activities appeared that transformed the landscape of the camps and began a process of differentiation and socioeconomic inequality. The gradual process of change in the set of customs and beliefs of the population is intertwined in its development with that commercial logic. This leads, over time, to a more evident individuation process in the young population. The social cohesion and the feeling of equity that had been generated since the settlement of the population in the camps does not suddenly disappear, nor has it completely disappeared over time. But new desires and aspirations for material well-being do appear in the population, which contrast with previous generations.

*Generations differ. Those who were born and raised in the revolution would aspire to other things and those who were born in the heat of the market and the search for life would have another mentality. And the challenge is to combine and deal with all these mentalities (Ministry of Justice).*



*There is this wave that “I want such and such car, I want to get married and I want to build such and such house.” And in the end, well... it seems unstoppable. But I think we still have time to resist all this (...) when this capitalist idea of individual and family well-being arises, in the end this happens. “I want this and I want my family to have this” (...) in the end, in a way, we have become more selfish. The new generations are much more selfish if we compare them with our parents and our elders (NUN SAHARA Association).*

This person mentions the desire for material well-being of young Sahrawis not only at the individual level, but also at the family level. This issue is important, because although the networks of reciprocity, cooperation and support between neighbours do not disappear, it seems that they are replaced to a certain extent by a more restricted solidarity that is articulated around the family. Caratini points out in this regard: “...from the expression One for all and all for one, we have reached Every man for himself and God for us all, with the difference that the “one” can never be individual in the Moorish society, and that “Every man” bears the heavy responsibility for dozen of individuals totally deprived of everything” (2006: 19).

The centrality of the family is also highlighted by Vilches and Esparza (2017), who consider it a supportive unit of resource collection and consumption. We have previously pointed out the fact that certain families receive economic inputs from abroad - via remittances, pensions, monetary remittances from families linked by programs such as Vacations in Peace -which has contributed to the increase in inequalities.

This reduction of solidarity to the confines of the immediate family is related, of course, to the commercial logic that we have mentioned, but also to other processes that occur in the camps. Some of these processes are: the decrease in international aid; the new needs that arise from the development of a market economy; exposure to the world through television and the Internet, especially in a young population that, like the rest of the world, is “connected”; the worsening of public services.

In this difficult context, the change in young people’s mentality is makes sense— even more so if we consider the specific context of being born and growing up in refugee camps, waiting for the resolution of a conflict that never comes. This specificity has also given rise to a “transitional mentality.” That is, the permanent tension of living in a place that is provisional, waiting for an uncertain future. This requires improving living conditions in a provisional context.

*But do you know why the Sahrawis don't work on something fruitful? Because, from the beginning, we have a "transitory mentality": tomorrow we will be able to return. In the 70s and 80s people did not want to build houses with adobe, only haimas. Because we were going to return right away. This mentality is deeply ingrained in our heads and we don't plan to live in the moment. We are always thinking about tomorrow and not about laying the foundation. We are always thinking about the future, but there is no present without a future (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training).*

*Here, it has been highly encouraged to create projects that only look at "today's bread" and not tomorrow's. I think that, in the long run, this has created a collective imaginary in youth, regardless of their training, that has made them believe that, to have a future, they have to leave the camps (NUN SAHARA Association).*

These last words are important, because indeed time in the camps seems to be stopped, suspended while waiting for that longed-for future that is taking a long time to arrive. Maintaining hope and enthusiasm in that future has meant, in turn, sustaining the provisional nature of the present, and that has translated into both ephemeral constructions and short-term projects. However, provisionality is giving way to the difficulties of achieving that future promised to young people born in camps. As that horizon that contemplated the return to their land is diluted, the horizon that is acquiring verisimilitude is one that will take place in the camps and, given the current conditions in them, it is not surprising that many imagine another possible future outside of them. The camps probably represent the non-future in the eyes of some Sahrawi youth.

It is no less true that, although older generations reproach youth for their individualistic and consumerist mentality, they also recognize that there are commitments that youth do not fail to fulfil. They may have a different mentality, be more individualistic and materialistic, but this does not stop their commitment and loyalty to the cause of their people:

*What I demanded when I was young... I did not demand or ask for anything. But now my sons and daughters think completely differently. And in a way I can understand that, because the stage that I lived is not the one they are living. But I do not mean that they are not nationalists. They are willing; they are fighting (Ministry of Health).*



*The society of yesteryear did not have this need, because it was content and it was fine. But those who went to a study centre or a host family in another country when they were 10 or 12 years old got to know all these things and they need them, because they have tasted the plus that they bring. But they still want to come back and want to contribute. And therein lies the dilemma between the “I” and the “everyone” (Governor).*

The dilemma that this informant points out, that it is always present, seems to be resolved, for the moment, in favour of “everyone.” The loyalty and attachment of youth to their families and to the political cause must be highlighted. In fact, as we have said, the case of the Sahrawi camps is probably unique in the sense that those who leave Tindouf never do so definitively. On the contrary, they return again and again and collaborate from wherever they are to support their families.

It is interesting to see, in this sense, how over time the camps have become a reference axis for all the Sahrawi people who are in the diaspora, in the occupied or liberated territories. In this tension between transience and permanence, the camps begin to be configured and have meaning as “home.” A “home” on top of another that is the legitimate one, one’s own, the denied

one, the colonized one. Many of the young people were born in the camps, and therefore consider it their home, but even those who were not born there, consider it the same way:

*We have grown up in a totally Sahrawi family, with an upbringing from there but here. So at the end of the day you are getting familiar with that (...) Even though I wasn't born there it is my home. I feel I have the need to go down there. I disconnect, yes. I feel much better there (Young male, focus group 17/32 years old, diaspora).*

*In my case, I have my family there. But also the fact that it is your home, you were born there, it is the place you always want to go back to, that longing always exists (Young male, focus group 17/32, diaspora).*

Another interesting fact is the idea of “disconnecting,” which appears in many Sahrawi populations when talking about the camps. Camps are a refuge, without a doubt, but this idea of refuge is even more significant for the population that lives outside of them. For them they are places of rest, reunion and return to a way of life that has nothing to do with the accelerated rhythms of the societies in which they currently live.

*The camps are the solar panel and we are the battery. We come here, discharge the battery and go back to recharge it. Like someone who goes on vacation in August to the family village... People are in continuous nomadism (Young male, focus group 17/32, diaspora).*

This social space interconnected in multiple ways between different points on the map, each with its significance in the imagination of the Sahrawi population, and the continuous circulation that seems to occur between those points, raises a question about another aspect of the Sahrawi mentality. Despite the violent and rapid changes that have occurred, the Sahrawis seem to find a way to continue being present: nomadism. It is obviously no longer the nomadism that characterized this people before and during Spanish colonization, but rather a nomadism that, maintaining a thread of continuity with that past, is simultaneously a response, adaptation and strategy of resistance to the political and economic conditions that they face.

# Educational-training and employment

As we have noted previously, one of the great efforts of the Polisario Front during the first decades in the camps was to develop the capabilities of the Sahrawi population. To this end, an educational system was created and today it is structured as follows: kindergartens (3 to 6 years); primary education (7 to 13 years); secondary education divided into two branches: vocational training and high school (13 to 16 years old). Generally, the last two years of high school are studied in Algeria or in one of the boarding centres in camps. University education is carried out in countries such as Algeria, Libya or Cuba, with which there are agreements in place.

We have mentioned before, but we must highlight it again, that this generation - the “second Polisario generation” - carries out studies abroad and returns to the camps with specialized training (teaching, engineering, agriculture, IT, engineering, etc.). However, Sahrawi institutions had no possibility of hiring workers of this generation, so they are forced to work in sectors that have little or nothing to do with their training and expectations:

*We have trained many people in many specialties, but there is no job opportunity in those specialties (...) we have many people who have been trained and have lost that specialization waiting for a job in their field. In the end they have lost their lives (...) and a young person who is 20 or 30 years old and who has gone to university does not want to repeat what has happened to their elders, who have lost everything waiting. And so the only solution to find a job opportunity and to not have to wait thirty or forty years to have a life is to leave (Ministry of Economic Development).*

What that Second Polisario Generation experienced has an effect on the youth that followed. When these young people see that the investment of effort and time made by the previous generation, who also remained far from their families and their people, did not lead to an improvement, they prefer to focus on other possibilities, such as migration or private initiative, which do not require an effort that does not bear fruit.

*We observe that people who have training often do not receive remuneration commensurate with the job they do. A person who has training in a health profession, be it a doctor or a nurse, does not receive anything to cover the needs of his family, so he is forced to leave that job because he has to earn a living... (Young male, focus group 25/29 years old, Bojador).*

These problems are considered especially worrying in the case of women:

*We have many graduating classes of people, young women and men, for whom we have no jobs (...) this situation has led to people becoming dangerously disinterested in studying (...) this situation is especially dangerous for girls. It will result in women lagging behind and falling behind in terms of their training and preparation (Ministry of the Interior).*

However, and despite the potential danger that this situation may have, the data indicate that, both in formal education and in vocational training, the presence of women stands out. Absenteeism and abandonment of studies seems more common among young men, due to the search for income to support their families:

*Regardless of the training experience you attend, you will observe that the majority of those being trained are women. Men are conspicuous by their absence (...) only women benefit from vocational training, because men are looking for a more lucrative job opportunity... (Young woman, 40/45 years old discussion group, Smara).*

Vocational training has been linked to the specificities of the context. Thus, during the armed confrontation, vocational training was understood as support for the war machine. With the displacement of the population and the settlement in camps, the first vocational training schools linked to the needs of that moment were organised (basic education teachers, nursing, administrative work, sewing techniques, agricultural practices). During the 1980s, vocational training was updated and renewed thanks to the intervention of international cooperation. Since the ceasefire, the transformations experienced in the refugee camps once again modify the context and vocational training has lost social value. This is how Martín Pozuelo and Gimeno Martín (2010) analyse it: "Professional training no longer qualifies combatants, nor women who manage camps, nor does it offer any

attraction (...) anyone who wants to acquire technical training can go directly to a family member's workshop to learn the trade and obtain compensation..." (2010: 11).

Having made these considerations, we can say that the field of education, of whatever type, is at a difficult moment in the camps, probably because the type and conditions of life in the camps have changed, and the skills and knowledge required for family strategies of production and reproduction are different. Thus, it makes sense that today's youth do not value education in the same way as previous generations did, and that there is currently a decline and a greater abandonment of studies:

*In the camps that I remember as a child, all my cousins who were 45 or 50 years old had educations. But those people's children don't. They get to high school and stop there. There has been a setback in education. And women also leave school earlier, but not because the family forces them, but simply because they can see it leads you nowhere. And they prefer to go to Algeria or Cuba. In the end, few girls study. It is also true that those who attend have a much higher university rate than men, but there are many who drop out even before secondary school. In the camps you see many 14 or 16 year old kids who have dropped out of school (NUN SAHARA Association).*

Through the workshops and discussion groups carried out with the youth in the different wilayas, we see that there is, in general terms, a significant discontent both with the level of training and with the level of preparation of the teachers in the schools. Likewise, reference is made to the relationship between youth and the teaching staff and the need to make relationships that are considered excessively hierarchical more flexible.

*I think the problem is that teachers today do not have sufficient training to teach nor do they have pedagogical skills. Many of them have only reached the primary education stage and then completed training at the vocational school, but what they have been taught has nothing to do with what is taught in schools. Therefore, their level is low (Young woman, 40/45 years old discussion group, Smara).*

*The lack of teachers and the little freedom they give students to express themselves freely. This is what makes many students drop out of school, because they do not feel listened to and do not have*





*freedom to express their opinion (Young male, discussion group 25/29 years old, Bojador).*

Youth are aware of the difficult employment situation of teachers and how this conditions the situation. In this area of education, the lack of transportation and the need for better sports facilities is also mentioned on numerous occasions. This other young man from Bojador summarizes the faults and, in his opinion, the possible solutions:

*...I also see that there is a lack of teachers in schools. And that is due to the lack of salaries or the poor remuneration they receive; I also observe the lack of transportation and the lack of movement within the schools. And the lack of freedom of expression within the class. Therefore, the solutions here include giving the teacher a decent salary that allows him or her to do their job completely. And that they offer us fields to play sports (...) and that there are means of transportation to go to school... (Young male, discussion group 25/29 years old, Bojador).*

We cannot fail to mention also in this area, the specific difficulties encountered by those young people who are in the militia, and who upon their return to the camps have a family waiting for them and whom they have to take care of. Their difficulties in being able to follow training processes are striking:

*The young Sahrawi who is in the militia is in a difficult situation, because he goes to the military region and when he returns, he has to be with his family and get something for his family to eat. Therefore, he spends his time taking care of his family or going to the military region. He doesn't have time for training (UJSARIO).*

We mentioned, when talking about the economic dimension in the camps, the difficulties in making an estimate of the supply and demand of work. If we talk about public employment, the Sahrawi government has hardly any possibility of maintaining a body of workers who carry out their work on a voluntary basis and as a form of militancy.<sup>18</sup> What makes a worker stay in the field of health or education, who cannot support his family, and who has families around him in a comfortable situation with income from the private sector? Probably he will look for other solutions, such as migration:

*I am a doctor, but a mechanic or electrician has more money than me. Because if I work as a doctor, or if I work as an engineer, I have to work for the government. But if I fix cars I can work for myself. But as a doctor I cannot work in the private sector, because there are no private clinics. And so the only way out is to leave, to migrate. The majority of people who have a degree migrate to Spain, Germany, France or the United Kingdom (Ministry of Economic Development).*

If we look at the lack of a normalized salary from a gender perspective, we see that the situation is even more complex for women. It is true, as Trasasmontes (2011) points out, that the participation of women in the labour market is higher compared to other Muslim countries.

*Today, women's participation in the workplace has changed. I see that there are many women who are working. At my job, almost 50% of the administrators are women. And in hospitals and schools the majority of workers are women (NOVA).*

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18 The government lacks sufficient budget to establish a salary system that guarantees the minimum income that a family requires. According to Caratini: "it can offer between 15 and 30 Euros per month, on average, to its combatants and administration, health and education personnel" (2006: 19). In 2022, the consolidation workshop of the Sahrawi State of the EUCOCO (European Conference of Support and Solidarity with the Sahrawi People) proposed funding a normalized range of salaries. This proposal estimates 10,000 public workers who, based on the scale established by the government, would earn a salary of €300, €200 and €100 respectively. About 25 million annually would be required to pay for it. Since 2010 it has been paid intermittently, depending on availability. International cooperation aims to secure at least 50% of this budget by 2024.



It is a constant in the studies to emphasize the important role that Sahrawi women have had in the camps, especially during the war period. But all this work, of a voluntary nature, has been on top of the work carried out in the home. Thus, in relation to the work in the educational field, one informant mentions the lack of professionals and the harshness of the conditions when it comes to women:

*Why are there no young teachers? Because working in the education sector is very difficult. They have to be with the children from eight in the morning until two in the afternoon. And then, for the rest of the afternoon, they have to prepare work for the next day and do other things. And the situation is even harder when we talk about the fact that most of the teachers are women. Because women have a family responsibility: they work with the children at school and then with their family, with the kitchen, with the washing machine, with the cleaning and so on. And at the end of the month there is nothing,*

*the pay is no more than a symbolic quantity. Sometimes every three months and sometimes every six months, because there is no money (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training).*

We can also deduce that the greater presence of women in public work is related to a sexual division of labour that places men in the role of family provider through economic income:

*Since a man is morally obliged to fulfil his duties to his home and family, he has to look for jobs where he can earn money. But, on the contrary, women are not entirely obligated, because that responsibility belongs to men. Thus, you find women working in different institutions without taking into account the salary, whereas men do care a lot about the salary (General Secretariat of the Polisario Front).*

The fact that there is a significant presence of women in the formations in relation to men is interpreted in the same way:

*When we talk about training courses, it is always noticeable that there is more attendance and interest on the part of women. And this is probably because men are not up to it. They just want to work and don't have time to study, because they are struggling for life (...) if men have the opportunity to work, they prefer to work and not go to study. The existing work is more for men... (UNMS).*

Finally, and in relation to women's access to work, there are two negative elements that women themselves highlight. Firstly, the need to travel outside the family environment:

*The problem is that there are very qualified young women with university degrees who find a job opportunity in Rabuni, but their families do not allow them to leave their camps and work in a place far from home (...) When training opportunities arise in Algeria for a qualification or a professional degree, sometimes the positions remain vacant, because the Women's Union cannot find candidates... (Young woman, 40/45 discussion group, Smara).*

*Women suffer from a shortage of jobs and the location of available jobs (...) If they have to go outside their wilaya to work, it is very difficult for them (Young woman, discussion group 25/29, Dakhla).*

When mobility involves distancing oneself from the family context, the traditions and values of the family influence the decision-making of the young Sahrawi woman. To this, we must add the problems of combining work with the duty to care for children or elderly relatives. Care, as in many other societies, is in the hands of women.

*Even if you find a good job opportunity, you always have to see if it is compatible with your family obligations. This is the reason why we do not take advantage of all the potential we have or all the opportunities that are given to us (Young woman, 40/45 discussion group, Smara).*

This situation has led some young women to begin to contemplate the institution of marriage as a possible way out in a context of lack of opportunities. Marriages at younger ages seem to have increased in number as young women do not see the sense in investing in studies that will not provide them with an income beyond voluntary work in the public sector:

*Girls get married much earlier (...) because normally people who reached this age [the thirties] were getting married because they loved someone and had a life project together. But nowadays it's like a way out. Having no opportunities, they start to see it as a way out (...) No job is well paid in the camps, but the least paid and most precarious jobs, and even the ones that are free, are mostly done by women (NUN SAHARA Association).*

Although women's participation in the labour market is high compared to that of other Muslim countries, the lack of employment affects them to a greater extent. Household work is almost exclusively considered to correspond to the female world, and many of the emerging sectors in commercial activity are linked to the male world. Thus, despite their high levels of qualification and commitment to society, women may find themselves confined to the home. This issue was already pointed out by Vilches and Esparza (2017). Likewise, they mentioned an issue that we consider is still important and that is linked to the labour issue: the (in)mobility of women who in this aspect are always dependent on men. Indeed, women's attachment to the domestic space is not only symbolic, but also translates into material and bodily terms insofar as they depend on their male relatives to move from *wilaya* to *wilaya* either for work or for visiting relatives or for leisure. Job opportunities are further reduced for women when they lack autonomy of movement.

In recent years, based on the economic boost that development cooperation has brought, jobs linked to international cooperation have appeared. They are especially interesting jobs for youth, since they offer economic incentives as compensation for work.

*Why do teachers always go outside the education sector looking for other opportunities, for example, with the NGOs present? Because NGOs can pay them a little better than the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training).*

As this informant points out, NGO incentives are certainly a step up in monetary terms from the quasi-voluntary work that the government can offer. Furthermore, beyond financial compensation, this type of work opens up the possibility of personal relationships that in the future can translate into favours such as, for example, invitations to a country. Something very valuable for any young Sahrawi.

*Youth cannot think about salary. Every job is volunteerism. And when it comes to starting a family, you start to think that you have to find a job, in addition to that social work and helping the Sahrawi cause*



*and its people. You can find another job with an NGO that generates money to raise and maintain a family (General Secretariat of the Polisario Front).*

NGOs hire through the Ministry of Cooperation, their counterpart, and usually look for a profile of people with certain experience and knowledge to be able to develop and execute projects. Trasmontes (2011) considers that the employment being generated by NGOs is increasingly significant, both because it maintains a greater number of direct positions and because of the generation of indirect employment.

In this complex scenario, it is not surprising that the greatest concern expressed by the people interviewed is the impossibility of entering the job market:

*A tremendous challenge is facing how that young person will react after graduating and not finding a job. This is a challenge they have to face daily: how to get a job after having studied so much (UJSARIO).*

*One of the urgent needs is employability, getting a job, because people have nothing to occupy themselves with. And because of the nature of the individual, when he is very unemployed, he could deviate in terms of his behaviour and may engage in other negative things (UNMS).*

The problem is not employability, but the absence of effective employment, which in these structures is extremely complex. In some way, the training of the second generation collides with available jobs. On the one hand, there is no employment structure that corresponds to the training acquired and, on the other hand, any training in the current circumstances will be inadequate, except that which is related to education or health services.

Furthermore, as this person points out, unemployment inevitably generates a high degree of frustration in youth, which can lead to conflictive or even criminal behaviour. When analyzing the economy of the camps, Trasmontes states that unemployment is probably one of the biggest internal threats, among other things because it is fuelling the loss of an educated and skilled population.

*The young Sahrawi studies fifteen years between secondary school, high school and university. And after finishing school, they come here*

*and work at any job, just like the person who has not studied (...) and that is unfair for the student who has been studying all those years. But he is faced with the reality that there are no jobs for his career. And that leads to emigration... (UESARIO).*

We can say that what is happening with Sahrawi youth is what in other contexts has been called “brain drain.” Trained young people with ample potential, not finding a place to work according to their training, undertake the journey to other countries, generally within the aim of forming a family.

*The limitations of employment are extremely clear. They are limitations to fulfil yourself and to work on what you have trained in (Governor).*

*But the problem is that later, when you finish your studies, where are you going to work? That's the problem. Although there are NGOs, projects and all that, not all Sahrawis can end up in these projects (...) There are young people, both young men and young women, who can enter a Sahrawi institution and end up working, but in the Sahrawi situation, now at war and previously under occupation, in 80% of cases they work as a volunteer (...) There are young people who have tried to carry out a project by opening a bakery or some other type of business (...) And others are old enough to join the Sahrawi army (...) And there are also others who try to reach the other continent because they believe that the place they are going to reach is a dream... (CONASADH-Sahrawi National Commission for Human Rights).*

In addition to this migration to countries such as Algeria, Spain or Mauritania, there is, as the following informant points out, a migration to the private sector. Small shops, restaurants, hairdressers, mechanical workshops, taxis... They are commercial activities whose emergence is related to the extra income that some families receive (pensions from the Spanish government, remittances, income linked to the Vacations in Peace program) and also with the support of development cooperation microcredit programs.

*Today young people demand working conditions and a quality of life that we are not in a position to provide. And that is why there are a large number of young people who migrate. There are two ways to emigrate: abroad or to the private sector. Because now we have a private sector that is growing and is becoming stronger and*



*offers greater life possibilities for people (...) This is already a fait accompli whether we like it or not, and it generates a lot of money (Ministry of Health).*

This trade is becoming increasingly important and many young people put their hopes in it so less time is invested in training. This in turn has an impact on the lack of qualified professionals for certain basic sectors, such as health and education, which impoverishes the quality of public services. Directing or retaining youth in public sector jobs that involve minimal income in relation to the returns from private activities is exceedingly difficult. Many young people do dedicate some time to public service, but on the side, after taking care of their activities in the private sector.

Both this lack of qualified professionals and the increase in youth migration have generated the urgent need to implement measures to activate the labour market in the camps.

We have mentioned the microcredit programs of development cooperation. In fact, development cooperation programs have become more widespread in recent years and microcredit is part of a medium and long-term development strategy in which the young Sahrawi population is the protagonist in terms of responsibility and involvement. However, some of the people interviewed consider that a certain assistance-based approach and a disconnection of the content of the projects with the real needs of the population still persist in development cooperation:

*Normally we make the mistake of coming up with projects without taking the population into account (...) I believe that many times Western cooperation responds to a need to silence the feeling of guilt and not because they know what is really needed or what can be contributed. First you have to listen and, depending on what they tell you, do (...) There are associations that have been here for 20 years and have really done nothing (NUN SAHARA Association).*

*It is not a matter of developing a project and then seeking financing of any kind. We have to see what the needs are in the camps and what the people want (CONASADH).*

*I think we have to have a very deep moral review of the work that the third sector does in the camps. Because I do believe that there have been some years in which "welfarism" has prevailed. And I know it's*



*very easy for me to say this sitting here, but this is like any company. If it's not profitable... Because it is profitable for the organizations, but the Sahrawi people are not capitalizing on it, they are not getting any profitability from all of that. (Young woman, interview, diaspora).*

Beyond this critical look as far as development cooperation is concerned, we are interested in highlighting the opinion of microcredit programs, since a diagnosis has been carried out at the Youth Directorate of the Ministry of Youth and Sports.<sup>19</sup> This report offers a positive assessment of microcredits in terms of their viability, profitability and the returns achieved for the beneficiary and the community. However, there are also a number of elements that pose limitations to the success of these programs. The first of these has to do with the qualification of the population in terms of administration and entrepreneurship:

*...people's knowledge of how to handle credits and the administration of those credits is also limited; especially due to lack of awareness (...) we are talking about a slow process in which people must be trained in relation to entrepreneurship. However, the funds are for a determined period of time, which is one year. And the priority is to use up that money in a year's time (...) There is no balance between the time for training, for completion and preparation and the time we have to close the accounts (Ministry of Youth and Sports).*

The second element is related to the lack of a legal framework that regulates the characteristics of the beneficiaries and the responsibilities of each agent participating in the program:

*Another element is that there is a tremendous lack of a legal framework and that everything is driven by personal and inter-institutional relationships. So, who is responsible for misdirected credit? (...) What kind of people should benefit from it? Normally, support from institutions and authorities tend to be for the most vulnerable people, for families with widowed women or those who have disabilities. That's good, but one might also wonder if they have an entrepreneurial mentality. Because if not, it doesn't matter if we give them that money (Ministry of Youth and Sports).*

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<sup>19</sup> We refer to the Report on the diagnosis of entrepreneurship initiatives, carried out within the framework of the "Capacity Development Project of the Central Directorate of Youth". Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2021.

# Drug use and illicit activities

In previous paragraphs one of the people interviewed referred to the risks of having a significant sector of the population unemployed and without future prospects. A situation that generates alarm in any society, but that takes on special importance in the conditions of the camps. The feelings of frustration and helplessness that the economic and political situation causes in Sahrawi youth have also been mentioned.

It is in this context that behaviours can be generated that lead to an increase in conflict among young people, radicalization in their positions regarding religion or war, and the emergence of criminal behaviour and drug consumption.

There are two phenomena here that should be differentiated: one is drug trafficking, which is part of the informal - sometimes illegal - movements and commercial exchanges that have been carried out for a long time; and another is drug consumption by youth in the camps. In relation to the latter, two orientations are perceived in the interviews carried out: one aimed at minimizing the importance of the phenomenon, linking it in any case to the action of Morocco, and another that affirms the existence and seriousness of consumption among youth and draws attention to the importance of working on it.

*Young people are aware that they live in the camps and that there is a lot of danger here. For example, there are terrorists and drugs in the area. Not in the camps, but in the surrounding areas (...) The percentage of young people who hang out with terrorists or who use drugs is very small, it is less than 1% of the young people who live in the camps (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training).*

From this position, the religious factor and the social control that the group exercises over the individual person are mentioned as elements that would stop drug consumption among youth:

*Due to the nature of Sahrawi society, due to government mandates, due to the nature of our religion and also because we are a conservative people, we do not have those cases of drug addiction. They are not very common or very popular here. You can find some, but you can count them on the fingers of one hand. Furthermore, in our society it is not only your family that tells you what you have to do, but there is also the neighbour, the relative, the cousin... they all have eyes on you (General Secretariat of the Polisario Front).*

As we have said, Morocco is often mentioned as responsible for the appearance and increase in drug consumption, which, through the introduction of drugs, tries to weaken and disable the Sahrawi youth:

*Drug trafficking is considered to be a policy of Morocco. In Africa it is considered the first country to distribute drugs throughout the continent. And it is a policy of Morocco to have young Sahrawis who are ignorant, dangerous and not sensitized. And if this is considered a danger for first world countries, imagine for a country that does not yet have its independence and is living in a refugee camp. It is a very dangerous phenomenon that affects the Sahrawi people (UESARIO).*

*The “occupier” is at war with us on many different fronts. And among them I could mention that it is passing a lot of drugs into the camps and bringing in pills. And all this can destroy the will of young people (UJSARIO).*

Those who admit the existence of this problem and the consequences it can have on youth appeal above all to the situation of poverty and lack of work among youth. Furthermore, the need for income to start a family and the difficulties in finding it pushes young people to seek it through drug trafficking.

*There is extra pressure on young people. Because there is no work, they want to get married and support their parents. And that leads them to look for solutions and to think about drugs. Young people have had very easy access to narcotics and are involved in drug trafficking, the trafficking of fuel and the search for gold in dangerous territories (Ministry of Culture).*

*This has to do with the fact that there are no solutions and there is no education. There is no possibility of getting out of poverty (...) so, as*

*a way out, many people, many young people work in the gold trade or in trafficking. There are more young men, although there are also some young women who participate. Normally they work as “drug mules” (NUN SAHARA Association).*

Although, according to the people interviewed, trafficking is carried out by young men, it is important to note the information provided by this informant in relation to young women and their possible work as drug carriers. Drug trafficking, in the context of vulnerability in which many young people find themselves, provides immediate income:

*The government and authorities must work for young people in the face of extremist discourses, drugs or whatever. These young people have material aspirations and want to be someone in life (...) the difference between employment in an institution, which has no strategy, and employment in a drug mafia or a terrorist movement is that you were unemployed and “a nobody”, and suddenly you can give your opinion and have authority. You go from making bricks to a world you never dreamed of (...) this is the reality. They want to come in and they are always knocking on the door (Ministry of Youth and Sports).*

It is necessary to point out the relevance that youth themselves give to drug consumption. In the workshops and discussion groups held with young women and men, the issue of drugs is brought up when asking about other issues such as employment, health and free time, as well as when asking them to identify the most notable changes that the camps have experienced in recent years. Along with changes in the field of construction or the increase in high-end cars, drugs are always mentioned:



*The most notable change occurs in the use of cement and concrete bricks (...) the appearance of drugs of all kinds, and especially synthetic drugs such as pills and “tabs”... (Young male, discussion group 40/45 years old, El Aaiun)*

*The changes that we observe in the camps have to do with the phenomena of drug addiction and drug dependency, such as pills or ecstasy, hallucinogens... (Young male, discussion group 30/34 years old, Dakhla).*

*In the camps there have been many changes, among which bad social habits stand out, such as drug consumption, tobacco consumption, violent robberies and other very bad phenomena that did not exist in the camps (Young woman, discussion group 15/24 years old, Smara).*

We believe that it is important to emphasize, due to the importance it reveals and the health, economic and social consequences it entails, that among youth it is not even necessary to ask about drugs directly. This topic comes to their minds when addressing any issue. For many young people, drug use is linked to an excess of free time that they cannot or do not know how to fill:

*I think a noticeable change is the one concerning drugs and hallucinogens, which is starting to appear frequently in the camps and is a consequence of the fact that young people have no better occupation. That is why young people seek refuge in this type of drugs to escape from the reality in which they live... (Young man, focus group 25/29 years old, Bojador).*

*The young Sahrawi often has a lot of free time, which in itself is not an opportunity but a burden. Young people try to occupy their time playing board games and other games, making tea, spending time with friends or family, etc. And as a result of this lack of employment, new social scourges such as drug addiction or violent crimes appear (Young woman, focus group 40/45, Smara).*

In this sense, in the discussion groups and workshops, young people demand and value the possibility of having leisure centres, entertainment venues, cafés where they can meet, libraries, sports facilities, etc.

Both lack of work and insufficient wages in public employment lead some young people to turn to drug trafficking, a quick source of income that gives them access to new objects of consumption:

*There is a severe lack of jobs, so unemployed and uneducated young people resort to other unwelcome outlets, such as drug smuggling, which causes disease and kills people, and (...) some people's greed leads them to do these bad jobs, as they are not satisfied with the good jobs (Young male, focus group 25/29 years old, Bojador).*

The situation, given the consequences that both drug trafficking and drug use have on society, urgently calls for the provision of jobs by the government. In this respect, according to the words of the following informant, we see that some steps have been taken in relation to drug trafficking:

*There has been some awareness-raising and I think there has been some kind of campaign (...) and this allows us to deduce that there have been and that there are drugs. But it is not for consumption, but for drug trafficking. There is clearly no capacity to consume here. We serve as a transit territory (UNMS).*

*I think there should be a campaign to raise awareness among young people about the consequences of this situation. And not just because of the possibility of going to jail, but because of the long-term consequences in this society. Because it means losing that aspect of the identity of the Sahrawis, which was always to do something that would benefit us all (NUN SAHARA Association).*

As we can see, there is a lot of talk about the causes behind drug trafficking, but less about drug use. Behind this consumption, however, there are always the same causes: hopelessness, frustration, the impossibility of planning for the future, too much leisure time, etc. The harsh physical and mental conditions in which the Sahrawi youth live undoubtedly have an impact on their emotional and psychological health. Drug use as a 'way out' of this situation can seriously affect the physical and mental health of young people<sup>20</sup> and contribute to destroying the foundations of solidarity.

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20 In relation to mental health, Vilches and Esparza (2017) mentioned in their study the increase in disorders such as depression in women, and phobias, psychosis or bipolar disorder in the case of men. The difficulties of treating these disorders stem from the fact that mental illness is considered taboo in Sahrawi society, especially for men.



# Migration

*“There is no meeting of a group of young Sahrawis in which they do not talk about the hope of being able to migrate abroad, about this dream of going abroad and obtaining a better life”*

Young man, Bojador

In all that has been said so far, migration has appeared on numerous occasions, always linked to the situation of unemployment and inactivity of young people, and to the need for income to help their families and create their own (marriage). We have already mentioned the evolution of migration through the different migratory groups: from the ‘Second Polisario Generation’, who suffered the double exile, to families coming from the camps or from Mauritania, as well as young people from the occupied territories and teenagers from the camps linked to the “Vacation in Peace” programme. We are therefore discussing a scenario of high mobility among this population.



On the other hand, Sahrawi migration presents particularities that make it very different from other migrations, since the main point of departure for this population and, simultaneously, the space that is transformed economically and socially as a result of it, is a refugee camp. As Gómez Martín (2010) points out, there is a Sahrawi institution and government in exile, but the scenario in which the movements of economic and social capital take place, the product of migration, is not a Nation-State in the strict sense, but a borrowed territory.

When asked about the causes and effects of youth leaving the camps, the people interviewed point, as we have said, to the need to obtain a higher income that will allow them to start a family or to survive in a world to which they would like to gain access.

*Opportunities are limited and young people need income to start a new life. And they need a lot of money to get married. They need to build a house, own a car and have a job. There are many needs that cannot be met by the jobs available here. So, most young people have the dream of emigration, of going to another country because they have no opportunities (Ministry of Economic Development).*

*Most young people who are highly educated and trained see that they are not going to be offered and take that job or that salary either, because they know they have superior skills to what the job offers. That is why they see emigration as a solution (...) they look for solutions in other jobs or in different regions, such as Algeria. They opt for emigration in order to have what is rightfully theirs... (Polisario Front General Secretariat).*

*The biggest challenge today, in all countries, and one from which we do not exclude ourselves, is the issue of migration. Most young people aspire to get to Europe to look for work. Regardless of what they have graduated in, these young people want to go to Europe to work, even if they do not work in anything related to what they have studied (Sahrawi Army).*

The departure of the best educated young people, who suffer the frustration of not being able to work according to their training, is a 'brain drain' and generates a significant gap in qualified personnel in sectors such as health

and education.<sup>21</sup> And potential political opposition is diluted in the process. However, there are also people who see the positive side of these migration processes.

*On the one hand, it is a "drain", but on the other hand it is a great help to us. Because every family has one or two of its members working on the outside who help them to survive. Because if there are no means to survive, people leave in three or four years. But we have been here since 1975 (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training).*

*This emigration has its negative side, but also its positive side. The positive side is that those young people, who migrate, for example, to Spain or France or elsewhere in the world, work to support their families here. And among those who migrate here to the private sector, the main reason is also to support their families and improve their standard of living (Ministry of Health).*

*Much has been said about the negative side of emigration, but I think it also has its positive side, which is that it has had a positive influence on the standard of living of Sahrawi families (Sahrawi Army).*

These two people refer to economic remittances, money from migration. These flows of money have become increasingly important since they have allowed, as the previous informant points out, for significant support for families. Remittances have also meant that they have been able to access consumer goods that are not basic necessities: cars, mobile phones, computers, etc. Money from migration has also allowed for the emergence of small shops and businesses. It is therefore a very important factor in the creation of a 'market economy' in the camps.

However, not all families receive remittances; ultimately, the money brought in through the migration process has added to other factors that have led to socio-economic inequality in the camps. Moreover, as in other contexts, having one of the members of the family unit abroad becomes another strategy for the reproduction of the domestic group. In the end, this generates a 'culture of migration' among young people, for whom going abroad becomes another step on their journey to maturity.

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21 Gómez Martín (2010) estimates that around 200 Sahrawi doctors trained in Cuba are working in Spain. In his opinion, this migration, together with that of other health professionals, has destabilized the health system in the camps.

*If the youth in the camps are not in the diaspora, it is because they have not yet had the opportunity. Those who have not come are trying. And those who have not yet succeeded will keep trying until they succeed (NUUN Sahara Association).*

Those outside, in the diaspora - as they call themselves - are by no means a homogenous group. The time periods in which they migrated, the youth group they belong to, the cultural and social capital they possess, etc. make up a rather heterogeneous population. On the other hand, these groups have also encountered very different situations in the host context itself. Since the turn of the century, Spain has become a preferred destination in Europe for immigrants globally, and this influx has made the reception of Sahrawis in the country much different than what it was in the 1980s and through most of the 1990s. The scenario has completely changed.

*There are disparate and very different contexts (...) the generations of the 70s and 80s who emigrated to Cuba to study, had a different perspective and arrived here with more tools to adapt. They spoke Spanish and had a slightly more Western attitude towards child-rearing (...) but there are many others who have just arrived from the camps four or five years ago and have just started to master Spanish. . They come from very traditional families and they haven't quite established a rhythm of life... how can I put it? (LEJSEE- League of Sahrawi Youth and Students in Spain).*

This informant points out the difference between the 'Polisario Second Generation' and those who make up the majority of migratory movements today. As already mentioned, the 'Second Polisario Generation' was sent to study in other countries such as Cuba, Algeria or Syria, leaving their families in the camps and suffering a second exile in the context of the struggle for national liberation and sacrifice for the Sahrawi people. The return of these young people to the camps, well educated and with the experience of migration, coincided with a political moment, that of the Peace Accords, of hope and illusion. However, Morocco's failure to comply with them dashed the hopes of a generation that must have felt, after all their efforts, a serious level of frustration and disappointment. This generation moved again in a context of economic migration and a large part of them went to Spain, a country familiar to them because of colonial ties. However, the colonial past is not taken into consideration by Spanish administrations and the Spanish legal system. In addition, the Sahrawi population encounters the xenophobic attitudes of the Spanish population towards people from the Maghreb.

Individuals and families migrating today are very different from the generation mentioned above. Many of them do not possess the cultural and social capital of the former and face even more difficult social and legal contexts than those of the 'Second Polisario Generation'. Although we have mentioned the xenophobia of the Spanish population, it is true that the Sahrawi population initially arouses the sympathy of much of the local population, especially in places such as the Basque Country, where they note the parallels between the Sahrawi conflict and their own political situation. But the passing of the years, the neglect of the international community, the economic crisis of 2008, the perception of the local population regarding the size of the Maghreb population, etc. have led to attitudes changing and becoming more hostile. This is the experience of two young people from the diaspora:

*I think there is a lack of trust, there is prejudice and there is racism. They exist in the workplace, I have experienced it myself. And any of us here have experienced it when looking for a house to rent. You have a salary of 3,000 euro, you bring yours and your wife's salary and they say no, because you have the surname you have... there is racism and I am especially surprised by the Basque Country, which boasts of being so liberal, especially with respect to other communities... (Young man, focus group 17/32, diaspora).*

Mention is made of housing and work, two areas in which people of foreign origin often suffer racism; particularly women who choose to wear the *melhfa*<sup>22</sup>. The daily life of these young people is marked by hostile stares and gestures on the part of locals, which in the long run affects their self-perception:

*We don't talk about it, we don't respond... this creates an inferiority complex. Perhaps we are not aware of our rights. It is also due to lack of empowerment. You don't know the language, you are afraid of the status of your papers or your temporary resident status, that stamp (...) and the racist... who among us hasn't been followed by the guard in a supermarket, in your neighbourhood? You get suspicious looks. That's day-to-day life, even if you are spotless... (Young man, focus group 17/32, diaspora).*

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22 Traditional garment worn by Sahrawi women. It consists of a single piece that covers from head to toe and usually comes in several colors, sometimes very bright. In addition to being a fundamental object in the social norms of reciprocity, it has been configured in the political context of SADR as a symbol of political identity and of the struggle for the Sahrawi cause.

The departure of the Sahrawi population, especially the youth, was initially viewed with great suspicion by the Polisario Front. However, over time, due to the benefits of economic and social remittances in the camps, its attitude has changed and it is easier to obtain permission to leave.

*The fact that they migrate is a challenge not only for our country, but also for us as leaders. One might think that we can no longer contain young people, that we cannot respond to their needs and that emigration is the only way out (UJSARIO).*

The mistrust of the Polisario Front and the image of the 'migrant traitor to the cause' meant that from the outset young people had to commit themselves to three things (Gómez Martín 2016): to return to the camps whenever



necessary; to maintain unity in the diaspora; and to never stop working for the cause of the Sahrawi people. In fact, in the interviews we have seen how, when talking about Sahrawi migrant youth, their political engagement is immediately mentioned:

*The young people are trying to help their family and at the same time help their village (...) they don't think only of themselves and are working to support their families, but they don't forget that they are there for the cause. They may have other nationalities, but they know perfectly well that they are Sahrawis and work for their family and also for the Sahrawi cause (UNMS).*

It is precisely this commitment and the problems of the migration process in Spain that led to the coming together in 2004 of associations of migrants, groups of young university students and groups of intellectuals. Gómez Martín (2016) has researched the formation of these organizations, their relations with the Polisario Front, their limitations and possibilities. The sociologist points out how the migrants' associations were initially distrusted by the Polisario Front, as they were set up outside the official organization structure. As the Polisario Front's mistrust eased and the discourse on migrants changed, the Polisario Front accepted certain autonomy from the associations with which it began to coordinate. In addition, a Polisario Front Office was opened in Madrid and representatives of migrants joined the 12th Congress of the Polisario Front in 2007.

Since 2010, the importance of young Sahrawi university students has grown in Spain. In fact, Gómez Martín (2016) considers them to be the precursors of the social and political mobilization of Sahrawi youth in Spain. Moreover, these groups have gradually become aware that Sahrawi youth are spread across three distinct spaces - camps, occupied territories and diaspora - and therefore face different problems while maintaining a common identity. This was made explicit at the 13th Congress of the Polisario Front, which created the UESARIO (Union of Students of Saguia El-Hamra and Rio de Oro), which unites young people from the three territories<sup>23</sup>.

We see, therefore, that there is an organizational movement of Sahrawi youth that concerns the three spaces in which they live and through which they sometimes travel. Migrant youth become a dynamic element in Sahrawi

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<sup>23</sup> In Spain it is represented by the League of Sahrawi students and young people in the Spanish State (LEJSEE). It was created in 2012.

society, offering different, sometimes alternative discourses to the official ones. Because the cause and the conflict are now experienced from three connected but distinct spaces

Among the young population migrating to Spain, we find voices that are beginning to question the idea of a successful future in this country and that foreground the difficulties of a migratory process that, on the other hand, implies a drain of human capital for the camps. Thus, questions and proposals are posed on how to articulate the diaspora populations and the camps, taking advantage of the social and economic capital of migrants, in order to generate changes in Tindouf.

*There has been a 'brain drain' from the camps and, fortunately, I believe that we have woken up in time from this dream of Europe (...) You go to Spain paying money but getting into debt, because most people don't have that money. They go to a territory where they do not know the language and where they have no papers, and they spend months repaying that debt (...) I think it is also the responsibility of the diaspora to remember this. We need to stop idealizing the West (...) the Sahrawis cannot hold out much longer on Spanish territory. They must come and create jobs here. Right now there are a lot of projects by people from the diaspora to create jobs (...) The first time I heard this idea of 'to what extent are we going to continue to leave our efforts, our knowledge and our purchasing power on Spanish territory' was in 2018. From there I have met a lot of young people... for example a project we are now involved in called 'Cooking for change'... (NUN SAHARA Association).*

Another important issue to analyse, which goes beyond the scope of this diagnosis, is the changes that are taking place among young people in the diaspora in relation to the norms, customs and ways of doing things in Sahrawi society in the camps. Changes in leisure patterns, in gender roles, in the experience of religion, in the understanding of their own conception of who they are as a people are frequent and, as in other migration processes, the young person may find him or herself in a very complex space full of contradictions that are beyond him or her. On the one hand, loyalty to family and community of origin are present; on the other hand, new patterns of



behaviour emerge over which the family and community often exercise strong control.<sup>24</sup>

*Being a very small society where we all know each other, there is always that fear of being judged and not being accepted not only on a personal and individual level, but also because of the feeling of community and family, the feeling of honour. All of this is a burden, and everyone carries their particular burden in a different way. Sometimes all these things make it difficult for young people to relate to each other, but I think that the different organizations and associations are doing a great job (LEJSEE).*

*... because those of us in the diaspora feel guilty towards our relatives or those who have stayed there, and what we do is send an injection of capital to somehow buy our relatives' love and pride in us. Because there are already many who tell them that their son is rubbish, that he drinks or that he is not a Muslim any more (... ) I can assure you that each one of us has mitigated this feeling of guilt in a different way, because we come with a tremendous burden of expectations placed on us (Young woman, interview, diaspora)*

Over time, the different movements of the Sahrawi population have shaped a social, economic and political space that transcends the physical space in which they live. Indeed, between the three main points of this 'transnational' space (diaspora, camps and occupied territories) there is a continuous movement and circulation. This is how some of the interviewees put it:

*Because it is easy for the Sahrawis to move around. For example, I can be in Spain tomorrow, because I have my residency papers. And I can also be in Mauritania, because there are no difficulties in crossing the borders between the Sahrawi camps and Mauritania. And I can also easily be anywhere in Algeria. And I can also be in the occupied zones of Western Sahara with an Algerian or Mauritanian passport (...) this is the ease of movement we have. And this is a good thing, but in our situation it is also very dangerous (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training).*

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24 A control that falls especially on women insofar as the identity or tradition of the group tends to be embodied by them. Identity has, like all social constructions, relations and processes, a 'gendered' character. It is women who convey the identity of the group and it is women's bodies that constitute a space of social control.

*I don't know if we can call it politics, but it is the politics of flexibility. For example, I am a director in the ministry, but from time to time I am a migrant in Spain looking for work in the countryside or in auxiliary services. (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training).*

*I always say the same thing: it seems that when I go to the camps everyone is there, and when I come to Spain everyone is here. The amount of transit is unbelievable (Young male, focus group 17/32, diaspora).*

In all this mobility and interconnections, we must also take into account the spread, especially among Sahrawi youth, of the use of mobile phones and the Internet, which enables constant communication among the Sahrawi population, regardless of whether they are in Mauritania, Tindouf, Spain, Algeria or the occupied territories.

The dangers that this geographical dispersion may pose are obvious, given the specific situation of a population partly expelled from its legitimate territory, under conditions of colonization and systematic violation of its rights,<sup>25</sup> and in different parts of Europe. For the time being, however, this dispersion does not seem to diminish the unity and struggle of the Sahrawi people. However, it does mean that conceptions of identity, the struggle and ways of confronting the future are generated from three differentiated spaces. A priori this is something that enriches the point of view and the discourse, but it can also generate dissent depending on the space and place occupied, because not everything can be coherent across the three spaces.

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25 In this regard, the numerous works and documentaries published by Hegoa since 2010 can be consulted, such as 'The Oasis of Memory. Historical Memory and Human Rights Violations in Western Sahara' (2012). See: <https://www.hegoa.ehu.eus/es/pages/Sahara>

# Family and marriage

*“Family and home is the main cause of inspiration, and it’s the reason why you get up every day and work and organise your whole life...”*

Young woman, Auserd

The field of kinship relations has undergone many transformations over the years, but at the same time there are practices or elements that have either remained the same or have been redefined in a different context. We noted at the beginning of this study how the social revolution initiated by the Polisario Front brought about a series of changes, which directly affected the kinship structure of the former nomadic society: declaration of equality between women and men, reduction of the dowry to a symbolic 1 dinar, eradication of the practices of force-feeding of girls and female circumcision. Moreover, the prohibition of the tribal system, a type of socio-political organization based on kinship structures, also played a role. Indeed, in the revolutionary era, the creation of the Sahrawi People was a relative shift from tribal and therefore family group loyalties and feelings of belonging to a broader identification and loyalty:

*Those born between 1965 and 1975 did not have a consolidated concept of family. They knew the concept of a village (...) the family has been consolidated and now young people are more aware that they have to work for the family rather than for the collective, which is the village (...) in the context in which we have lived, the individual was not so much in focus. I work for the people and he works for his family, that’s the difference (President’s Cabinet).*

However, especially since the introduction of money in the camps, there seems to be a decline of importance placed on extended kinship relations. This is what the previous informant indicates when he mentions the importance for the young Sahrawi of the family as opposed to the community, which has been displaced.

Equal rights for women and men also meant an important change in marriage and thus in the construction of the new family, a ritual that usually marks the passage from youth to adulthood in most societies. The change was in the sense that in addition to the father's consent, the mother's consent was now required, which may or may not facilitate the marriage. What seems not to have changed so much was the fact that the consent of the previous generation was still needed. Today, this consent still seems to play a role, although opinions are mixed on its importance:

*Before it was the family that decided, but now it is the couple that decides. It is a question of terms. Some say that the family proposed and others that it decided, that it chose. But evidently it has changed in the sense that now the couple agrees (UJSARIO).*

*When it comes to getting married we as young people can plan anything, but the last word always has to go to the parents. It is a question of respect. But there are also changes... (NOVA).*

Nowadays it is common to hear in camps about the difficulties young people have in getting married because it is so expensive. Understanding this grievance involves entering into the many material and symbolic exchanges that take place between family groups through marriage. These marriage practices have been changing and transforming over the decades. In the practices of the pre-exile period, marriage involved a system of exchange in which the bride's compensation - the *sadāq* - given by the groom's family, the gifts from the bride's family to the groom's family - the *faskhah* - and the goods given by the bride's family to the bride for the marriage - the *rhīl* - including the tent, were of utmost importance.

Through the *sadāq* or the bride's compensation, inter- and intra-*kabyle* hierarchies were reproduced at that time. It was logical for the revolutionary regime to try to eliminate this practice, but it did not disappear. In Islam, this offering by the groom to the bride is required for the marriage to be considered legal. This is why the *sadāq* was maintained, but as a symbolic benefit. In addition to standardizing the bride's compensation, the national liberation movement adopted roles previously played by the *Kabyle*: different committees organised and prepared the wedding, hosted the guests, and supplied the new couple with equipment from international humanitarian aid. The role of the woman's family in equipping the future wife was taken over by the new regime.



But from the 1990s onwards and in the context of the monetarization of the economy, marriage practices were again affected. According to Wilson (2016) who has analysed changes in marriage practices in depth, by 2007 the intensification of the material aspects of marriage had resulted in a large part of the *sadāq/e* falling to the groom. The reasons for this change can be found in the fact that there is a need, in a context of increasing circulation and mobility of men, for a guarantee for women in relation to possible divorces (Solana 2022; Caratini 2006). It should also be considered that in pre-revolutionary times the new home was furnished by the bride's family and that, later, it was the national liberation movement that took over this role. With all the changes since the 1990s, there are new goods and materials circulating in the camps that cannot be supplied by the government.

Thus, today we find that the bride's compensation has reappeared, but with significant changes, both in its form and content, and in its name: it is now called *dabashi* and includes in the endowment not only the old *sadāq* but also (although no longer camels but household equipment) the items formerly covered by the government and which in pre-revolutionary times were called *rhil*. This process has led to a significant increase in the cost of marriage, which is difficult for the youth in the camps to afford, and which delays marriages.

*We see that there is an excessive waste of money at weddings and an ostentation that is increasing. (Young woman, focus group 25/29, Dakhla).*

*Now there is a lot of extravagance in weddings, and they cost a lot, and that is something that prevents young people from getting married and having children (...) we are a small population and we have to grow, and that is what prevents it, the high cost of dowries... (Young man, focus group 35/39, Auserd).*

This situation, as described by Wilson (2016), also worries the Polisario Front insofar as costly weddings are linked to a demographic crisis - falling birth rates and migration - that may ultimately jeopardize the national liberation movement. This is one of many instances in which we witness the waning influence of the National Liberation Movement on social tendencies, which are acquiring increasing autonomy.

However, despite changes and transformations, the family remains a fundamental pillar of Sahrawi society, and the moral imperative to take care of it certainly presents continuity with the past. This explains why, even when they have moved geographically, economic, social and emotional ties are still maintained. The family remains the basic institution of socialization for children and young people, maintaining authority in accordance with the principle of gerontocracy.

*For the time being, the eldest persons in each family still have the last opinion. That opinion is always that of the father or grandfather. There remains this respect for the elderly. For example, if there is a conflict between families, the solution always comes through the elders. The Sahrawi community maintains this respect for the elderly (NOVA).*

*What we do is try to keep this respect alive. Young men and women have to maintain a certain bond. We want them to be free in their decisions, but without contravening the rules that include that respect. Because we have traditions to maintain. There has to be a balance between what they want in terms of freedom and what should really be (UJSARIO).*

*The role of the Sahrawi family changes according to the context and according to the times (...) but basically the role of education of young people and adults is maintained by the family. The family continues to play this role... (Polisario Front Secretariat).*

But there are also voices that minimize this, insofar as they consider that today's families allow for more autonomy for young people:

*I don't think there is so much impact of the family on the young person nowadays. Rather, there are new mentalities, new aspirations and a totally different context than in the past. I think that the mentality is changing not only in terms of the young person who wants and aspires to new things, but also at the family level (...) there is greater autonomy in families and they give more space. They distance themselves a bit and let the young person act and decide with more autonomy (UMS).*

*The family is still a pillar; the family is one of the elements that I would consider rigid (...) something that cannot be sustained over time. Families used to dictate issues like marriage or work, but now they don't. They still make decisions, otherwise they can isolate you. For example, if you insist on a certain partner, you may be left to your own devices. But beyond that they don't have much influence (Ministry of Youth and Sport).*

*The family of today is not like the family of a few years ago; in the way of thinking, in the way of seeing things, in the approach, in the way of living together, in the autonomy that a woman or a girl can have... (Ministry of Health).*

However, in relation to what this last person affirms, and recognizing the changes that the family institution has undergone, another informant points out that this autonomy would benefit young men, but not so much women:

*Autonomy, change and the evolution of the family towards young people favour men more. Not because of discrimination, violence or any other kind of discrimination, but because of certain characteristics that are deeply rooted in society. For example, women believe that there are limits and they impose those limits on themselves (UNMS).*

It seems that this informant is referring to certain gender patterns that structure parental relationships and that limit the implementation of certain changes that have taken place within families, such as autonomy, and that benefit young women comparatively less. It is true that the place of women in relation to the domestic space is very well defined and it is they, without a doubt, who are in charge of the house and all that this implies (attention and care for the elderly and children, preparing meals, cleaning, taking care of visitors, etc.). On the other hand, it was they who built, organised and managed the refugee camps, making them a central presence in collective life.

*Perhaps what has changed in the landscape is the presence of women. The young woman of the 1980s and 1990s was very present in the everyday life of the collective. But now the young woman is more withdrawn, she is more “inside” and less “outside”. And by this I mean ‘outside’ in the activities, in the participation, in the institutions and in the movement. She is more within the family, in the haima and “with herself” (President’s office).*

This increased participation of women has been studied and is related to the absence of men during the war period. Women led and took care of the work at the grassroots, the whole collective dimension of life in the camps. Perhaps the gradual erosion of this collective life since the introduction of money in the camps, with the consequent ascendancy of the family over broader community units, erased the role of Sahrawi women, while at the same time requiring them to fulfil more traditional roles within the family.

*If we talk about the differences, I see that there are not big differences, it is just that women sometimes find it more difficult to look for a job or to attend courses. You have to take into account that women always have things to do at home, more so than young men, because the man can work and that’s it (Young woman, focus group 30/34, Bojador).*



*They do not want to move forward or join or participate politically for two reasons. The first reason is the fear of failure (...) and the second reason is that young women generally tend to start a family and childbearing life before becoming involved in political participation in society (Ministry of Interior).*

We will come back to this collective and participatory dimension of young people, and especially young women, when we talk about participation.

## Religion

The Sahrawi society's experience of the Islamic religion is always noted for its particularity. It is a practice and experience of religiosity that is embedded in the system of customs (cultural religion), which gives the individual, especially women, greater scope for freedom than in other societies and countries. The more dogmatic and radical versions of the Muslim faith are, generally, not found in this population.

*In terms of belief and idiosyncrasy, we have no problem and we recognize Islam. There is no fear there. And there are no restrictions on religion either. We are not like those societies that measure your beard. There is freedom to use the veil here (...) for us Islam is something inherent. It is part of the family values that are passed on from generation to generation (...) they tell us that we Sahrawis are... they even call us communists and atheists sometimes. They say that we are governed by our women and that we don't follow the Islamic Muslim religion to the letter (...) they tell us that our women are very liberal and that they talk to anyone (Ministry of Culture).*

It is also true that the practice of religion, its meaning and scope, is different in the younger generations. This is an inevitable phenomenon if we take into account the changes that have taken place in the camps: mobility, the use of new technologies, etc.

*People of my mother's generation, who are over 60 years old and who studied the Koran with their father or with their neighbour, are not the*

*same as the young people of today, who have been, for example, to Cuba. You have a religious background coming from different places and you have some external influences (NUN SAHARA Association).*

But, above all, what the people interviewed point out is the increase in religiosity among the youth and the sympathy some young people feel for more extremist or radicalized religious positions, which have long been alien to the Sahrawi religious experience.



*We now have the problem that the most extremist are not the old but the young. There are mosques where they teach you that (...) now they say they have exported it from Arabia. But it doesn't matter so much where it comes from, but how young people assimilate it and believe it (Ministry of Youth and Sport).*

*I see many more young people with external religious influences than 20 years ago. And For example, there is now the influence of Saudi Arabian Islam (NUN SAHARA Association).*

The government considers that, although this phenomenon exists, it does not currently pose a particular danger as it is being controlled. The authorities intend to keep religion in the cultural sphere and avoid its transformation into a political religion. There is a concern that the population may retreat back to religion and reverse the secularization process that was an initial objective of the Polisario Front. National liberation fronts are one of the many processes of modernization in which religion has always been made subordinate to politics. This may have been the case for a time for the Sahrawis, which was possible for a time, but social practices may now be revitalizing the role of religion. As the Ministry of Justice points out:

*It is true that in recent times we have noticed some religious manifestations, especially in behaviour. For example, bearded men or men with a certain way of thinking. But we always try to guide and take the reins (...) with our ministry, with our registers in the mosques; I think we can keep the situation under control. I don't believe that there is religious extremism among our youth (Ministry of Justice).*

What are the causes of the sympathy of some sectors of youth with religious extremism? A local mosque points to the excessive ambition of some young people to earn money, but also to the difficult situation youth face in the camps.

*From a very young age, young people are conscious of wanting to have more and more money. And that is why they do not attach much importance to work and employment. And that leads them down other forbidden paths, such as drugs. Some go down these forbidden paths and others get so caught up in religion that they end up moving closer to terrorism. These young people have studied and many are university graduates, but they have seen that*

*in the end they are sitting at home without a job, without anything. And that directs them to these paths (Imam).*

As we can see, the journey to religious extremism and the path to drugs are paralleled in the testimonies. In both cases, this transition that some young people are making happens within a context of a very difficult socio-economic and political situation, with serious difficulties for employability and, consequently, for being able to start a family. This more or less conscious absence of a future can sow the seeds of religious fundamentalism; a search for refuge in religion as a reaction to socio-economic distress. In this scenario, drug trafficking or religious radicalization becomes attractive alternatives.

*It's not natural for a young person to be inactive. So the young person is available to the first person who provides him/her with funds, whether legally or illegally (...) this was a period characterized by open borders and traffic, and especially by Morocco's interest in continuing to supply large quantities of narcotics throughout the region. And after that came another period characterized by the rise of extremism (Sahrawi Army).*

The recent return to arms and, therefore, the reactivation of the context of war is also mentioned as a cause not so much of radicalization, but of the increase in religious sentiment, linked to the figure of the martyr.

*Now young people are more religious. Now that the war has started, people pray more and all that. Because people go to war to be martyrs (UJSARIO).*

We know that the figure of the martyr occupies a prominent place in the Muslim religion, although in the Sahrawi case, in addition to a religious connotation in the sense of defending the Muslim faith, it is also interwoven with the individual's dedication to a political cause: ending Morocco's illegal occupation of Western Sahara.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> 9 June marks National Martyrs' Day, the anniversary of the fall in combat of the leader and founder of the Sahrawi Revolution, Luali Mustafa Sayed.

# Social Media

*“In social networks there is another war: the media war”*

Youth, Auserd

The use of mobile phones has long been commonplace in the camps, especially among the young population who, as in the rest of the world, use social networks (Instagram, TikTok, X, Facebook and others) and access various digital platforms. The people interviewed all see the use of social networks from different points of view, always weighing their pros and cons. One of the issues that stand out regarding social relationships, and specifically with respect to family relationships and relationships with the elderly, is how the use of mobile phones changes the dynamics and patterns of communication:

*It has brought some advantages, but also disadvantages. And the main one I notice is that, for example, here we have a good habit of visiting each other. The younger ones visit the older ones, so they are aware of what is going on with grandfather and grandmother. This creates a more family atmosphere; there is a bond and a better relationship (...) but with the telephone we call each other and we don't go to each others' homes anymore (UJSARIO).*

*When we used to have tea together as a family, we would all talk to each other and talk about our own things. But now the father or grandfather is left alone because they don't have a smartphone. And that is a big change, because it breaks the relationship between children and their parents and also with older people (NOVA).*

*Before, in our free time, we used to ask the elders to tell us how they had got from the territories of Western Sahara to the camps. We used to ask them to tell us about some battles, about the early days in exile (...) Whereas now we spend most of our time on the phone, and everyone does it, all the family members sucked up in their phones and social networks (Young woman, focus group 40/45, Smara).*

The words of this young woman are interesting insofar as they make explicit a break with a world in which the transmission of culture, in terms of

memory and the collective subject, took place mainly orally and in the family environment.

Less frequent visits or the creation of differentiated spaces that separate those who use mobile phones from those who do not, is commonplace in all societies today. It will be necessary to examine the extent to which these ruptures in family and community social ties affect young people like the Sahrawi youth, who find themselves in extraordinary circumstances, and how they affect society more broadly. Precisely in these circumstances and under difficult living conditions, social networks allow young people to get virtually closer to very different worlds that, as a mirror, show young people a world of possibilities that they lack:

*Suddenly, social networks come into play, putting the whole world in front of their eyes. In their imagination, it seems that everything is even more within their reach (Ministry of Culture).*

*The networks show us a world and then you get disappointed, because people here don't have those things... because I'm seeing people my age or younger who live in other worlds and I don't have the possibility of accessing any of that. And I think that all this is not positive for the emotional health of the youth here (NUN SAHARA Association).*

The latter informant mentions the psychosocial effects that mobile phone use can have on young people. These effects may or may not be aggravated in a context where free time, time spent doing nothing, not knowing how to fill up your time, is one of the most common situations for young people.

*Sahrawi youth have a lot of free time and these special circumstances create psychological problems that affect their daily lives (Polisario Front Secretariat).*

The use and enjoyment of leisure time is in fact one of the priority policies (especially for the adolescent period), since it can prevent the emergence of criminal activities such as those mentioned above. In the absence of activities to give content to time, the mobile phone can become a factor that generates isolation and loneliness in the person:

*People isolate themselves when they find free time, time in which they do nothing. When people can't find something to do, they*

*automatically isolate themselves with their mobile phones in another world (UESARIO).*

However, as far as the excess of free time is concerned, it must be said that, from a gender perspective, this amount of time is not the same for women as it is for men. In fact, it is the man who has the free time, as women have housework in addition to voluntary work or any other kind of work:

*The man is the one who has free time. Because women, when they don't have a job, they have domestic work. And if you are not busy with the house, you are busy with the guests. They often come to visit the man, but it is the woman who looks after them (UMNS).*

Alongside the negative aspects of new technologies, the possibilities offered by the use of new technologies in a camp setting are also highlighted:

*Some people have taken advantage of them to access digital platforms for training, qualifications or university entrance. But I believe that those who do this are very few, 0.5% of the total. And maybe 1% can take advantage of them for entrepreneurship work or whatever. But this is not the general trend (UNMS).*

*The positive thing is that they are now more educated and know how to use the media. I don't know if you have heard about a foundation that the young people have created and which is like a media outlet to provide news and information about the appropriate areas (CONASADH).*

In many young people's testimonies, we find the idea of using social networks to collaborate with the Sahrawi people's cause by calling attention to it, disseminating information, etc. There are associations, both in camps and in occupied territories and diaspora communities that have incorporated digital technology<sup>27</sup> into their work. However, there appears to be ample room for improvement:

*Our experience as Sahrawis in this regard is negative. Unlike the Palestinians and Iraqis, who make good use of social media, we use it for fun and personal things. We could use media, such as*

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27 See, for example, the digital platform @Equipe\_Media or the Nushatta Foundation, @Nushatta\_WS.



*podcasts, for the cause or to talk about the daily life of the Sahrawis... (NIDAL Sahara Association).*

*Years ago people in our village thought that the conflict could only be solved by war, and that is because there were no means of pressure like the internet and social media. I think we can put more pressure using the media, using the networks to our advantage to solve our cause (Young male, focus group 25/29, Bojador).*

In fact, several young people from the camps highlight the work of figures such as Taleb Alisalem, who carries out extensive activity as a lecturer and commentator in the media around the world and, of course, on social networks:<sup>28</sup>

*Taleb Alisalem is a Sahrawi activist who works on his own and shares his cause on social media, because social media is the biggest platform in the world and so you can bring your voice to the whole world and explain the cause to many people... (Young woman, focus group 35/39, Auserd).*

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28 See in X @TalebSahara. Author of Western Sahara. A Journey to Freedom (2023).



# Youth Participation

Regarding the Sahrawi youth participation in the cause and civil society, we can distinguish two different dimensions in the testimonies of the people interviewed: youth participation in the national liberation movement through work in institutions, and participation in associations created directly by the youth.

Regarding the first aspect, when asked generally about the youth and their degree of involvement in the Sahrawi cause, almost all voices praise a youth that does not forget its past and continues to fight for a future:

*Many young people have studied abroad. But they never change. When they come back here, they know that they have come back for their people (UMNS).*

*We are not concerned about the continuity of the struggle with these generations. They form a generation that preserves the cause and the culture. I'm not saying that it's a bright light, but the motive always remains there (UNMS).*

*After almost fifty years and with the global and regional difficulties, young Sahrawis are still politically in favour of the cause. Politics is not philosophy, it is our life. In other countries they say they don't want to talk about politics but in our situation it is in our DNA (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training).*

Praise for Sahrawi youth is intertwined with the need to convey to youth the political legacy of a people in struggle and the demands for youth to live up to that legacy.

*We are working here in the Sahara for an ideal and we want to educate young people about what is at stake, which is self-determination and this national and nationalist ideal. We are always trying to orient and situate young people in that sense. Therefore, the priority for the people in general and for these young people is liberation (...) Young people are a vital part of society. They are the heirs of all that has been achieved and they are the ones*

*who are now shaping the revolutionary trajectory of the people (Polisario Front Secretariat).*

*We do not want just a young worker, but a young worker who fights for the cause. We do not want to train young people for the sake of training them, nor do we want them to work for the sake of working; we want a young worker who fights for the Sahrawi cause and who fights for the future of this cause (UESARIO).*

When looking at the situation of youth participation in institutions, the difficulties associated with low salaries are once again apparent:

*Young people, more or less from 1997 to 2016, were engaged in voluntary work (...) And that helped to build the society. But after 2016 this started to decrease and there were fewer young people working in voluntary work. This is due to several factors, including economic factors. This forced young people to make a living by working... (NIDAL Sahara Association).*

*Voluntary work in the camps is not like in Spain (...) if you tell young people that they have a voluntary job for two or three days, they ask what they are going to get out of it. They can't give three days of their time without compensation, because their situation is very hard. That's why voluntary work here is a bit difficult (NOVA Group Western Sahara).*

The economic difficulties faced by young people in an increasingly difficult context in which the possibility of a job that guarantees survival is diminishing, leads some young people to migrate to other countries. Comparisons with lifestyles in different contexts influence the expectations of these young people. We have analysed this situation in previous pages. We note the emergence of a discourse, similar to that in Spain, about a generation without education and without work, and which is perceived as a potential source of problems:

*There are young people who are involved with institutions. For example, young workers in the education sector, in the health sector, in the administrative sector or in the military sector. And there are also a large number of young people who are studying (...) but there are also another percentage of young people who are outside the institutions. Young people who are not working in education, health*

*or any of these sectors and who are not studying. And these are the ones who are always in danger. And it is not that they are not doing anything, but that we cannot guide or control what they are doing (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training).*

Together with the economic situation and the limitations it imposes, the generational issue also appears in the area of political participation. There is a perception among young people that there is an excessive presence of older people in the institutions and that there is a need for a changeover:

*Youth is quite outside the institutions and in the end you realize that, except in the Ministry of Youth, in most institutions there are much more old people than young people (NUN Sahara Association).*

The youth's perception of the lack of this generational changeover leads to a distrustful relationship between the generations. This lack of confidence increases as the conflict drags on and young people do not see any change in the medium or short term.

*As the years go by, young people begin to find themselves in a new psychological situation and ask the Polisario authorities what they are doing and with whom they are working. And so there is a growing distance between young people and the authorities, because they don't see results: "The Polisario says there are negotiations and there is always a lot of blah, blah, blah, saying that we are the Sahrawi people who continue our struggle to achieve independence. But where is the independence? There are no results." And that's why young people get tired and start asking new and difficult questions. And this is a situation that has a negative impact and young people wonder why they are going to help these people (...) because from their point of view they don't do anything. 'They only travel and come back, make speeches, go to the UN and nothing else' (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training).*

There is a diversity of positions on the generational handover, or lack thereof, in institutions and the government. Young people, especially those in the diaspora community, believe that the different positions come from the differences between their parents' circumstances and life experiences and their own in the present moment. In this debate, the older generation's argument for maintaining the same people in political positions is based on the historical role the Polisario Front played, especially during the first war.

*The older people, our parents, who have lived through the exile, have a feeling of respect and complete trust in the Polisario Front's leaders. Of course, I don't have that view because I haven't lived through what they have (...) Older people trust them blindly, because they are the ones who defended them, who gave their lives for them to get to safety. I argue about that with my mother. I tell her that these people have to change. And she says to me: 'I hope you do the same as they have done' (...).It is an argument that will never be resolved, until the day comes when that generation does not exist... (Young man, focus group 17/32, diaspora).*

*From my perspective, the argument of a young person saying: 'hey, some older people should no longer be in charge', and being told: 'I wish you had done what they have done' is not really right, because we have not lived through the same situation. Because we have not experienced the same thing, you cannot know if that person in this situation would have done the same thing or not; it doesn't make me worse or better, it makes me different... (Young woman, focus group 17/32, diaspora).*

For other young people, however, their elders' line of argument about the Polisario Front's work remains valid and generates a confidence in its leaders that is beyond question:

*I think the opposite of him, although I belong to a young age group. I trust blindly in what they do and I want them to be there until they die... It's not like all young people think one way and old people think the other way, there is variety (Young woman, focus group 17/32, diaspora).*

Those who question continuity and ponder the possibility of change allude to the fact that circumstances have changed a great deal since the 1970s, and that the new scenarios - locally and globally - probably require different kinds of strategies and responses.

*Those times required some things and these times require others... So that is the debate. Why do I want to have a person who is stuck in the past when today's times demand other things? These are questions we should ask ourselves. There will always be respect and admiration. No one is going to take that away. But it is true that we*

*have to reinvent ourselves and keep up with the times.... (Young man, focus group 17/32, diaspora).*

Other voices speak directly of the need for a generational change in the institutions, and point to the lack of a retirement system as a major factor holding back this necessary change:

*Another problem we face is the perpetuity in office of the first women (...) as there is no retirement system; they are faced with the responsibilities of their positions and also the problems and ailments of age. I believe that a retirement system should be put into place for these women to have a decent retirement, so they can step aside and make room for the qualified young women who are asking for their turn (Young woman, focus group 40/45, Smara).*

In contrast to participation in institutions, Sahrawi youth associations seem to be doing well, with the creation of numerous associations, not only in the camps but also, as we have seen, in the diaspora communities.

*Before, there was not so much participation, but now there are many associations. And those who are participating in these associations, in this civil society, are young Sahrawis. And those who are coordinating and managing the NGOs now are young people (CONASADH).*

Last but not least, different informants point to remarkable progress regarding Sahrawi women's participation in the public sphere. The existence of quotas developed in some institutions to ensure women's political participation is viewed positively.

*In the Sahrawi youth, student and women's unions, we see a change in the political participation of young Sahrawi women, which has increased a lot (...) now in the Sahrawi student union there is a quota for women in order to attract them to political participation. And in the Ministry of Social Affairs there has also been a change in terms of the advancement of women. All this has brought about a very noticeable change in the level of political participation among Sahrawi women and young women and has affected social life more broadly. Because young women go to different positions and participate more politically and that gives them a greater political knowledge and it means that there is more distribution between men and women. Before, politics was only for men... (UESARIO).*

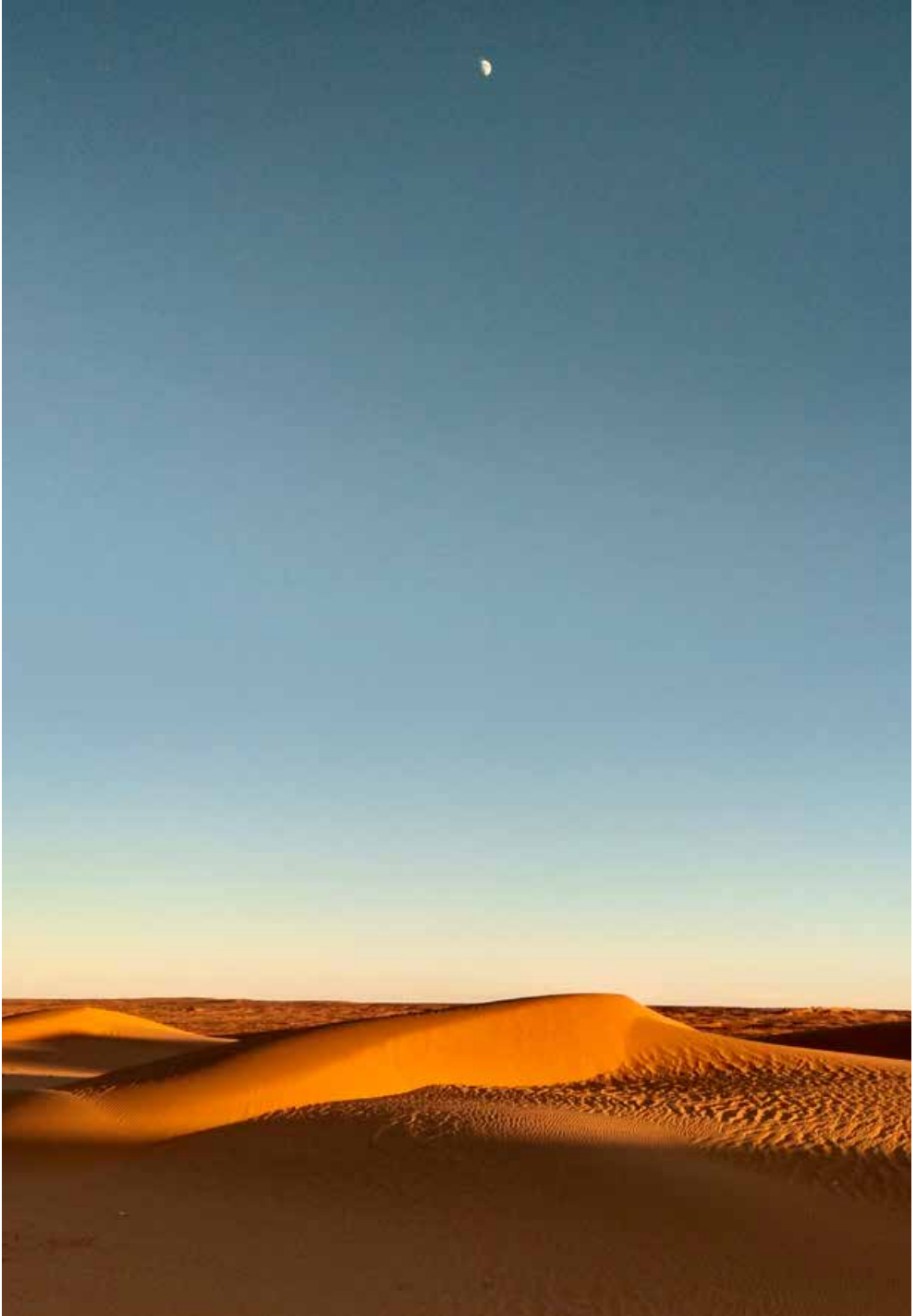
The Sahrawi population continually demands a public role for Sahrawi women, but this does not always translate into a balanced participation in high positions, although progress is being made. What does seem clear is that the presence and participation of women at the grassroots is much higher than that of men. This is in spite of the difficulties mentioned above for Sahrawi women, who will always have domestic work and care responsibilities on top of this participation in the public sphere.

*It is easier to invest in women than in men. Because women are more disciplined, they want to change their situation and they also like to learn new things (...) in education, approximately 85% are women. And in the SADR general secretariat there are 11 women and 50 men. And there are only 35 women in parliament. But in the rank and file the majority is women (NIDAL Association).*

*In the education sector, more than 90% are women. It is well known that Sahrawi women like to be in jobs close to home (...) but this does not prevent young Sahrawi women from being in institutions as well. Today, Sahrawi women and girls have advanced (...) and that is why we see that there are more and more women in elected positions (...) in parliament now there are more and more young women standing for election, who have more ambitions, who want to go further and who are no longer satisfied with grassroots participation (UESARIO).*

*We want more. We participate in the secretariat of the Polisario Front, we are just over 20%. In the parliament we are 41% and in the health sector almost all of us are women. And the same is true in education. And in the president's council there are three men and three women. For the first time we have a woman minister in the Ministry of Internal Relations... (UNMS General Secretariat).*

First of all, it is important to highlight the significant presence of women in the fields of education and health. Secondly, it seems that Sahrawi women are gradually entering and participating in the highest spheres of power, although this does not mean that there are not still many areas of public life in which they can have a greater presence and participation, as well as in the workplace.



# The return to war

As noted in the first section, in November 2020 the Polisario Front announced the breaking of the 1991 ceasefire with Morocco. The reactivation of the armed conflict is affecting the context of Sahrawi youth and will have to be taken into account. The SADR government expresses pride in the youth response to the outbreak of war:

*We didn't even put out a call, the response was spontaneous. And you don't know the lengths they had to go to because of the pandemic. But thousands of young people showed up and we didn't know what to do with them (...) this is a reality. The nationalist sentiment of the Sahrawis is beyond a doubt. Even if they were born in Hong Kong (Governor).*

*The greatest evidence [of the youth's commitment] is the outbreak of armed struggle on 13 November. They even came from abroad; they came from all over the world to participate and even to look for a final solution to the conflict (Young man, focus group 35/39, Auserd).*

This context can generate different societal needs that involve the young population and at the same time seems to motivate sectors of the youth to become directly involved in the war effort:

*Now with the return to the outbreak of conflict and war (...) we have to pause and rethink strategic issues. We need most of these young people for the war, and especially the boys. We need the men on the frontlines and we can't stop them and not go to war. Especially when they are so enthusiastic to participate (Ministry of Culture).*

*War can be a solution, but it is necessary to prepare for it (...) In fact, when the war broke out at the end of 2020, young people flocked here and took the initiative to join the army, but the lack of resources forced them to return home (Young man, focus group 30/34, Bojador).*

However, the armed conflict has also meant the displacement of the population from the liberated territories to the camps, and this movement means not being able to count on a space which, in the words of this informant, served



as an escape valve from the pressure and the harsh conditions experienced by Sahrawi youth in the refugee camps.

*The war has brought with it the closure of liberated territories where many people lived and which offered respite and relief from the pressure of the camps. In the liberated territories there was peace and the youth were occupied in herding and trading (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training).*

It is clear from all the testimonies collected that the Sahrawi youth, especially the men, reacted immediately to the breakdown of the ceasefire by gathering in the camps. It is no less true that when the possible solution to the conflict is raised in workshops and discussion groups, there are voices that opt for the diplomatic route and others that clearly see armed confrontation as the only way:

*I believe that we can contribute to a peaceful solution by means of a UN Council resolution. Maybe we should make some concessions. The legitimacy of the Sahrawi people's struggle will never be under question, and we will not give up the pursuit of what is rightfully ours, but we have to assume that Morocco will not give up what it has under its control either (Young man, focus group 40/45, El Aaiun).*

*I believe that the solution is for young people to get involved in state institutions and in the military institution because, in the end, the solution will come through the military (Young man, focus group 40/45, El Aaiun).*

*As for the contribution of youth to conflict resolution, I believe that youth have an important role to play in the resolution through diplomatic channels (Young woman, focus group 40/45, Smara).*

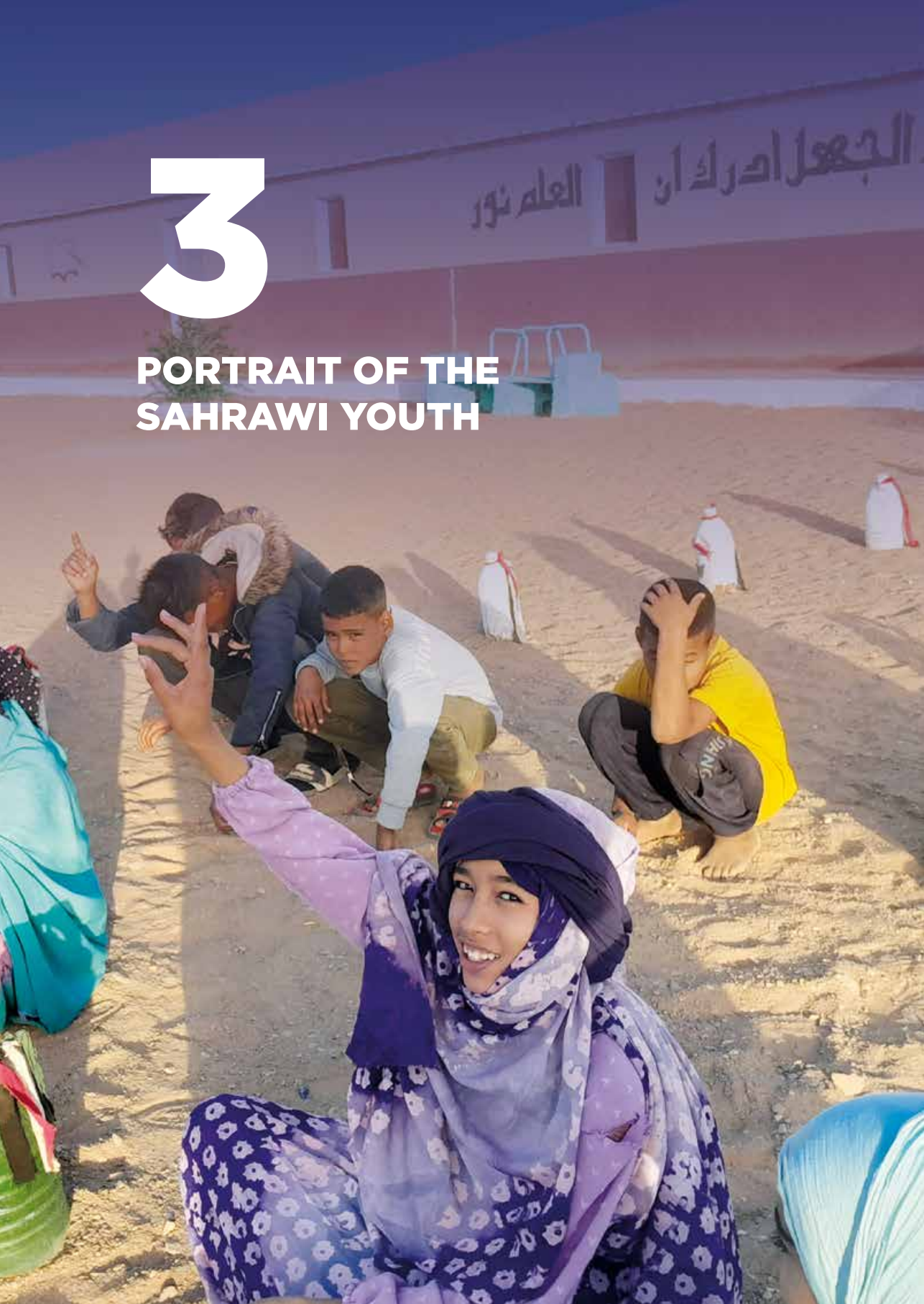
*The only solution available to young people today is war (Young man, focus group 25/29, Bojador).*

Despite these differences, the degree of commitment of young people in this new context can be seen as an example of the effect that, according to Ruiz Miguel (2022), the resumption of the war has had: the intensification of the internal cohesion of the Sahrawi population in the camps.



# 3

## PORTRAIT OF THE SAHRAWI YOUTH





# Youth and social welfare

## Present personal situation

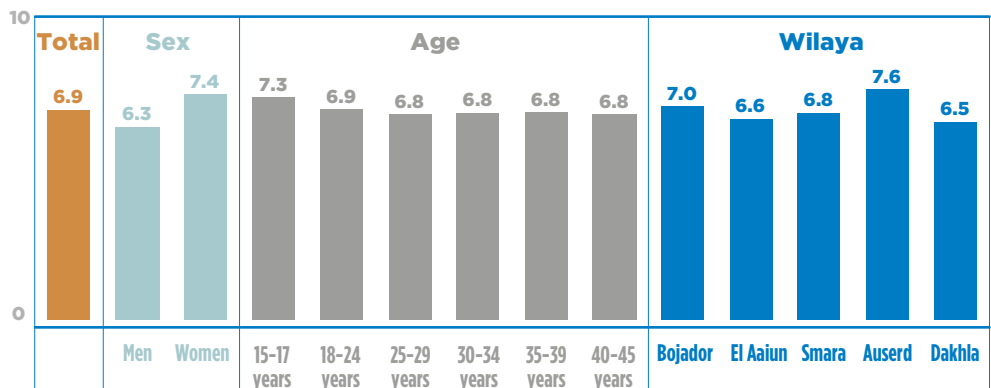
On a scale of 0 to 10, young people aged 15 to 45 living in the Sahrawi camps rate their current personal situation at 6.9 (Figure 1). Women show higher satisfaction (7.4 pts.) than men (6.3 pts.).

If we consider the age of the people surveyed, there is a downward curve in the assessment of the current personal situation as age increases, so that the youngest people - those aged between 15 and 17 - are those who express the highest satisfaction (7.3 points), while from the age of 25 onwards satisfaction is fixed at 6.8 points out of 10.

There are also differences according to the wilaya of residence. In Auserd, young people express the highest rating (7.6 points) and in Dakhla the lowest, with a difference of more than a point between them (6.5 points).

**GRAPH 1.** Evaluation of current personal situation on a scale of 0 to 10 points, according to sex, age and wilaya of residence

### Q6. Overall from 0 to 10, how do you rate your personal situation at the moment?



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHRAWI YOUTH SURVEY

## General situation in the camps

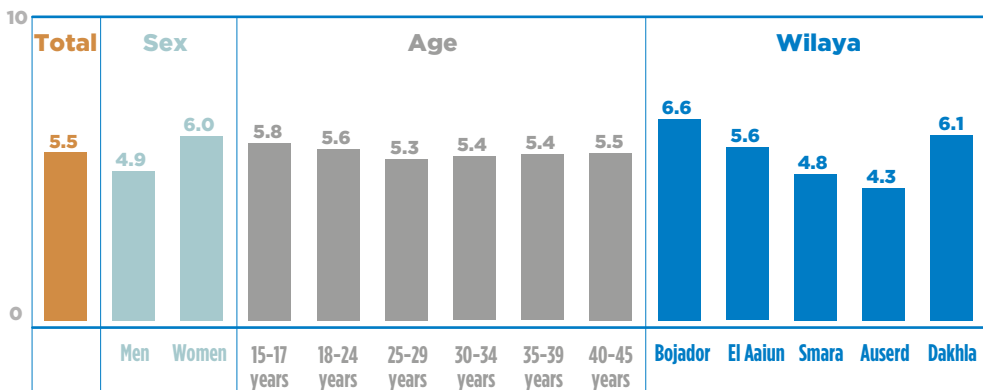
Youth in the Sahrawi camps are much less positive about the overall situation in the camps today (Figure 2). While the rate of satisfaction with their personal situation is 6.9 points and even exceeds 7 for women, the overall situation in the camps does not exceed 5.5 points out of 10 for the youngest people and those living in Auserd.

As was the case with assessment of personal conditions, women again have a more optimistic view of the situation. In this case, they rate it 6 points, while men rate the overall situation in the camps at less than 5 points (4.9).

The same is true for age, with a slightly higher rating of the situation in the camps among younger people. In the case of the wilayas, it is the people living in Bojador who rate the situation in the camps more positively, with 6.6 points, compared to 4.3 in Auserd.

**FIGURE 2.** Rating of the overall situation in camps at present on a scale of 0 to 10 points, according to gender, age and wilaya of residence

**Q9. On a scale of 0 to 10, how would you rate the overall situation in camps today?**



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHARAWI YOUTH SURVEY

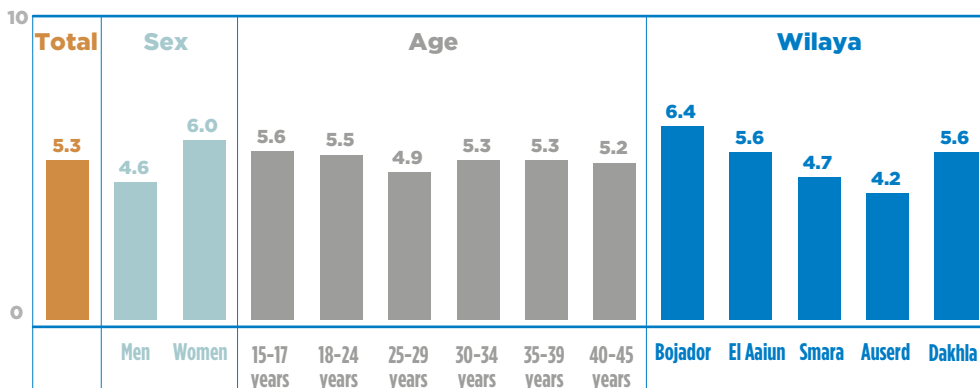
## General situation of Sahrawi Youth

Finally, it can be seen in graph 3 that the rating of the general situation of youth is the lowest of the three questions analyzed so far, with 5.3 points out of 10. Women rate the current situation of Sahrawi youth with a 6, and men with 4.6 out of 10.

Once again, the difference between the assessment of young women and young men is even more marked. According to age groups, those aged 25-29 are the people who consider the situation of Sahrawi youth to be the worst (4.9 points). By wilaya, Auserd again has the lowest score (4.2 points) and Bojador the highest (6.4 points).

**FIGURE 3.** Assessment of the general situation of Sahrawi youth on a scale of 0 to 10 points, according to sex, age and wilaya of residence

**Q11. On a scale of 0 to 10, how would you rate the overall situation of Sahrawi youth today?**



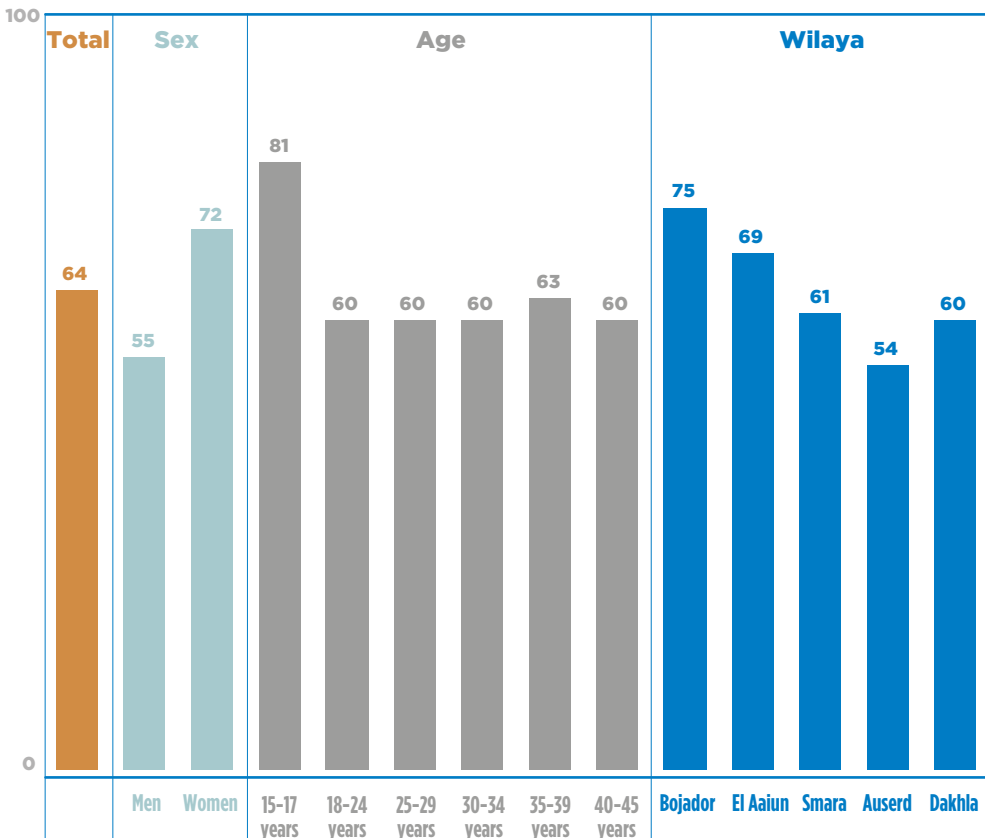
SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHARAWI YOUTH SURVEY

## Present moment evaluation index

Using the three questions related to the general well-being of the Sahrawi youth, we have elaborated a **PRESENT MOMENT EVALUATION INDEX**.

This index reaches 64 points out of 100 for the young Sahrawi population (Graph 4). As we have seen in the previous pages, the value of this average is based more on the individual than the collective situation, whether in the camps or among young people.

**FIGURE 4. PRESENT MOMENT EVALUATION INDEX** on a scale of 0 to 100 points, by sex, age and wilaya of residence



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHRAWI YOUTH SURVEY

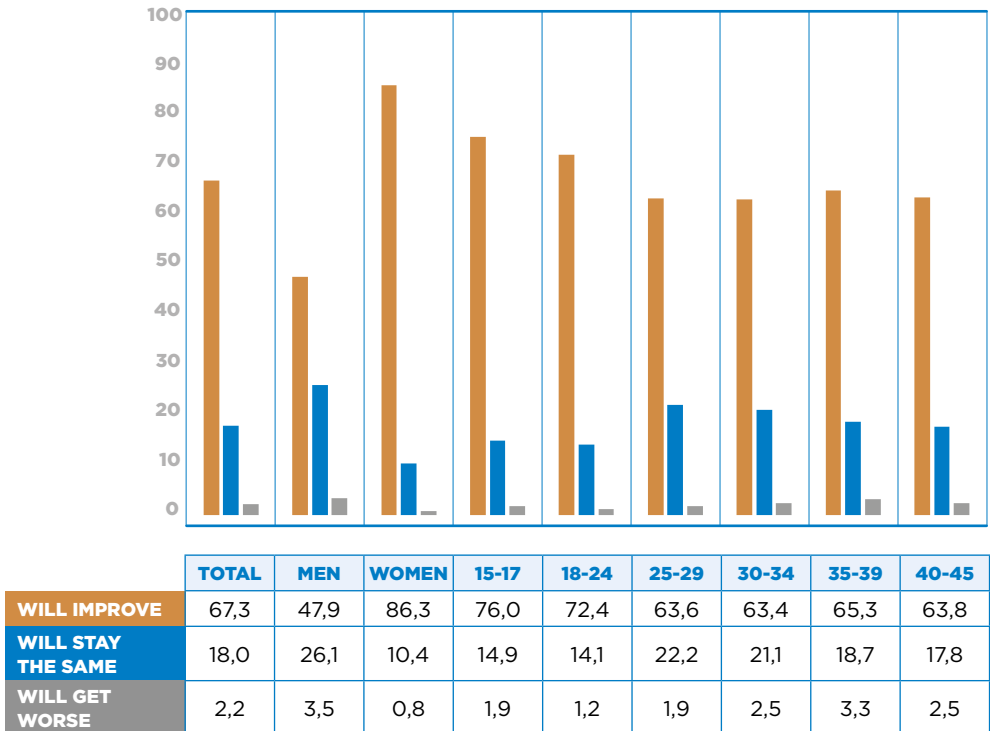


## Personal situation over the next 5 years

As we can see in graph 5, 67.3% of the youth living in the Sahrawi camps believe that their personal situation will improve in the next 5 years. By sex, women are more likely to think that their situation will improve (86.3%) than men (47.9%), although the latter tend to think that their personal situation will remain the same in the future (26.1%), more so than women (10.4%). On the other hand, younger people seem to be the most optimistic according to the data, with 76% of 15-17 year olds and 72.4% of 18-24 year olds believing that their situation will improve.

**FIGURE 5.** Opinion on personal situation in the next five years, by gender and age group (%)

**Q8. And in the next five years, do you think your personal situation...?**



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHARAWI YOUTH SURVEY

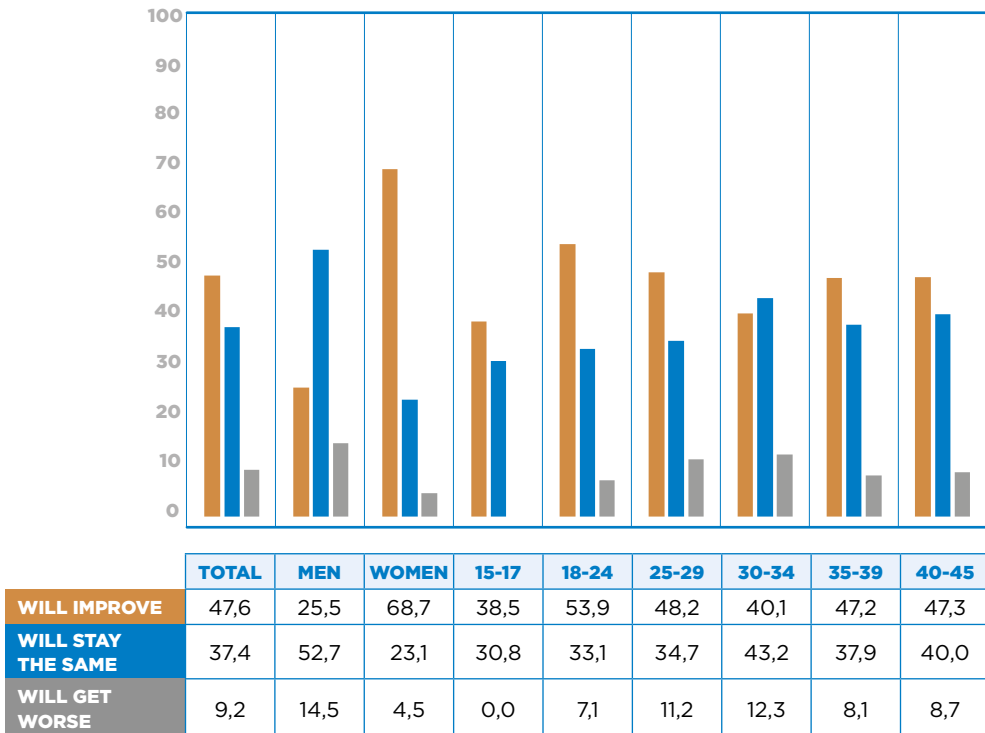
## Situation of the camps in the next 5 years

Similarly, young people were asked about the general situation of the camps in the next 5 years. In this case, 47.6% of Sahrawi youth believe that it will improve in the next five years, another 37.4% believe it will stay the same and another 9.2% believe it will get worse (Figure 6).

Again, this overall value shows a deep gender gap. While 68.7% of women believe that the situation in the camps will improve in the next 5 years, among men it is 25.5%. In fact, among men, the percentage of those who think that nothing will change and everything will remain the same is much higher (52.7%).

**FIGURE 6.** Opinion on the situation of camps in the next 5 years, by gender and age group (%)

**Q10. And in the next five years, do you think the overall situation in the camps...?**



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHRAWI YOUTH SURVEY

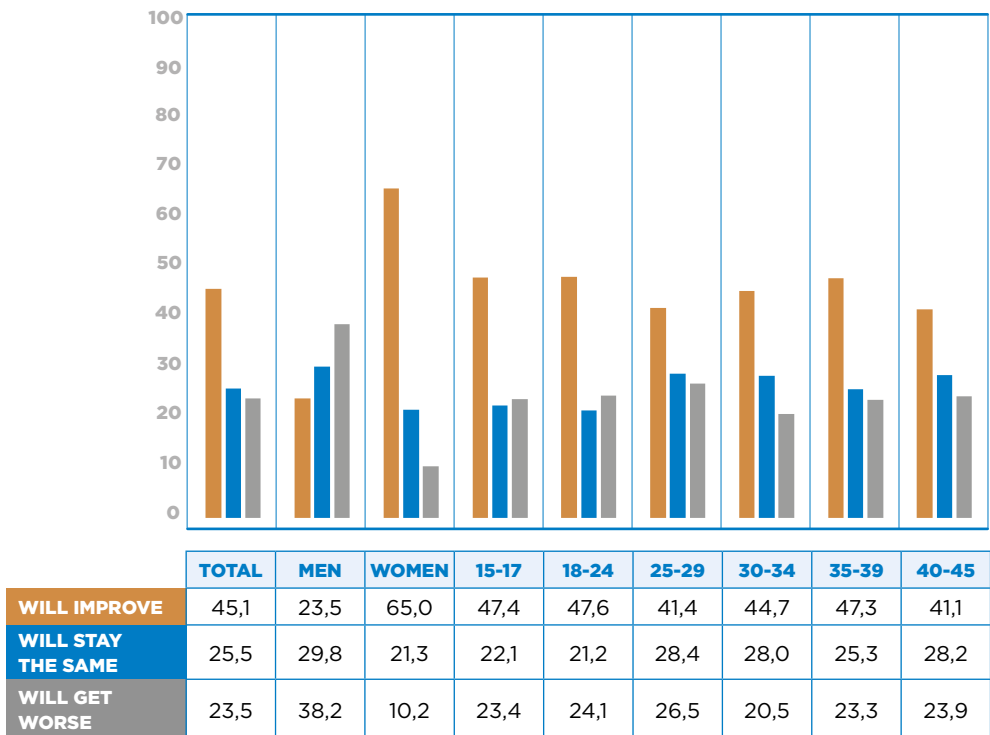
## Situation of Sahrawi youth in the next 5 years

Sahrawi youth living in the camps were then asked whether they think the situation of Sahrawi youth will improve or worsen in the next 5 years (Figure 7).

45.1% of the youth consider that the general situation of the youth will improve in the next 5 years and we see that 23.5% of the youth consider that as a collective the Sahrawi youth will see their situation worsen in the next 5 years.

**FIGURE 7.** Opinion on the situation of Sahrawi youth in the next 5 years, by sex and age group (%)

**Q14. And in the next five years, do you think the general situation of Sahrawi youth...?**

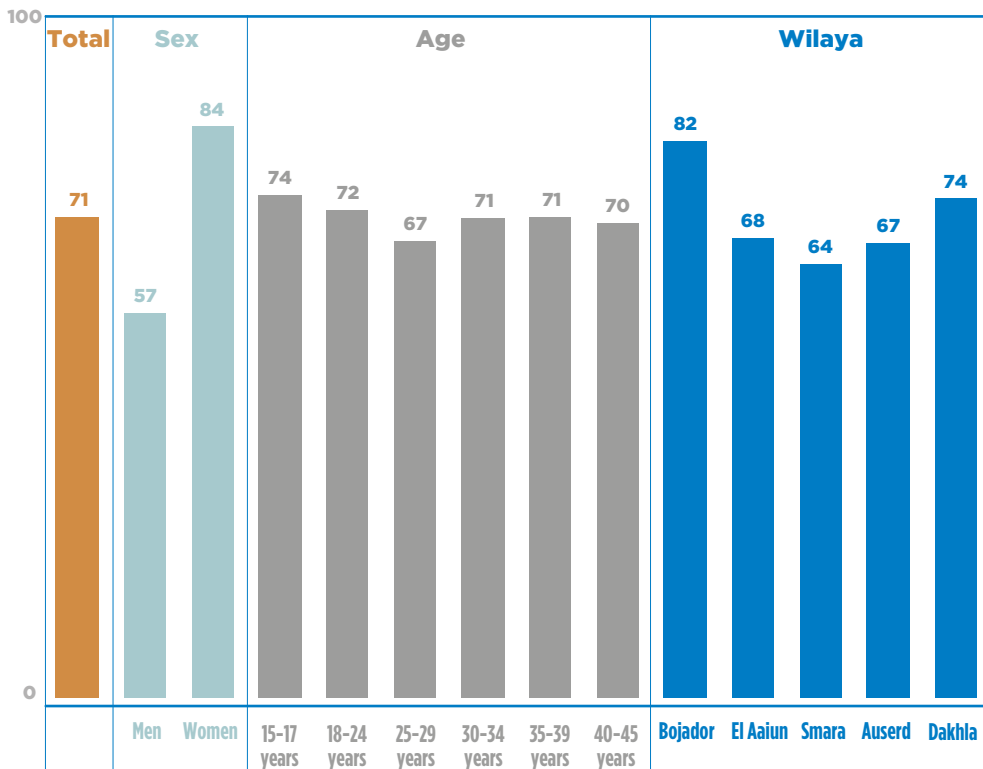


SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHRAWI YOUTH SURVEY

## Confidence index for the future

The **CONFIDENCE INDEX FOR THE FUTURE**, which is compiled from the three questions analyzed above, is 71 out of 100 (graph 8), 7 points higher than the current evaluation index. In other words, young Sahrawis living in the camps place a higher value on their expectations for the future than on their present situation. Confidence in the future is much higher among women than among men (84 points and 57 points respectively). The age group with the highest confidence in the future is the youngest, with 74 points out of 100. At the other end of the scale are the 25-29 year olds, with 67 points. Finally, those living in Bojador are the most optimistic about the future (82 points) and the least optimistic are those in Smara and Auserd (64 and 67 points respectively).

**FIGURE 8.** Confidence in the future, by sex, age group and wilaya of residence



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHARAWI YOUTH SURVEY

## What word best describes the situation in the camps?

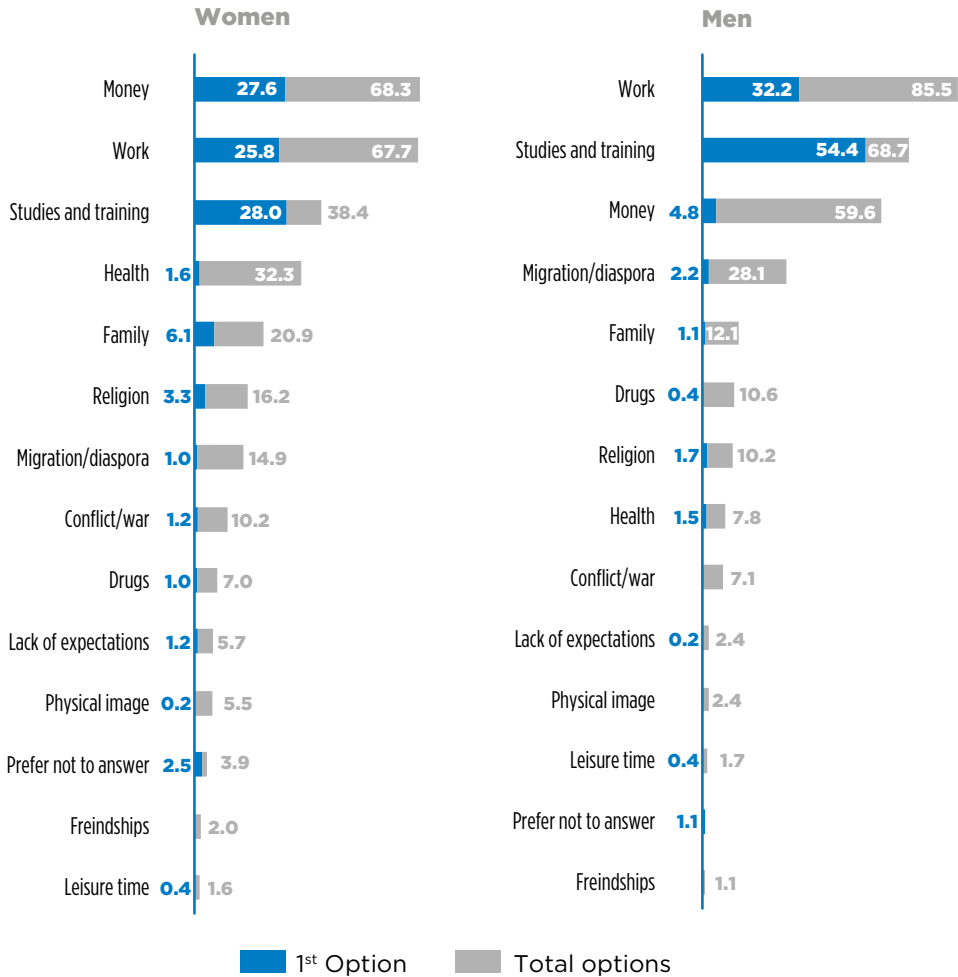
When asking youth in the camps which word best sums up how they currently feel, 18.2% spontaneously mention the word *resistance*, followed by 17.2% who say *hope*, followed in third place by a feeling of *tiredness* (15.9%). *Uncertainty about the future* (11.4%) and a *desire to fight* (10.7%) appear as elements that Sahrawi youth consider to define them.

In the case of women, resistance is the most spontaneously mentioned option by women (20.7%), followed by just over a point difference by hope (19.4%) and, in the case of men, tiredness (21.4%) appears in first place and with a difference of just over 6 points from the second most mentioned option, resistance (15.3%). Women, on the other hand, mention tiredness much less than men (10.6%), as well as uncertainty about the future (10% compared to 13%), desire to fight (9.2% compared to 12.3%) or frustration (5.5% compared to 7.8%), although with smaller differences than the one noted with the feeling of tiredness. The opposite trend is observed with solidarity, where 8.8% mention this feeling as a matter of course compared to 0.9% of men. Hope is a state of mind more often mentioned by women (19.4%) than by men (14.7%).

## Main problems and needs of young people

Figure 9 shows that women perceive money as the main problem or need (68.3%), almost at the same level as work (67.7%), and in third place and at a great distance from the first two reasons, is training and studies (38.4%). On the other hand, for men, work is by far the most mentioned obstacle (85.5%), followed by studies and training (68.7%) and money (59.6%). Both women and men consider studies and training to be the main problem for Sahrawi youth to a greater extent, although the case of the former is less supported (28%) than that of the latter (54.4%).

**FIGURE 9.** Main problems and/or needs of Sahrawi youth today, first and total choices, by sex (%)



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHARAWI YOUTH SURVEY

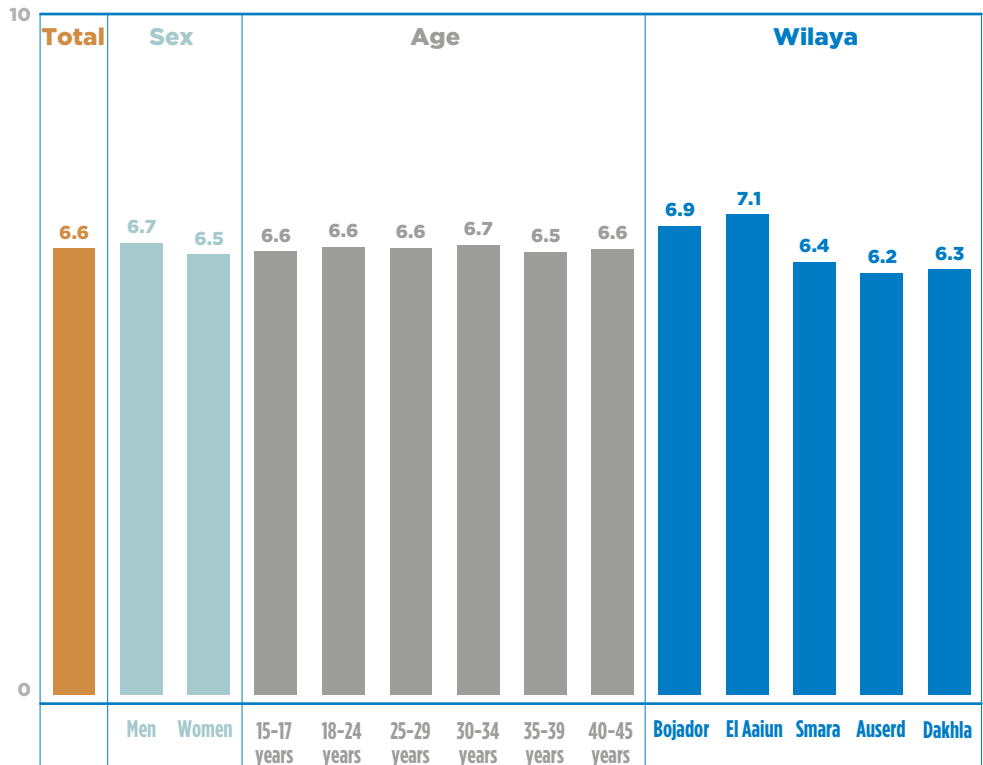
## Personal Satisfaction Index

The **PERSONAL SATISFACTION INDEX** is based on the question asking respondents to rate on a scale of 0 to 10 their personal satisfaction with each of the following aspects of their life: education and training, work, money, marriage or partnership, health, physical appearance, leisure time,

friendships, family, conflict/war, migration/diaspora, religion, politics and gender equality.

To calculate the indicator, the arithmetic mean of the scores given to each of these questions is calculated and the resulting value is multiplied by 10 to adjust it to a scale of 0 to 100.

**FIGURE 10.** Personal Satisfaction Index of Sahrawi youth, average score from 0 to 10, according to sex, age and wilaya of residence



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHRAWI YOUTH SURVEY

As can be seen in the graph above, the personal satisfaction index of Sahrawi youth stands at 6.6, with no major differences between men (6.7) and women (6.5). By age group, there are no major fluctuations either, always remaining between 6.5 and 6.7. By wilayas, El Aaiun stands out, where the index is the highest (7.1), which together with Bojador (6.9) exceeds the overall average.

# Education and employment

## Studies completed or in progress

Almost one in three young Sahrawis (32.2%) have completed or are in compulsory secondary education.

Among women, 76.1% have completed or are in at least compulsory secondary education. Among men, the percentage is similar at 75.6%. Differences are established in university studies, which are more frequent among men (24.2% compared to 17.4% of women) and baccalaureate and vocational training, which are more frequent among women (7.2% compared to 3% of men). The distance from home in which university studies are often undertaken and the custom for men to travel abroad for university studies may be the cause of these differences. Only 1.2% says they cannot read or write or have no education (7.6%).

## Main occupation

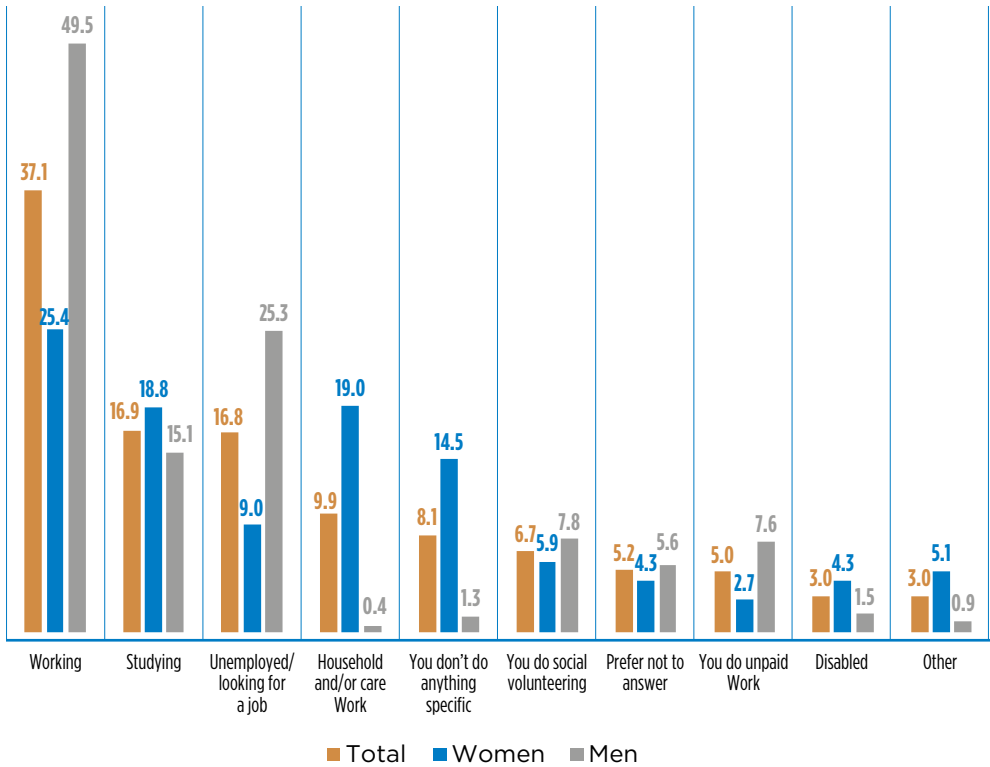
Regarding the main occupation of Sahrawi youth, Graph 11 shows that for 37.1% of the Sahrawi youth population, work is their main activity. The percentage is significantly higher among men than among women (49.5% and 25.3% respectively). Similarly, the percentage of the active population not working but looking for a job is higher among men than among women (25.3% compared to 9%).

Housework is the main occupation of 19% of young Sahrawi women, while among men this percentage is statistically insignificant (0.4%).



FIGURE 11. Main occupation, by sex (%)

## Q19. Currently, what is your main occupation (multiple answers)?



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHRAWI YOUTH SURVEY

## Employment appropriate to training

Only 11.2% of Sahrawi youth whose main occupation is work (i.e. 37.1%) have a job related to their studies or training, i.e. a job appropriate to their training. 36.9% consider that their work does not relate much to their training or studies and 40.5% consider that their work has little to do with their training.

By sex, working women say more often that their job is related to their previous education (13.6%) than men (10%), although men are more emphatic in declaring that it has nothing to do with their previous education (35.8%) than women (27.8%).

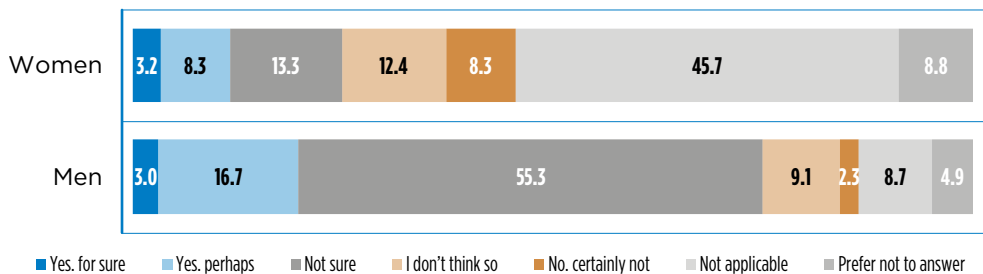
## Perceived risk of job loss

Despite the instability of the Sahrawi camp economy, the percentage of young people who feel they might lose their jobs in the coming year is not particularly high. As can be seen in figure 12, about half of the young people reveal some uncertainty about their immediate future by stating that they are not sure if they will be working in a year's time.

By gender, men see the possibility of losing their job as more likely (19.7%) compared to women's perception (11.5%). Uncertainty is pronounced among men, with just over half being unsure whether they will keep their current job in a year's time, compared to 13.3% of women.

**FIGURE 12.** Perception of the risk of job loss among young workers, by gender (%)

**Q21. In a year's time, do you think you might lose your current job?**



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHARAWI YOUTH SURVEY

## Expectation of training-related employment

When the 16.9% of young people who are studying are asked whether they think that, when they finish their studies, they will find a job related to their training, 14.6% are convinced of this and 25.3% are not totally sure, but are inclined to say yes. Practically half doubt this possibility, and the most negative stance stands at 1.9%.

By gender, women have a more positive perception than men, with 20% being confident and 26.7% seeing it as feasible, compared to 7.5% of men who show the same confidence and 23.9% who see it as possible that they

can get a job in line with their training. The latter are more hesitant (52.2%) than women (42.2%) about the possibility of finding a job related to their training.

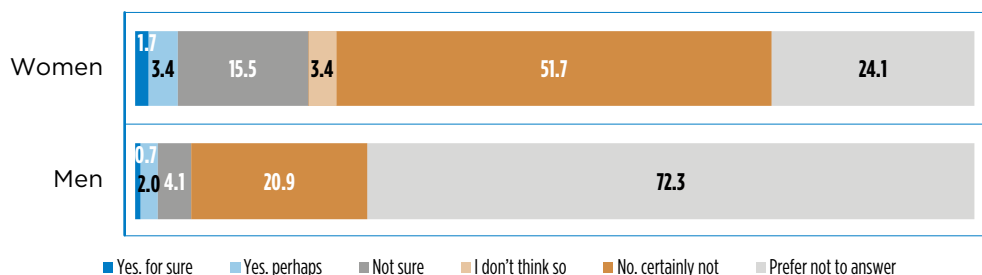
## Expectation of employment

Among the youth who are unemployed, doing unpaid work or social volunteering - 28.5% of the Sahrawi youth surveyed - a very small proportion believe they will find a job within a year (3.4%), 7.2% are not sure if this will happen, and 29.5% say they will not have a job within a year. It is worth noting that 58.9% do not want to answer this question.

By gender, women are again more positive than men, with 5.1% of women believing that they will get a paid job within a year, compared to 2.7% of men. A large proportion of men preferred not to answer this question (72.3%), although women were less hesitant (24.1%) and just over half of the women felt sure that they were not likely to have a job within a year.

**FIGURE 13.** Expectation of employment within one year, by gender (%)

**Q23. When you finish your studies, do you think you will find a job related to your training?**



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHRAWI YOUTH SURVEY

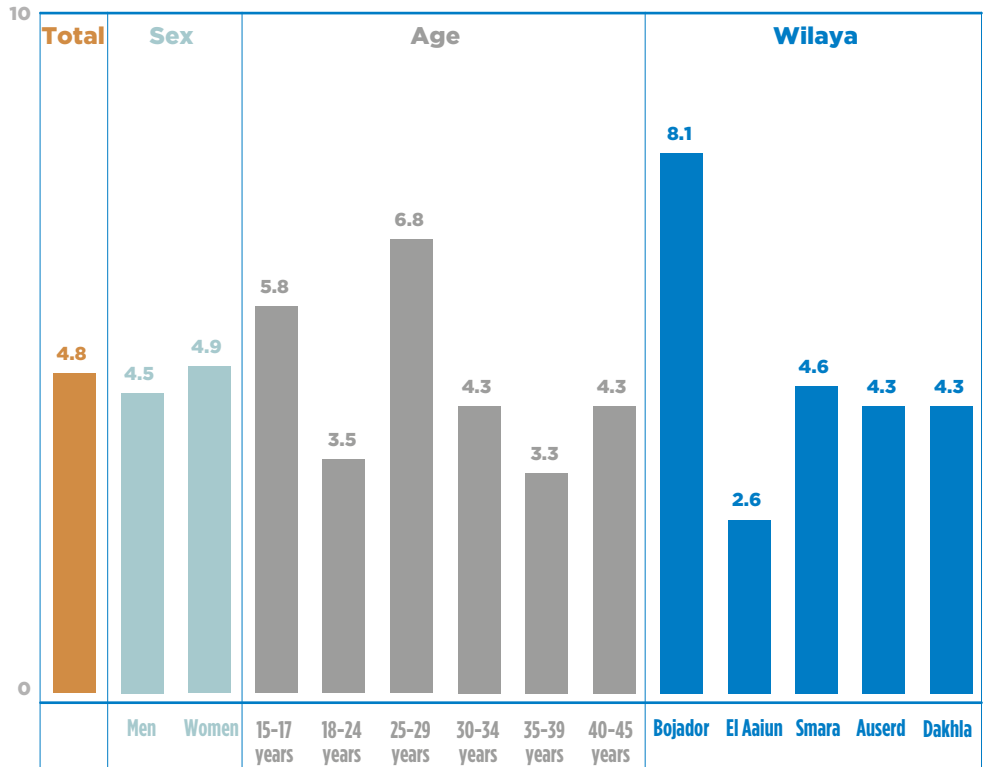
## Expectation of forced migration

Almost half of the Sahrawi youth are not sure whether they will work or study outside the camps in the future. Uncertainty is somewhat lower among women (42.5%) than among men (51.1%), although the latter show a higher expectation of leaving the camps. Specifically, 9.3% are convinced of this and 25.5% say this may be the case, compared to 5.7% of women who assume they will leave the camps and 15.3% who think it may be the case.

The desire to work or study outside the camps is widespread among young people in the Sahrawi camps, to the extent that 41.9% would very much like to do so. 34.2% would like it neither very much nor very little. 18.1% would like it little or not at all.

Working or studying outside the camps is a more appealing idea for men than for women. 55.9% of young men would like it very much or quite a lot, while among women this percentage drops to 28.8%. 32.2% of women are neither in favour nor against, compared to men, where the percentage in this intermediate position falls to 10.6%.

To find out the expectation that young people have of needing to emigrate when there is no desire to do so, we calculated the expectation of forced emigration (Figure 14).

**FIGURE 14.** Expectation of forced emigration, by sex, age and wilaya of residence

SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHARAWI YOUTH SURVEY

As we can see, the score is 4.8 out of 10. In other words, Sahrawi youth in camps do not seem to be forced to emigrate, as the data does not seem to indicate this. So we can say that there is no intention to leave the camps if there is no desire to do so.

# Family and home

## Structure of family units

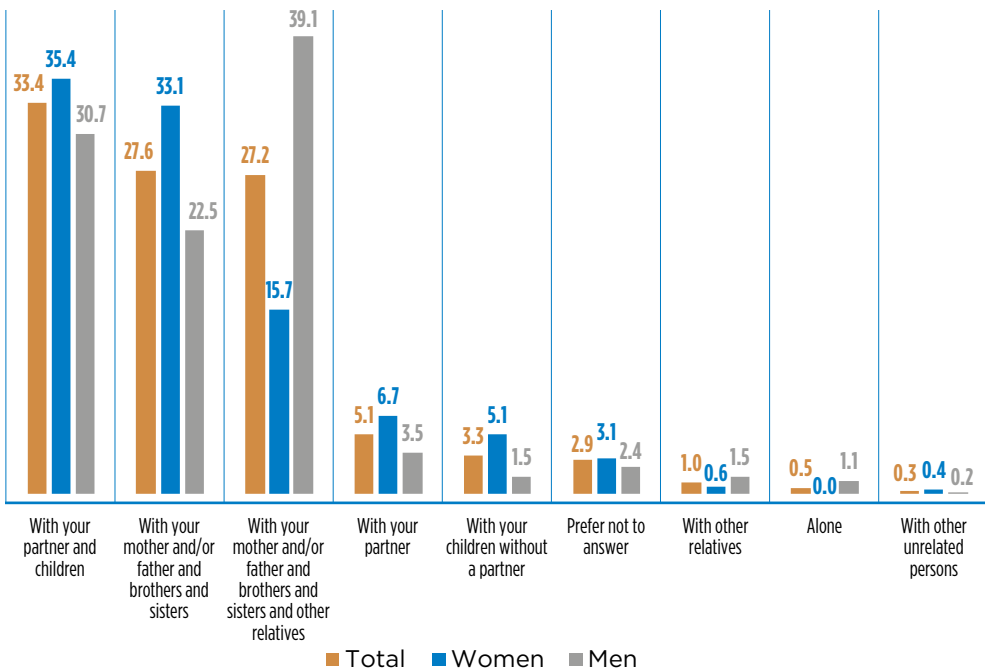
The growing spread of nuclear family units in the Sahrawi camps is evident in Figure 15, which shows that 33.4% of the young people in the camps live with their partner and children.

The percentage of women living with their mother and/or father and brothers and sisters, i.e. with their family of origin, is higher than that of men.

Likewise, the percentage of men living with families larger than the family of origin is higher than that of women, due to the fact that new couples build their homes next to the houses of the woman’s family.

**FIGURE 15.** Living situation, by sex (%)

**Q27. Who do you currently live with?**



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHRAWI YOUTH SURVEY

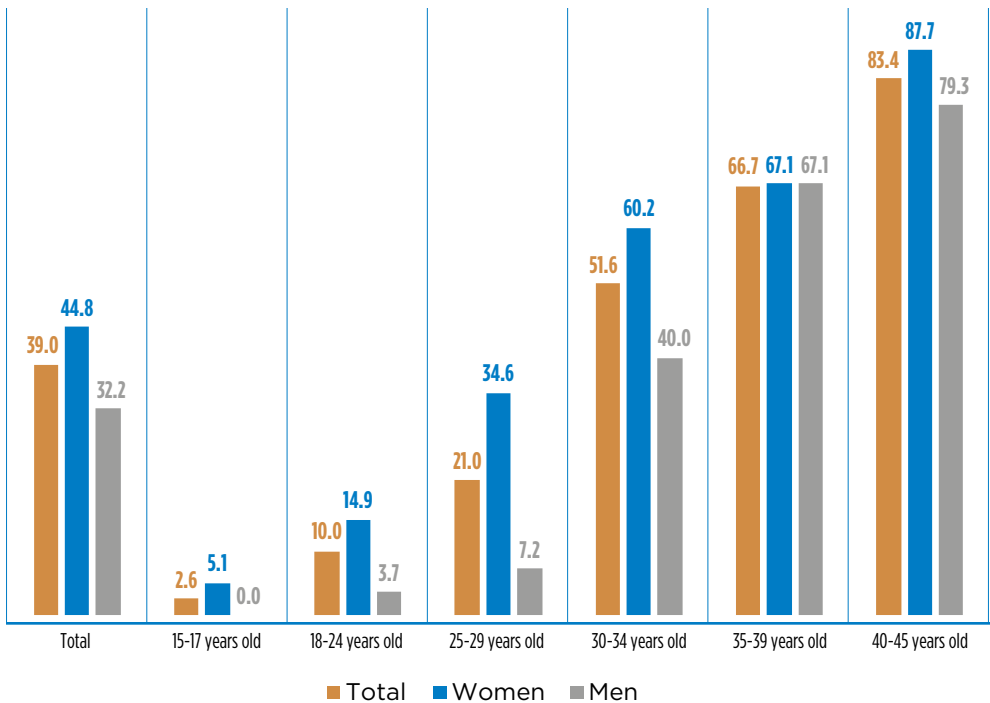
The majority of young people in the Sahrawi camps live in households with many members. More than 4 out of 10 young people (42.6%) reside in households with 11 or more members. Next, 39.3% reside in households with 7 to 10 members, 28.6% reside in households with 4 to 6 members and 13.5% reside in households with 1 to 3 members. Among women and men the distribution is homogeneous, although there is a higher percentage of women residing in this type of extended household with more than 11 members.

## Maternity and Paternity

The high cost of marriage and, consequently, the delay in childbearing means that only 39% of Sahrawi youth have children (Figure 16).

**FIGURE 16.** Distribution of the young population by maternity/paternity, according to sex (%)

### Q29. Do you have any children?



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHRAWI YOUTH SURVEY

## Main source of family income

The main source of income for young people in the Sahrawi camps is odd jobs (38.2%), regular work (23.3%), commercial activities (22.4%), remittances sent by family members or friends from abroad (19.1%) and a relative outside the home (17.7%). By gender, differences can be perceived, such as odd jobs, which in the case of men amount to 46% as the main source of income, compared to 30.9% of women who state this. On the other hand, 27.9% of men say that remittances are the main source of income for them and their families, while only 3.9% of women say so.

## Available money

However, when asked about the money they have for personal use, 27.9% prefer not to answer this question, a percentage that rises to 44.9% among women compared to 9.5% of men who are reluctant to answer. Among the youth who do indicate the amount, 13% have between 10,000 and 40,000 doru, 15% have between 40,000 and 100,000 doru, 20.8% have between 100,000 and 200,000 doru and 18.2% have more than 200,000 doru. In all the ranges described above, men amount of personal spending money reported by men is generally higher than that reported by women.<sup>1</sup>

## Household equipment

In relation to all the furnishings in their homes, as well as all those elements that provide comfort in these spaces, Figure 17 shows some of the elements available to Sahrawi youth in the camps. 8 out of 10 young people have a cooker, gas, utensils and electricity. Between 70% and 80% of young people have a refrigerator, television, toilet, shower and washbasin, air conditioning and washing machine. Half of young people (51.2%) have their own mobile phone and 37.3% have internet network access. On the other hand, 43.2% have internet at home. Almost half of young people (48%) own cattle. The

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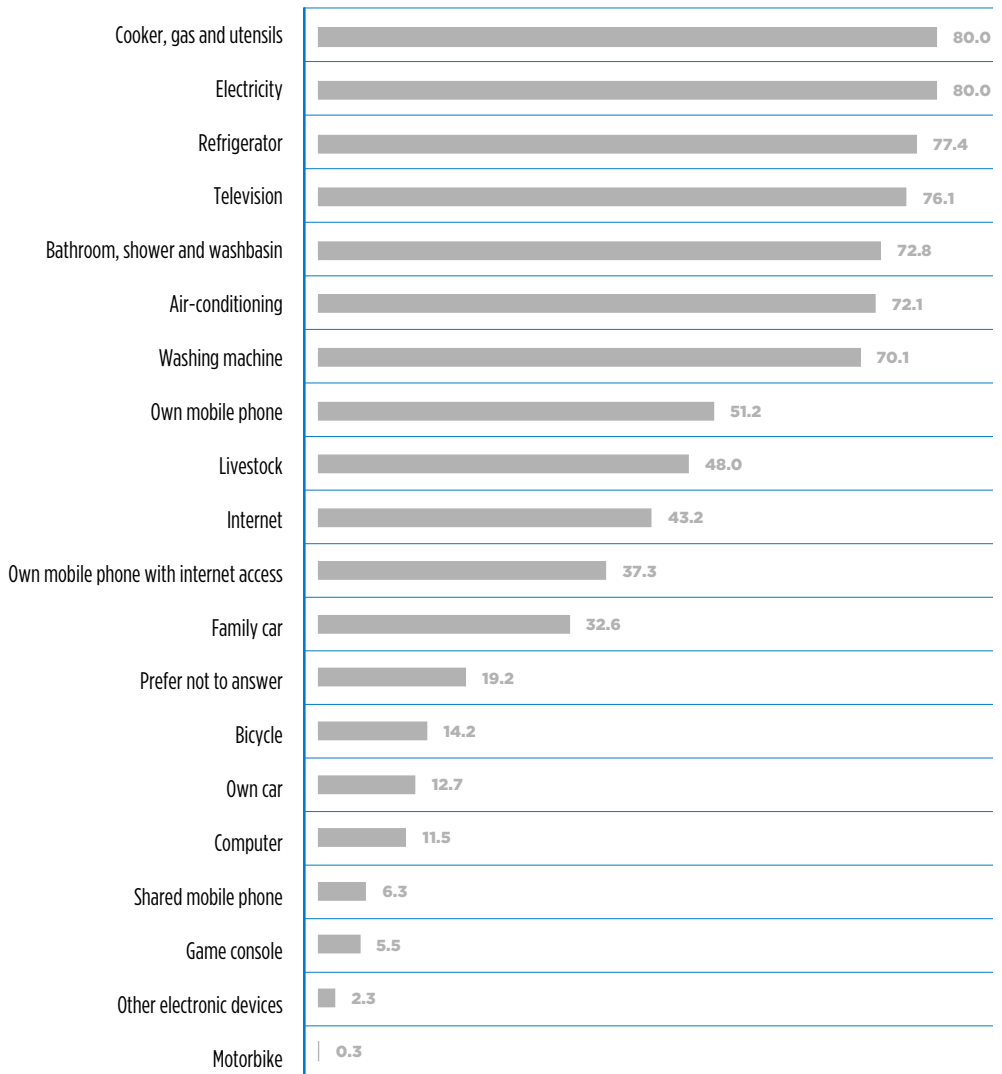
1 20 doru is equivalent to 1 dinar. To contextualise the value of this currency in camps, the average salary of a doctor is 200,000 doru (10,000 dinars) per month. The average salary of a teacher is 100,000 doru (5,000 dinars) per month.



vehicles to which they have access are the family car (32.6%), bicycle (14.2%) and their own car (12.7%).

**FIGURE 17.** Equipment present at the place of residence (%)

**Q32. What items do you have in your home?**



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHARAWI YOUTH SURVEY

Young women and men overwhelmingly say that people or households with higher incomes have a better quality of life.

# Perception of health and self-image

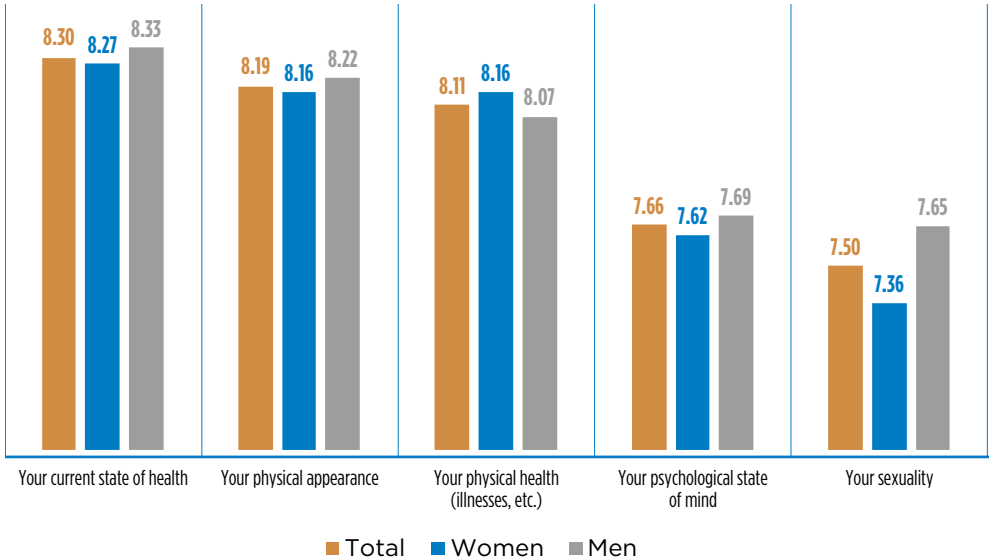
## Assessment of health-related aspects

The most highly rated aspect on a scale of 0 to 10 by Sahrawi youth is their current state of health, with an average score of 8.30 (figure 17). There are no significant differences between women and men in this respect. This is followed by the perception of their physical appearance with a score of 8.19, which again offers similar values for women and men. Strictly physical health is rated 8.11 by Sahrawi youth.

The fourth question, regarding psychological state of mind, shows a decrease from the first three questions. Despite being above 7.5, this lower rating provides an indication of a gap between physical and mental health. Finally, sexuality is rated at 7.50 and is at the same time the item where the gap between women's and men's ratings is the widest (7.36 for women and 7.65 for men).

**FIGURE 18.** Evaluation of different life issues, on a scale of 0 to 10, according to sex

**Q34. From 0 to 10, how would you rate each of the following issues in your life at the moment?**



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHRAWI YOUTH SURVEY

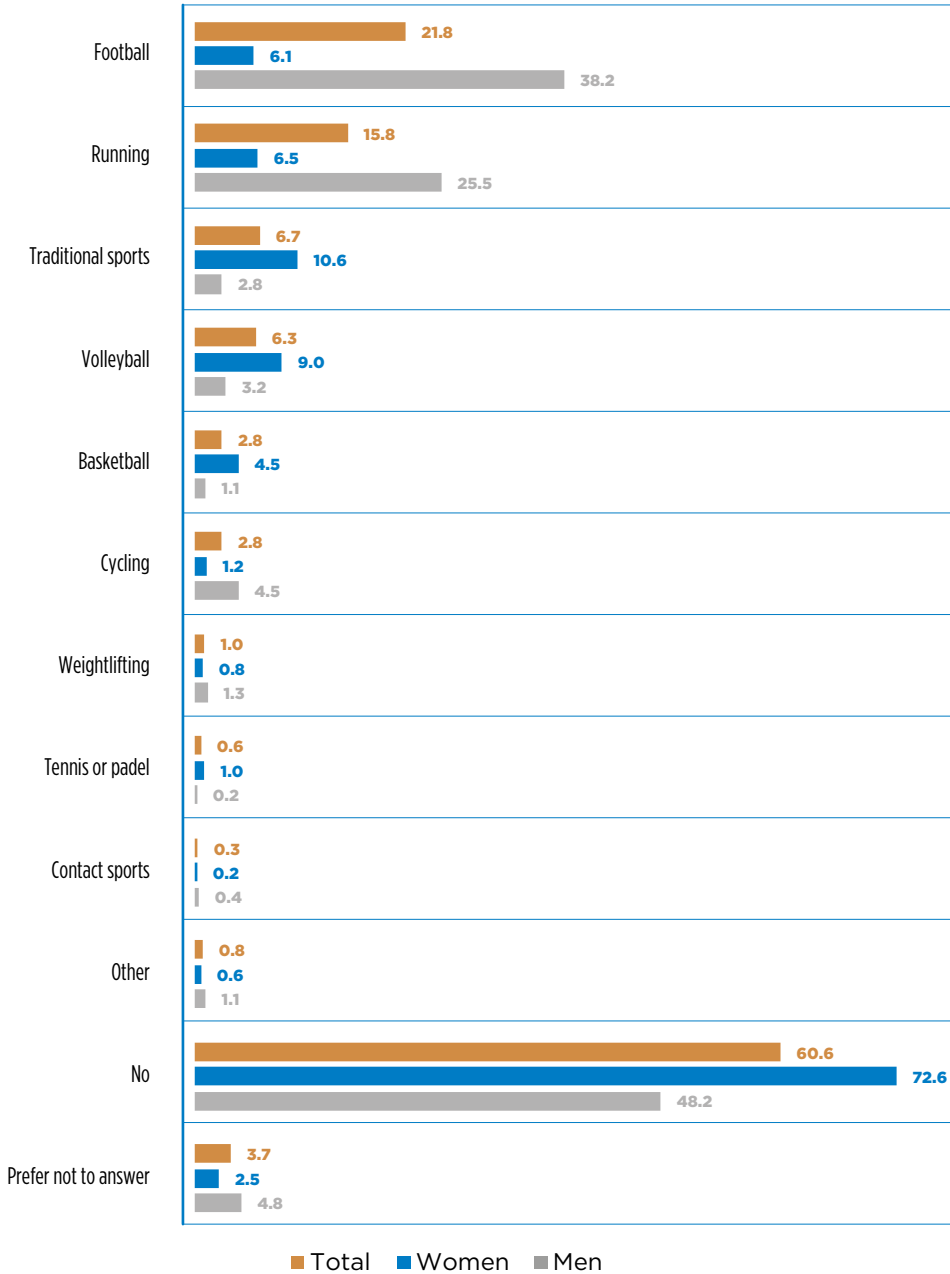
## Sports

Participation in sports is much more frequent among men than among young women in the Sahrawi camps. This can be seen in graph 19 below. Before describing the sports played, it is necessary to mention that 60.6% of young people do not play any sport, which is not surprising if we consider the lack of sporting facilities, one of the main complaints of the young population. Among women this percentage is even higher (72.6% do not do any sport at all), while among men slightly less than half do not do any sport either.

Football is the most common sport among those playing sports in the Sahrawi camps. Up to 38.2% of young men report playing football. Jogging or running comes in second place (25.5%). Other sports have very little presence in the lives of young Sahrawis, with 4.5% saying they practice cycling, 3.2% volleyball and 2.8% traditional sports. In the case of women, their practice focuses on traditional sports (10.6%), volleyball (9%), running (6.5%) and football (6.1%).

**FIGURE 19.** Participation in sports, by sex (%)

**Q35. Do you regularly practice any sport alone or in a group?**



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHARAWI YOUTH SURVEY

# Leisure time and participation

## Available leisure time

One of the major problems resulting from the lack of economic activity, the absence of work and the abandonment of studies is the excessive amount of free time, which sometimes leads to boredom and lack of motivation.

70.4% of Sahrawi youth have more than 3 hours of free time each day after their daily activities. Of these 70.4%, 38.3% have between 3 and 6 hours free daily, 24.8% have between 6 and 9 hours and 7.3% have more than 9 hours, i.e. they have the whole day free, probably as a result of being unemployed. By sex, 35.7% of men say that they have between 1 and 3 hours free, much higher than the figure reported by women (13.4%), although as the number of free hours increases, women outnumber men in terms of time spent idle.

## Daily activities

Sahrawi youth spend a large part of their time working, with 38.3% of them choosing it as their first option, and a total of 42% of respondents. While studies and looking for a job are the second and third most time-consuming issues (16.6% and 13.3% respectively) as first choice, the total number of responses for both is around 20%. However, in the sum of the three main tasks, we find that household chores are, for 41.9% of young people, the second most time-consuming task, with connecting to social networks in third place (30.4%).

However, if we analyze the data according to sex, we observe that, for women, household chores are their main task, as 36.2% mark that option first, though specifically among young women living in the camps the first marked option is work (25.4%), with household chores coming in second (22.7%). However, only 0.4% of men indicate household chores as their first choice. On the other hand, although work is the first option for both women

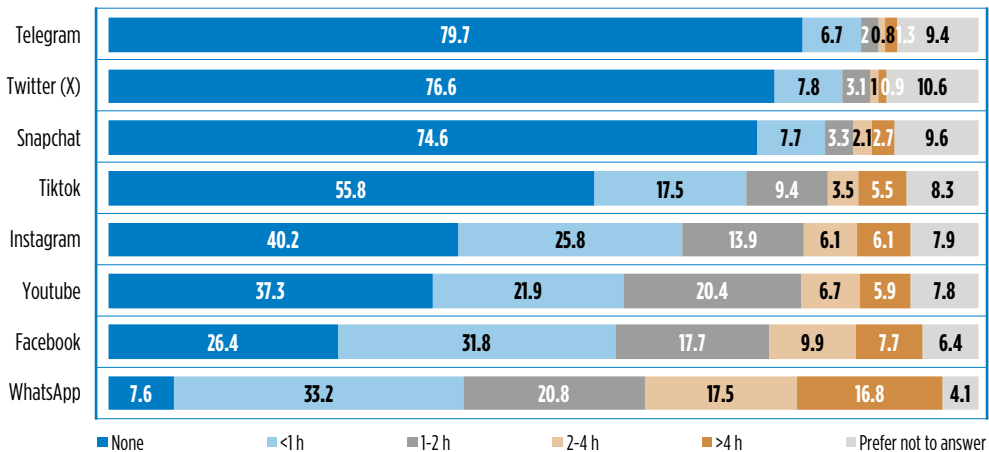
and men, the proportion of the total number of women’s responses is lower than that of men (36.2% and 53.6% respectively). Job search is a task with a higher presence among men (35%) than among women (3.7%). Regarding the use of social networks, 43% of young people say that this is one of the activities in which they spend the most time, although the figure for young women drops to 15.3%.

## Use of social media

WhatsApp is the social network where Sahrawi youth living in camps spend the most time (Figure 20). 16.8% say they spend more than 4 hours on this instant messaging application, 17.5% between 2 and 4 hours, and 20.8% between 1 and 2 hours. In contrast, of all the social networks surveyed, Telegram is the least used instant messaging application - 79.7% report not using it. Facebook is the social network where young people spend the most time in camps, with 31.8% saying they spend less than 1 hour a day, and 7.7% spending more than 4 hours a day.

**FIGURE 20.** Daily hours spent on each social network (%)

**Q39. How many hours a day do you spend on each of the following social networks?**



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHRAWI YOUTH SURVEY

## Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs use

Regarding the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, 41.7% of young people in camps do not know people who use these substances, although this negative response is even higher among women (48.3%) than among men (23.8%). On the other hand, half of young people are aware of tobacco smoking in their immediate environment, with women being less aware of it (34.6%) than men (68%). 6.2% of young people report using alcohol, 3.5% pills or psychotropic drugs and 2.9% hashish or marijuana.

52.1% of young people in camps are not aware of any criminal activity having been carried out. By gender, the lack of knowledge is higher among women (59.5%) than among men (44.1%).

83% of the youth in the Sahrawi camps believe that there is a deliberate strategy by neighbouring countries to introduce the practice of drug trafficking and consumption among Sahrawi youth.



# Values and identity

## Religion

Interest in religion among Sahrawi youth has increased in recent years, both among women and men. 59.6% of women say that their interest in religion has increased in recent years, with no significant differences between women and men.

By age group, there is an increase in interest in religion among 30-34 year olds, with 66.5% reporting this. People aged 40-45 also say that their interest in religion has increased in recent years (63.8%).

## Social changes in the camps

Sahrawi youth were questioned about the most important changes that have taken place in recent times in the camps (Figure 21).

Men consider that there have been more changes in the Sahrawi camps than women. The most important change, mentioned by 46% of Sahrawi youth, is the presence of drugs in the Sahrawi camps, but what is particularly striking is the difference between women and men on this issue. While 68.5% of men mention the presence of drugs as the most significant change in the camps, only 21.8% of women mention this as the main issue.

The inflow of income, i.e. money, is the second change mentioned by Sahrawi youth, with 31.5% of mentions. Here again, there is a big difference between women and men, with men also mentioning this change as more important (43.2%), compared to 20.4% of women.

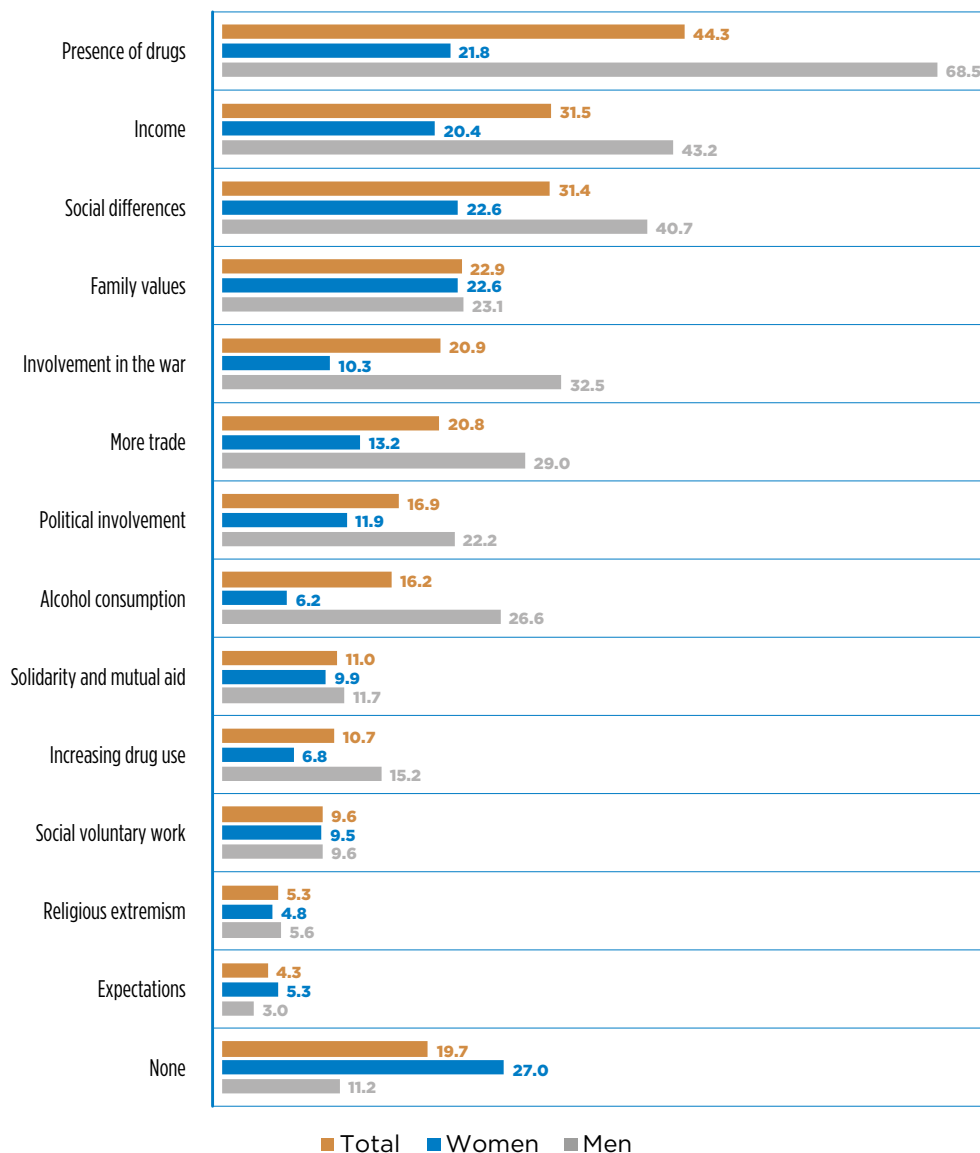
A change directly linked to the previous one, namely the economic differences produced by the difference in economic income, is mentioned by 31.4% of Sahrawi youth, and we again note a very significant difference between women and men.



But it is the fourth change mentioned where women's and men's ratings are similar. Family values are mentioned as an area of change by 22.9% of Sahrawi youth, with similar percentages among women and men.

**FIGURE 21.** Most important changes that have taken place in the camps, by gender (%)

**Q44. What do you see as the most important changes taking place in camp life?**



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHRAWI YOUTH SURVEY

## Solutions to the Sahara conflict

The most highly rated way of resolving the conflict is armed struggle, with 8.20 points out of 10. This way is the most favored, or the most highly rated, by both women and men.

None of the other proposed avenues score 5 out of 10, and they are ranked as follows: peaceful activism (4.26 pts.), denouncing companies for illegal trade (2.88 pts.), courts of law (2.44 pts.) and UN resolutions (2.36 pts.).

The only significant difference between women and men is regarding the ability of peaceful activism to resolve conflict. Women are less confident than men in this avenue of resolution.

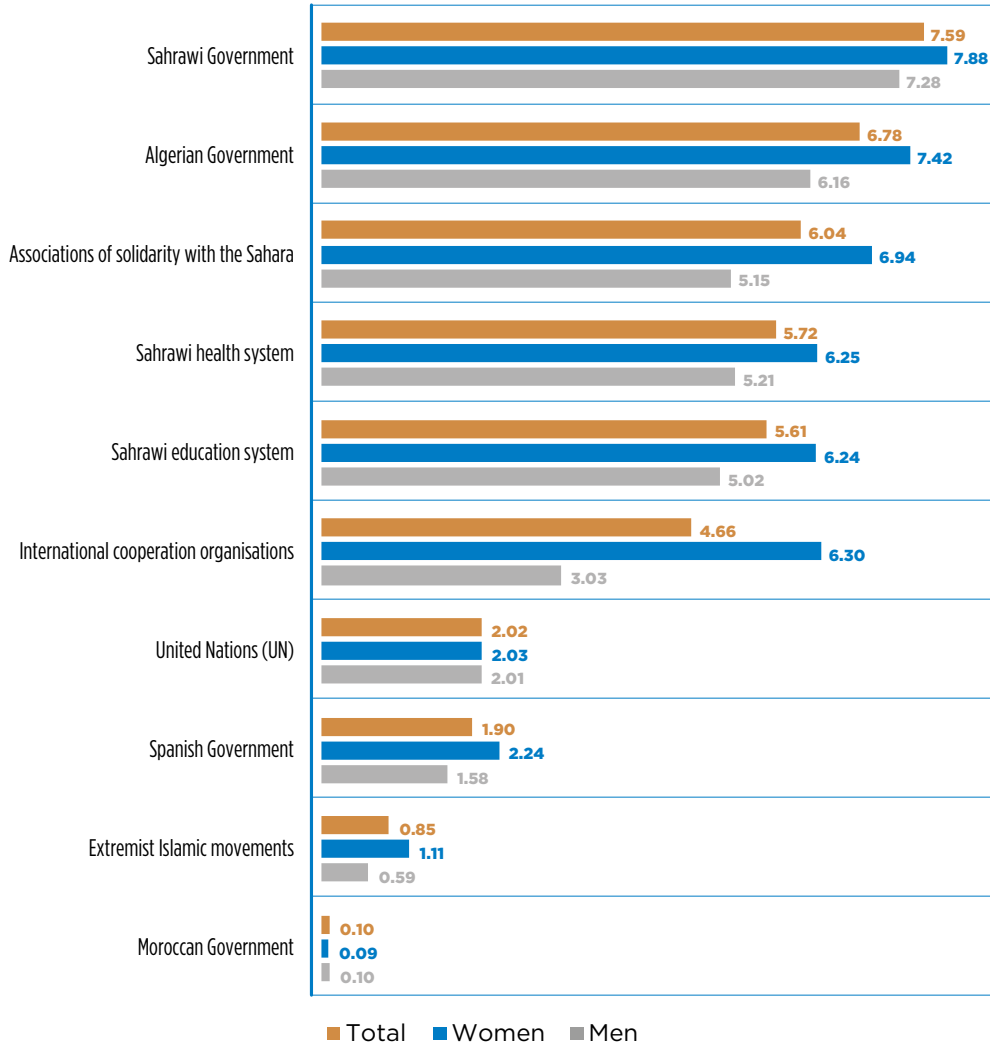
## Confidence in institutions

On a scale of 0 to 10 points, the organization or institution that generates the most trust among Sahrawi youth is the Sahrawi government (7.59 points).

This is followed by the Algerian government (6.78 points), Sahrawi solidarity associations (6.04 points), the Sahrawi health system (5.72 points) and the Sahrawi education system (5.61 points). Rating below 5 points are international cooperation organizations (4.66 points), the United Nations (UN) with 2.02 points, the Spanish government with 1.90 points, extremist Islamic movements with 0.85 points, and finally, as the institution or organization that inspires least confidence, the Moroccan government (0.10 points) (Figure 22).

Women express more confidence in each of the institutions they have been questioned about. Confidence in the Sahrawi government is 7.88 points among women, while among men it is 7.28 points; with regard to trust in the Algerian government, the gap between women's and men's scores is even wider (7.42 points among women and 6.16 points among men); there is also a large difference regarding trust in Sahrawi solidarity associations (6.94 points among women and 5.15 among men); the Sahrawi health system also reflects this trend of greater trust among women than among men, as well as the education system and international cooperation organisations.

**FIGURE 22.** Degree of trust inspired by the following institutions and organizations, by sex (%)  
**Q47. On a scale of 0 to 10, how much confidence do you have in these organizations?**



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHRAWI YOUTH SURVEY

## Channels of communication between youth and the Sahrawi Government

The assessment of the channels of communication that exist between the Sahrawi government and the youth in the camps is very lukewarm. 52.2% of the people interviewed rate this communication as neither good nor bad, and this percentage is higher among women than among men.

Only 3.2% of Sahrawi youth consider the communication between the Sahrawi government and the youth to be very good. 14.6% consider it good and 19.5% poor. 4.0% consider it very bad.

## Awareness of the First Youth Plan

32.5% of the young people in the Sahrawi camps are aware of the existence of the first Youth Plan that was implemented ten years ago in the camps. 59% are not aware of it and the remaining 8.5% prefer not to answer this question.

Awareness of the first Youth Plan is much higher among men (40.8% say they are aware of it) than among women (25.2%).

## Evaluation of the Sahrawi Government's actions

The assessment of the actions of the Sahrawi government and the Ministry of Youth and Sport in the field of youth reflect similar values to those discussed above with regard to communication between the institution and youth. 53.4% consider the Sahrawi government's performance in the area of youth to be neither good nor bad, with similar percentages among women and men.

Answers from the rest of the people interviewed were also distributed in the same way. 19.6% consider this performance to be good, 15.3% consider it to be bad, and at the extremes, i.e. those who position themselves in the very good or very bad ratings, reach residual values (2.3% consider it to be very bad and 3.9% consider it to be very good).

## Improvement of living conditions

36.4% of the young people in the Sahrawi camps confidently state that they enjoy better living conditions than their parents at the same age. An additional 32% also say that they enjoy better living conditions than their parents at the same age but with some reservation. A further 18.1% are not sure that this is the case, 5.2% do not think so and 2.3% are sure that it is not the case.

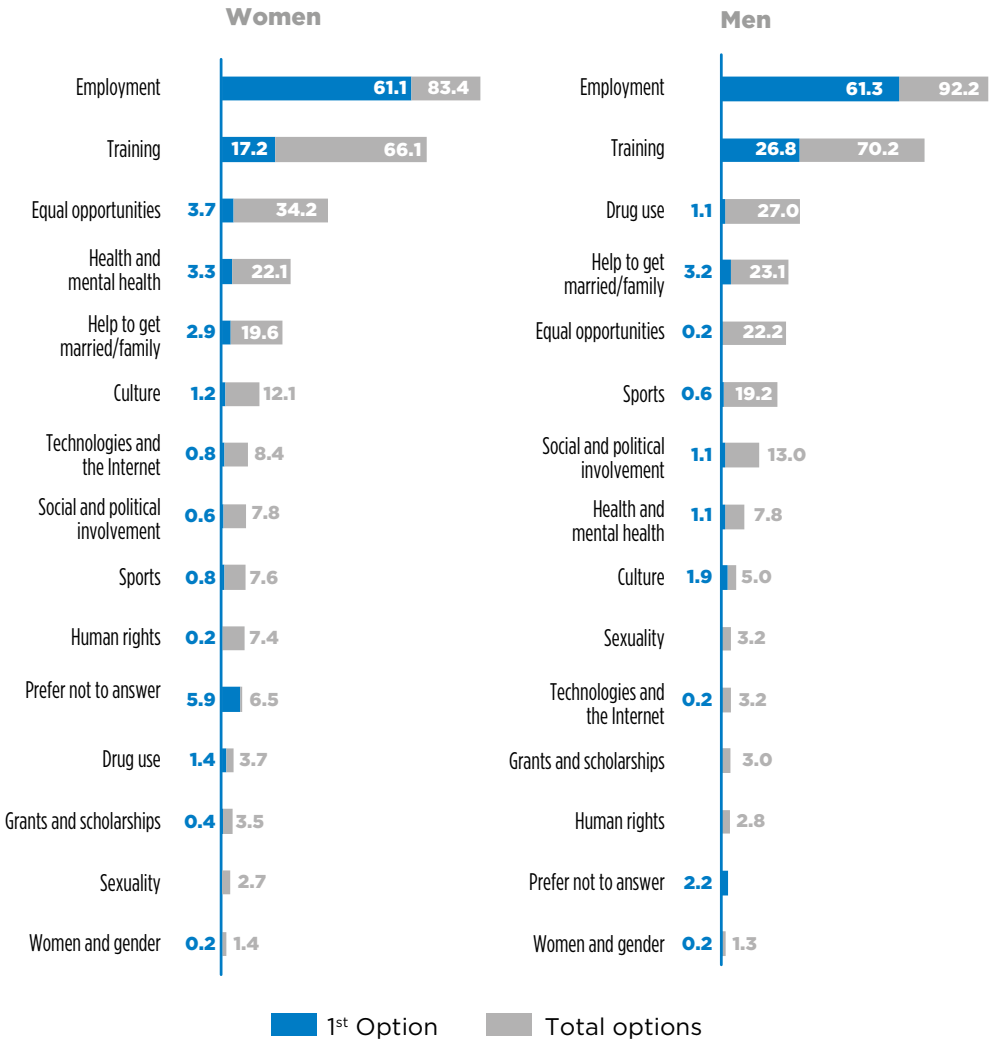
## Priority issues to be addressed by the Sahrawi Government

Sahrawi youth see employment and training as a priority issue to be addressed by the government. 61.2% of those surveyed selected employment as their first option and 21.9% selected training as their second option. If we look at the total number of responses, employment reached 87.6% and training 68%.

Regarding the differences between women and men, we find a similar trend, with employment and training as the two most important issues for both women (83.4% and 66.1%) and men (92.2% and 70.2%). In relation to the rest of the issues, differences can be observed, such as drug use, where 27% of men consider it an issue to be addressed by the government, compared to 3.7% of women. On the other hand, women attach greater importance to health and mental health (22.1%) than men (7.8%). In issues related to women and gender, both men and women do not perceive it as a priority, and in both cases it is the least preferred option of all the options collected (1.3% and 1.4% respectively) (Figure 23).

**FIGURE 23.** Priority issues that should be addressed by the Sahrawi government. First choice and total mentions, by sex (%)

**Q50. Identify three issues that you consider to be priorities for the Sahrawi government to address in the area of youth**



SOURCE: PREPARED BY THE AUTHORS BASED ON THE SAHARAWI YOUTH SURVEY

# 4

## FINAL REFLECTIONS







# Final reflections

With a view to drawing up the *Second Sahrawi Youth Plan*, we will now develop some brief reflections which, following the quantitative and qualitative analysis, may guide the bases and axes of this future Plan. We have organised these reflections around the following dimensions:

## 1. Work/training

In the field of work and training, we must begin with an earlier phase, that of the constitution of a formal and visible economy that gives rise to the knowledge of the economic foundations on which the current camp economy is based. Abnormal economic development hides the processes of trade, economic activities and remittance inflows; remittances that young people associate with a better quality of life, especially in the area of household equipment. These processes should help us shape a comparable economic framework to identify how the Sahrawi economy works.

This identification is key if we are to match needs with solutions. At present, the Sahrawi economy, in its broadest and most general sense, could be said to be made up of pieces that do not fit together. Neither does educational training find the right channel for normalised professional development, nor are many of the needs covered by the employment structure that actually exists. Nor are the educational expectations of young people in line with what is currently required and, as a consequence of all this, behaviours emerge that could be characterised as pre-anomic.

Thus, employment and training have been considered as two fundamental aspects, two axes that form the backbone of young people's concerns. And, consistently, the youth consider that issues related to employment, education and training are the priority issues that should be on the agenda of the Sahrawi government. The government, as an institution, has the confidence of young people, even if its efforts to address youth issues are rated lukewarmly.

An example of this is the precariousness of the health and education systems, which do not enjoy either the status or the economic resources

that would be allocated according to their category and function in a more standard economic situation. This situation affects the quality of education, which is perceived negatively by young people, not so much in terms of the quality itself, but in terms of its exchange value or market worth. If we add to this perception and experience of the inadequacies and dysfunctions of training the fact that the older generations cannot find work to match their preparation, we have a context that leads to a high school drop-out rate in the younger generations.

This example is even clearer in the area of health. Firstly, it should be borne in mind that active or reactive national liberation processes have prioritised both education and health; both spheres are strategic.

In the field of health, in addition to a demoralisation of professional staff, we are faced with the so-called 'brain drain' phenomenon. Insufficient health infrastructures, combined with scarce economic compensation, make opportunities in other countries attractive. These factors also cause young people to lose interest in this area of training and professionalization.

This disenchantment with training and professionalization for careers in health particularly affects young Sahrawi women, for whom this scenario translates into earlier marriages. These difficulties are compounded with obstacles already in place due to cultural patterns and practices associated with young Sahrawi women.

## 2. Pre-anomie behaviour

As Merton argues, when in efforts to improve social situations the means leading to a certain end are not appropriate, it is necessary to change either the means or the ends. Normally, in the first instance, action is taken to change the means. These have to be changed, and this is where the innovation process lies. When a given society is offered means that, at least theoretically and normatively, lead to the desired end but this promise is not fulfilled, the people who make up that society will look for alternative ways of achieving these ends. In the long run, this search for alternative ways runs the risk of focusing on the means while forgetting the ends and thus transforming them. It is therefore likely to start a process where the original ends are replaced by new ones.

As this study deals with the role of youth, it is in this sector of the population that we can best contemplate this process of substitution. Some of the youth observe what happened to the previous generation or to their elder siblings, and they opt for paths that deviate from the established collective norms. In this regard, it should be noted that the most important change, mentioned by almost half of the Sahrawi youth, is the presence of drugs in the camps. This is seen by the youth as part of a deliberate strategy by neighbouring countries to destabilize Sahrawi society.

In all this, an important role is also played by the lack of resolution for the conflict and its effects on a youth that has lost all hope in that resolution arriving and who have not even lived through the genesis and evolution of the conflict. However, views on this issue vary by gender and age. When young people are asked about their perception of the future, 67.3% of young people in camps are of the opinion that their personal situation will improve. But it is women who see the future in the most positive terms, 86.3% compared to 47.9% of men. It is also the youngest people, aged 15-24, who show the greatest optimism. In this respect, it should be added that more than a third of the young people in camps confidently state that they enjoy better living conditions than their parents at the same age.

In relation to what we have called pre-anomic behaviours, especially those linked to drug consumption or trafficking and the processes of radical fundamentalism - with Morocco driving these dynamics - it must be stressed that they can corrode both the current social structure and its survival over time. We could say that, in sociological terms, two structures with two different times coexist in Sahrawi society: on the one hand, we find an official micro-society, with values that refer to the founding principles, and on the other, a macro-society, which replaces the former and which is in the process of an uncertain adaptation to the present times. While the former maintains a firm and consolidated structure, the latter lives in uncertainty between the requirements of their elders and the possibilities offered by the present. In between the two structures is the Sahrawi family, which softens this impact and prevents anomie from taking hold throughout the structure. In this sense, we have seen how Sahrawi youth value and give priority to family in their lives. In a way, the dynamics of youth are the embodiment of the dilemmas of the adult population.

### 3. Leisure time

Leisure time is the aspect that young people refer to in order to describe their non-place in society. In fact, 70.4% of Sahrawi youth have more than three hours of free time daily, and within this group, 38.3% have between three and six hours, 24.8% have between six and nine hours, and 7.3% have more than nine hours. This non-place situation is shaped by unemployment, lack of expectations, the devaluation of education and the limitations of a society whose only stimuli for young people are accessed through travel and technology. The local world is shrinking in the face of a global world that is closer than previous generations perceive, and in which young people are looking for the possibility of developing alternative ways of life.

If modern society is characterised by anything, it is the possibility for individuals to imagine themselves as experiencing multiple biographies. This possibility has a great affect on how Sahrawi youth feel about their lives. For example, it is commonplace for a young Sahrawi woman, once she has finished her educational and domestic tasks, to imagine and constructs other biographies on Instagram on a daily basis. Moreover, all the contacts that the Sahrawi people have with social support networks in different countries are a factor that intensifies this experience. The same is true for the rest of the networks formed by family members throughout the Sahrawi transnational social space.

However, young people in camps are aware of the isolation generated by new technologies and ask for face-to-face spaces, such as leisure centres, sports facilities, cafeterias, etc. They point to a lack of equipment and low motivation as factors that have a decisive influence on the low level of participation in sporting activities. In the specific area of sport, where football stands out, it should be noted that men do sport much more frequently than women: 48.2% of young women say they do not do any sport compared to 72.6% of young men. Furthermore, when asked whether they would like to do any sport - or any sport other than the one they already do - almost half of them say no, and, in line with the above, this is much higher in the case of women: 60.5% compared to 36.1% for men.

Likewise, young people are considering how to learn to use the potential that new technologies can have in the context of their political struggle as a people. This is an interesting dimension, as the vast majority of women (91.8%) and men (90.9%) use social networks on a daily basis, but with differences in the way they use them: among men, it ranks second among

their main daily occupations (after work), with 43.0% citing it as their main activity; while among women, social networking is the ninth main activity, cited by only 15.3% of women. However, women report spending more of their daily time on social networks.

## 4. Participation in the public sphere

Participation, at first glance, seems a reasonable solution to address the place of Sahrawi youth within their social space and could work as a balm. Firstly, participation is usually a demand that all young people make of the adult generation and of society in general. Secondly, given the situation of uncertainty in which Sahrawi youth find themselves, this demand is accentuated. The Sahrawi institutional structure would do well to address the needs of its young population. Societies in similar situations to the Sahrawi one must make a much greater effort to achieve integration, both symbolically and in concrete life conditions. Symbolically, because the order of values they advocate must be inclusive of those generations that did not live through the founding moment of the revolution. In concrete conditions, because the socio-labour and functional integration of young people materially feeds back into the symbolic one.

The elaboration of a collective, possible and real future would satisfy young people's will to participate. If young people perceive that their participation in the broader political and cultural life of their society does not match their role as members of that society, this situation will weaken their level of attachment to their institutions and social context.

Youth claim their place as members of society through their yearnings and demands to succeed their elders in societal institutions with real power and decision-making capacity. More than theoretical governance, they want to be involved in practical governance, so that they can insert their interests as an age group into the common agenda.

It is worth highlighting the greater participation of women in more precarious institutional spaces, such as education, or in informal spaces, which are either promoted by institutions or by social agents such as NGOs. Women combine this participation with exclusivity in domestic and care work. The reproductive sphere of the social structure is monopolised by women and part of the productive sphere is also taken over by women. This asymmetry

may hark back to the relatively recent past, when women took over the social leadership of the camps as men were fighting the liberation war. In this whole situation, it can be said that women, formally and informally, are participating in a more noticeable way than men.

# 5

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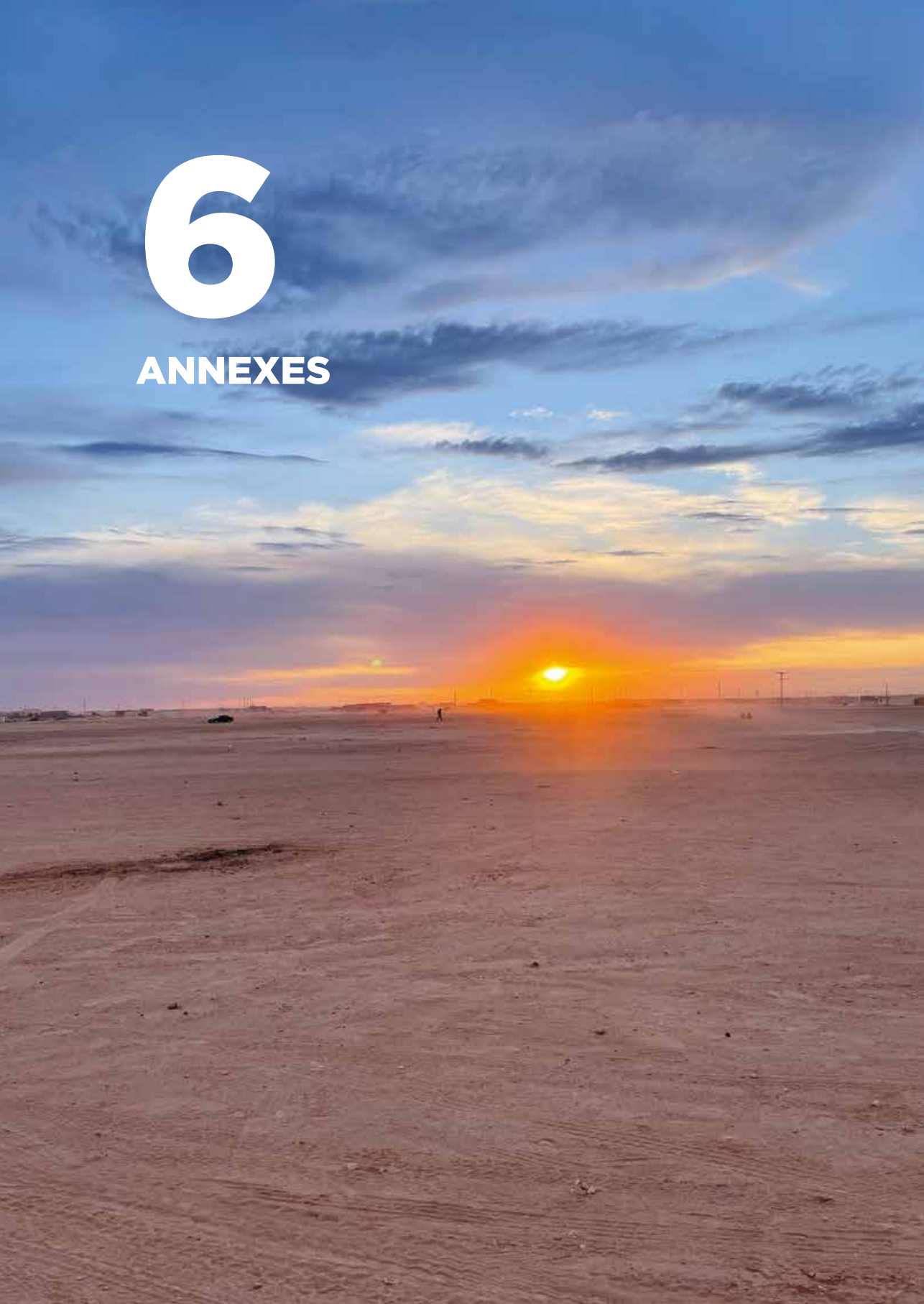
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# 6

**ANNEXES**



# INTERVIEW SCRIPT. MAY 2023

Key aspects of Sahrawi youth to be taken into account throughout the interview

- Differences according to wilaya
- Differences according to age
- Gender

## 1. PRESENTATION (5')

- Brief presentation of the team and the diagnosis being carried out
- Brief presentation of the person to be interviewed

## 2. IMAGE - PERCEPTION OF THE SAHRAWI YOUTH (10')

- How would you describe young Sahrawis?
- How would you define the Sahrawi youth in one word?
- What positive and negative aspects would you highlight about the young people?
- What options do young people have in the camps?
- What would you highlight about the context of the camps that can positively affect Sahrawi youth?
- What would you highlight about the context of the camps that can positively or negatively affect Sahrawi youth?

(At the beginning of the interview I would stress that when talking about the youth, both men and women are included, so the answers to the questions should differentiate between what it means for men and women, if they think it affects them differently).

## 3. EDUCATION - TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT (10')

- What is the most common educational pathway in the camps? (Gender)
- Where are the main challenges in relation to education in camps?
- What are the main areas of training of choice for young people (Gender)?
- What are the main areas of training of choice for young people (Gender)?
- How far do the young people in the camps go in their educational journey? How far do they go? Is there school dropout? What are the main causes? (Gender)
- What do youth in camps work in, and how much does their level of education influence their access to employment?
- Intention to stay: people with studies and experience abroad, others

- How can you tap into those young, educated people who live abroad but want to contribute to the cause, either by returning to the camps or through online work?
- What is your assessment of the youth entrepreneurship projects programme that was launched years ago through the Ministry of Youth and Sport with UNHCR funding?
- Another way of getting a large amount of money in a short time, although it involves a great risk for the person, is 'illegal work', such as substance trafficking or gold panning. Do you think there is an increase in young people opting for this route?
- Opinion: We have heard from young people that they are motivated to continue their studies, but then they don't have job opportunities and career development in the camps, among other reasons because the salaries are very low in relation to the opportunities they have abroad. Tell me a bit about this issue.
- Opinion: Are there many differences in salaries in the camps in relation to the agency one works for? How can the government take advantage of or recruit these highly educated people so that, in addition to working in the agencies, they can collaborate with or contribute to the government?
- Related to wage difference: does this issue affect the motivation and absenteeism of young workers?
- Opinion: On the other hand, we have heard in interviews with young women and men that they are encouraged to continue their studies, but once they have finished they have no job opportunities, so that women are relegated to household chores and caring for family members, but men do not contribute to these activities, despite having the same amount of unoccupied time.

#### **4. FAMILY AND HOME (10')**

- How important is the family for Sahrawi youth and how does it differ from the past?
- How does the family influence the decisions young people make? Whether to study or not, whether to work or not, whether to marry or not?
- How are intergenerational relationships (gender)?
- At what age do they form their own family? Have you seen any changes in the last years (if younger or older) (Gender)

#### **5. SOCIAL PARTICIPATION (5')**

- How do you rate the participation of young people in public life?
- In relation to the past, have there been changes; if so, what are they?

- What differences do you see between youth that belong to associations and those who don't?
- What do you think influences whether young people participate more or less?

## **6. RELIGION (5')**

- Do you consider that the Sahrawi youth practise religion, and have there been any changes in recent years?
- Differences by gender/age
- Where is religion present in the daily life of Sahrawi youth?

## **7. USES OF TIME (5')**

- What do you think young people do in their free time? Differences by gender/age
- What possibilities are there for occupying leisure time in activities such as sports, associations, participation, cultural activities, etc.?
- What role do new technologies play in the daily lives of young people (social networks, access to content)?

## **8. COEXISTENCE AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS (5')**

- How do you assess the coexistence of Sahrawi youth and is there any kind of conflict? If so, for what reason(s) (gender)?
- And how are young people's relationships with their elders? Climate of coexistence
- What role are social networks playing in the relationships that young people have?
- According to what some young people have told us, drug use among young people (psychotropic drugs) has increased in recent years. Do you think this is the case, and to what extent do you consider this to be dangerous for society?

## **9. CHALLENGES - EXPECTATIONS (15', IMPORTANT)**

- In your opinion, what are the main challenges facing young Sahrawis?
- Where, from your entity/ministry/association, should the intervention with young Sahrawis be focused?
- What remains to be done?
- What expectations do you think the Sahrawi youth have, and where do they look to?
- How do you see the future of the youth in camps?
- What do you think is young people's perception of their own future?

## YOUTH PLAN - CONTENTS

### 10. BACKGROUND - PRECEDENTS (10')

- Assessment of the Plan I: Do you know it? How would you assess the Youth Plan I?
- What do you consider to be its greatest successes/achievements?
- What have been its shortcomings?
- Did you feel anything was missing in the Plan?
- If you have not heard about the Plan: What have been the main developments for Sahrawi youth in the last 5 years, and what would you highlight positively in relation to the recent past of Sahrawi youth?

### 11. AREAS OR DIMENSIONS TO BE INCLUDED IN THE SECOND YOUTH PLAN IN THE CAMPS (10', IMPORTANT)

- Which fields or areas of the 1st Youth Plan should be maintained, included or transformed?
  - Liberation and volunteering
  - Employment and occupation
  - Social inclusion and birth rate
  - Health and prevention
  - Political and social participation
  - Socialisation, communication and cultural heritage
  - Intifada
  - Education and training
  - Gender
  - Leisure and free time
- Which ones should be priority and secondary? Name the three most important ones, the priority ones, the strategic ones. Then cite three others that seem important to you as well
- What is the realistic and feasible area for advocacy?

### 12. SPECIFIC ACTIONS (10', IMPORTANT)

- Can we establish any key actions?
- What actions can be interesting and successful?
- What are the keys to take them forward?
- Who can lead the different actions?

- Thinking about a Youth Plan that addresses the most important challenges that the SADR Government must face, what aspects should this Plan contemplate, and what are the major challenges that this plan must inevitably respond to?

### **13. THE OVERALL STRATEGY - GENERAL ISSUES (5')**

- Possibility of linking the occupied territories in some sense
- How to link the diaspora?
- Possibilities and feasibility of the proposal.
- Which areas can be further developed?
- Difficulties for implementation

### **14. THE DAY AFTER DELIVERY OF THE STRATEGY (10')**

- How do you make the project yours and not ours? What needs to be taken into account? Keys
- How to get the different ministries and youth organisations involved in the development of actions of a Youth Plan led by the Ministry of Youth and Sport?
- How to ensure that the Plan is present in the daily life of Sahrawi youth?
- How can we ensure that the various international organisations that promote programmes aimed at Sahrawi youth and that work in the camps value the axes and measures set out in the Plan and incorporate them as their own?
- What can be done / what can we do to make it happen?
- Which actor(s) are key to implementation? Who takes ownership of the plan?



# SCRIPT. SAHRAWI YOUTH GROUP

## O. PRESENTATION

### **Brief presentation of the study and the moderator and Purpose of the meeting:**

Good afternoon/good morning, my name is... First of all, I would like to thank you for your participation in this group today. I am here with you today to analyse and learn more about the opinions, sentiments, perceptions and needs of Sahrawi youth. This group is part of a 'Diagnosis on Sahrawi Youth' that is currently being carried out. At the moment, the research has two main parts: a questionnaire to be carried out in the wilayas with 1200 young people, and these groups and workshops for young people, which are also being developed in all the camps.

To this end, during these two hours we will talk about your experiences and opinions on various topics that will be presented below.

We hope that all of you will actively participate sharing your experiences; we are very interested in what you tell us. And bear in mind that there are no right or wrong answers, no one knows more than anyone else, but what we want is to collect different opinions and experiences.

### **Rules during the meeting, working methods...**

In this type of groups/workshops, it is necessary to maintain a certain order; because otherwise we may not collect all the information you give us properly. To do this, we will try to talk one at a time, i.e. we will not all talk at the same time and we will not have parallel conversations. We will turn off or silence any electronic devices (mobile phones) that are close to us and we will always respect the opinion of others.

**Brief presentation of the people attending the group** (name, age, area of residence, etc.).

I'm going to ask you to tell me briefly who you are (name), your age... so that the other people can get to know you too. Some of you may already know each other... (THEY INTRODUCE THEMSELVES)

From now on we will work in pairs. You have in front of you a booklet with some sheets of paper and some questions inside; let's look at the first page. It is written in big letters 'The Youth of the Sahrawi People'. And that is what we are going to talk about, you; the young people who live in the camps. Let's look together at what's inside together...

## 1. TO BEGIN, ON THE FIRST PAGE:

### **HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE TO SOMEONE WHO DOES NOT LIVE HERE WHAT THE YOUTH OF THE SAHRAWI PEOPLE ARE LIKE?**

In pairs and in 5 minutes, could you explain, what comes to your mind when you think about the young people around you and yourselves? How would we tell someone from the outside what young people living here are like?

**We share our opinions. We begin to present what we have written in pairs.**

## 2. JOURNEY MAP

**In general, WHAT IS AN EVERYDAY LIKE IN THE LIFE OF A YOUNG SAHRAWI MAN/ YOUNG WOMAN? from the time he/she wakes up to the time he/she goes to bed. If you see a difference you can add it to your explanation.**

## 3. NOW LET'S THINK ABOUT THE DAILY LIFE OF A YOUNG PERSON IN THE CAMPS

**We have a + on one side and a - on the other. STRENGTHS AND PROBLEMS/NEEDS**

And what positive aspects or strengths do you relate to the youth you live with? And what negative aspects, problems or needs are most outstanding? **We think in pairs and then share them together.**

*4-8. From point 4 to 8 we will discuss different topics related to our daily lives. We will read the questions and discuss each point together.*

## 4. TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

- What is the current situation of Sahrawi youth regarding education/training?
- What would you change regarding education/training?
- How would you describe the current situation of Sahrawi youth regarding employment/work?
- What would you change regarding employment/work?

## 5. LEISURE AND FREE TIME

- What does a young Sahrawi person do in his or her free time?
- What would you like to change regarding your free time and leisure activities?

**6. FAMILY AND HOME**

- As a young Sahrawi, how would you describe the Sahrawi family and the Sahrawi home to an outsider? What would you highlight?

**7. HEALTH**

- What aspects/actions of everyday life do you think make a young person healthy? What gives you a sense of wellbeing?

**8. VALUES AND IDENTITY**

- What significant changes do you see taking place in the camps?
- To what extent do you think Sahrawi youth are participating or getting involved in helping to bring about a definitive solution to the conflict?

**9. AND FINALLY, REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE YOUTH... HOW DO YOU SEE IT?**

**We have reached the end of the meeting. Thank you very much for everything.**



## OPINION SURVEY OF SAHARAWI YOUTH

Questionnaire No.	
Date (day-month-year)	
Wilaya	
Interviewer	

Good morning / Good afternoon. The Ministry of Youth and Sport is conducting a study about the situation of Sahrawi youth. We need your valuable cooperation in answering a few questions. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers; we just want to know your honest opinion on some issues. Your answers will always remain anonymous and confidential.

### Q1. Age

	→ SKIP TO Q3
(DO NOT READ) Prefer not to answer	99

### Q2. (ONLY for those who have chosen not to answer in Q1) Age range:

15-17	1
18-24	2
25-29	3
30-34	4
35-39	5
40-45	6

### Q3. Sex:

Man	1
Woman	2

### Q4. Wilaya of usual residence:

Boujador	1
El Aaiún	2
Smara	3
Auserd	4
Dajla	5
Rabuni	6

### Q5. Have you lived in other countries? (multiple choice)

No, only in camps	1
Spain	2
Algeria	3
Cuba	4
Morocco	5
Mauritania	6
Other. Which one(s)?	7
Prefer not to answer	99

### YOUTH AND GENERAL WELLBEING

Q6. Overall, on a scale of 0 to 10, how do you rate your personal situation at present (0 Very bad, 10 Very good)?

Very bad										Very good		Prefer not to answer
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99	

Q7. How does it compare to five years ago?

Has improved	1
The same	2
Has worsened	3
(DO NOT READ) Prefer not to answer	99

Q8. And in the next five years, do you think...?

Will improve	1
It will remain the same	2
Will get worse	3
(DO NOT READ) Prefer not to answer	99

Q9. On a scale of 0 to 10, how would you rate the overall situation of the camps now?

Very bad										Very good		Prefer not to answer
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99	

Q10. And in the next five years, do you think the situation in the camps...?

Will improve	1
It will remain the same	2
Will get worse	3
(DO NOT READ) Prefer not to answer	99

Q11. On a scale of 0 to 10, how would you rate the general situation of Sahrawi youth today (0 Very bad, 10 Very good)?

Very bad										Very good		Prefer not to answer
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99	



## OPINION SURVEY OF SAHARAWI YOUTH

P 2

**Q12.** Spontaneously, what do you think is the word that best sums up the current sentiment of the young Sahrawi population? (Spontaneous answer. DO NOT READ. Only one answer)

Boredom	1
Fatigue	2
Resistance	3
Desire to fight	4
Frustration	5
Despair	6
Enthusiasm	7
Hope	8
Uncertainty about the future	9
Lack of commitment	10
Individualism	11
Selfishness	12
Solidarity	13
Commitment	14
Other. Which one(s)?	15
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q13.** From the following list, what do you think are the 3 words that best sum up the current feelings of the young Sahrawi population? (SHOW card 1. Maximum 3 answers. No priority)

	1.	2.	3.
Boredom	1	1	1
Fatigue	2	2	2
Resistance	3	3	3
Desire to fight	4	4	4
Frustration	5	5	5
Despair	6	6	6
Enthusiasm	7	7	7
Hope	8	8	8
Uncertainty about the future	9	9	9
Lack of commitment	10	10	10
Individualism	11	11	11
Solidarity and commitment	12	12	12
Selfishness	13	13	13
Other. Which one(s)?	14	14	14
Prefer not to answer	99	99	99

**Q14.** And in the next five years, do you think the situation of Sahrawi youth...?

Will improve	1
It will remain the same	2
Will get worse	3
(DO NOT READ) Prefer not to answer	99

**Q15.** Indicate in order of importance the three main problems and/or needs of Sahrawi youth today (TEACH card 2)

	1.	2.	3.
Education, training	1	1	1
Work	2	2	2
Money	3	3	3
Family	4	4	4
Health	5	5	5
Physical image	6	6	6
Leisure time	7	7	7
Friendships	8	8	8
Conflict / War	9	9	9
Migration / diaspora	10	10	10
Religion	11	11	11
Drugs	12	12	12
Lack of expectations	13	13	13
Prefer not to answer	99	99	99

**Q16.** And for you, on a scale of 0 to 10, how important do you consider each of the following issues at this point in your life? (0 Minimal importance, 10 Very important)

	Minimal importance										Very important										NR
Education, training	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Work	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Money	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Marriage / partner	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Health	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Physical image	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Leisure time	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Friendships	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Family	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Conflict / War	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Migration / diaspora	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Religion	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Politics	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Gender equality	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									

**Q17.** And on a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied are you with each of the following at this point in your life? (0 Not at all satisfied, 10 Very satisfied)

	Not at all satisfied										Very satisfied										NR
Education, training	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Work	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Money	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Marriage / partner	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Health	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Physical image	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Leisure time	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Friendships	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Family	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Conflict / War	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Migration / diaspora	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Religion	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Politics	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									
Gender equality	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99									



## OPINION SURVEY OF SAHARAWI YOUTH

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## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

**Q18.** What is the highest level of studies you have completed or are currently pursuing?

Can't read or write	1
Not educated	2
Primary education (up to 12 years old)	3
Compulsory secondary education (12-16 years old)	4
High School (16-18 years old)	5
Vocational training (+16 years old)	6
Undergraduate university education	7
Postgraduate studies (Master's, PhD...)	8
Other studies: Which one(s)?	9
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q19.** At present, what is your main occupation? (Multiple choice)

Working	1
Studying	2
Unemployed / looking for a job	3
Unpaid work	4
Social voluntary work	5
Mainly involved in housework and/or care work.	6
Disabled	7
You don't do anything specific	8
Other	98
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q20.** To what extent is your work related to your education/ training?

Very much	1
Fairly	2
Somewhat	3
Very little	4
Not at all	5
Prefer not to answer	99
Not applicable	88

**Q21.** In a year's time, do you think you could lose your current job?

Yes, I'm sure I will	1
Yes, maybe	2
I'm not sure	3
No, I don't think so	4
No, I'm sure I will not	5
Prefer not to answer	99
Not applicable	88

**Q22.** When you finish your studies, do you think you will find a job related to your training?

Yes, I'm sure I will	1
Yes, maybe	2
I'm not sure	3
No, I don't think so	4
No, I'm sure I will not	5
Prefer not to answer	99
Not applicable	88

**Q23.** In a year's time, do you think you will find a job?

Yes, I'm sure I will	1
Yes, maybe	2
I'm not sure	3
No, I don't think so	4
No, I'm sure I will not	5
Prefer not to answer	99
Not applicable	88

**Q24.** Where do you think you can find a job?

In the camps	1
In Algeria	2
In Mauritania	3
In another foreign country	4
Prefer not to answer	99
Not applicable	88

**Q25.** (TO ALL) In the future, do you think you will end up working or studying outside the camps?

Yes, I'm sure I will	1
Yes, maybe	2
I'm not sure	3
No, I don't think so	4
No, I'm sure I will not	5
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q26.** Would you like to go to work or study outside the camps?

Very much	1
Yes	2
Neutral	3
Not really	4
Not at all	5
Prefer not to answer	99

## FAMILY AND HOME

**Q27.** Who do you currently live with?

Alone	1
With your partner	2
With your partner and children	3
With your children, without a partner	4
With your mother and/or father, siblings	5
With your mother and/or father, siblings and other family members	6
With other non-related persons	7
With other relatives	8
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q28.** How many people are currently living together in your household (including yourself)?

	(Number)
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q29.** Do you have sons or daughters?

Yes	1
No	2
Prefer not to answer	99



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**Q30.** What is/are all sources of income in the household? (Multiple answer)

None	1
Commercial activities	2
Regular work	3
Occasional jobs	4
Scholarship or grant	5
Other subsidies	6
Savings, income, investments	7
A family member away from home	8
Remittances (family or friends abroad)	9
Other. Which one(s)?	10
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q31.** How much money do you have each month for your personal use? (TEACH card 3)

None	1
<10.000 doru	2
10.000 - 40.000 doru	3
40.000 - 100.000 doru	4
100.000 - 200.000 doru	5
>200.000 doru	6
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q32.** What items do you have in your home (multiple choice)?

Livestock	1
Electricity	2
Cooker (gas + utensils)	3
Refrigerator	4
Washing machine	5
Bath, shower or washbasin	6
Television	7
Internet	8
Computer	9
Shared mobile phone	10
Own mobile phone	11
Own mobile phone with internet access	12
Other electronic devices (e.g. tablet)	13
Game console	14
Family car	15
Own car	16
Motorbike	17
Bicycle	18
Air-conditioning	19
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q33.** Do you think that some people or households have a better quality of life because they have more money?

Yes	1
No	2
Prefer not to answer	99

## PERCEPTION OF HEALTH AND PERSONAL IMAGE

**Q34.** On a scale of 0 to 10, how would you rate each of the following issues in your life now (0 Very bad, 10 Very good)?

	Very bad										Very good										NR		
Your current state of health	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Your physical health (illnesses, etc.)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Your psychological state of mind	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Your physical appearance	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Your sexuality	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99

**Q35.** Do you practise any sport on a regular basis alone or in a group? Which one(s)? (Multiple choice)

No	1
Yes, football	2
Yes, basketball	3
Yes, running/ jogging	4
Yes, weightlifting	5
Yes, gym	6
Yes, cycling	7
Yes, contact sports (boxing type)	8
Yes, tennis or paddle	9
Yes, volleyball	10
Yes, traditional sports	11
Yes, other. Which one(s)?	12
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q36.** Would you like to practice any sport or any other sport besides the ones you practice? Which one(s)? (Multiple answer)

No	1
Yes, football	2
Yes, basketball	3
Yes, running/ jogging	4
Yes, weightlifting	5
Yes, gym	6
Yes, cycling	7
Yes, contact sports (boxing type)	8
Yes, tennis or paddle	9
Yes, volleyball	10
Yes, traditional sports	11
Yes, other. Which one(s)?	12
Prefer not to answer	99

## LEISURE TIME AND PARTICIPATION

**Q37.** After your daily activities, how many hours of free time would you say you have per day?

<1 hour	1
1-3 hours	2
3-6 hours	3
6-9 hours	4
>9 hours	5
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q38.** During the day, which tasks do you spend the most time on? Please indicate the 3 main tasks, ranking them in order of dedication. (Spontaneous answer. DO NOT READ)

	1st.	2nd.	3rd.
Work	1	1	1
Study	2	2	2
Job search	3	3	3
Social responsibilities / meetings	4	4	4
Playing sports	5	5	5
Carrying out artistic activities	6	6	6
Cultural activities	7	7	7
Watching television	8	8	8
Listening to the radio	9	9	9
Reading	10	10	10
Playing videogames	11	11	11
Connecting to social networks	12	12	12



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	1st.	2nd.	3rd.
Other things on the internet	13	13	13
Being with friends	14	14	14
Being with my boyfriend/girlfriend	15	15	15
Being with my spouse	16	16	16
Household chores	17	17	17
Resting	18	18	18
Other. Which?	19	19	19
.....			
Prefer not to answer	99	99	99

**Q39.** How many hours a day do you spend on each of the following social networks?

	None	<1h	1-2h	2-4h	>4h	NR
WhatsApp	1	2	3	4	5	99
Facebook	1	2	3	4	5	99
Instagram	1	2	3	4	5	99
YouTube	1	2	3	4	5	99
Twitter (X)	1	2	3	4	5	99
Tiktok	1	2	3	4	5	99
Snapchat	1	2	3	4	5	99
Telegram	1	2	3	4	5	99

**Q40.** Do you know anyone in your close circle who has used alcohol or any other drug in the last year? (Multiple answer)

No	1
Yes, alcohol	2
Yes, tobacco	3
Yes, hashish or cannabis	4
Yes, pills or psychoactive drugs	5
Yes, cocaine	6
Yes, other. Which one(s)?	7
.....	
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q41.** During the last two years has anyone in your immediate environment engaged in any criminal, illegal or unlawful activity or activity contrary to Saharawi culture and custom?

Yes	1
No	2
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q42.** Do you think that there are neighbouring countries interested in Saharawi youth trafficking or using drugs?

Yes	1
No	2
Prefer not to answer	99

**VALUES AND IDENTITY**

**Q43.** Your interest in religion and its practice, in recent years...?

Has decreased	1
Remains the same	2
Has increased	3
(DO NOT READ) Prefer not to answer	99

**Q44.** What do you see as the most important changes taking place in camp life? (Spontaneous response. DO NOT READ. Multiple choice.)

None	1
Family values	2
Income	3
Political involvement	4
Social differences	5
Religious extremism	6
Solidarity and mutual help	7
Alcohol consumption	8
Drug presence	9
Increased drug use	10
Involvement in the war	11
Social volunteering	12
More trade	13
Expectations	14
Other. Which one(s)?	15
.....	
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q45.** On a scale of 0 to 10, to what extent are you willing to get involved in improving... (0 Not at all, 10 Completely)

	Not at all										Completely										NR		
Your living conditions	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Your family	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Sahrawi society	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Political participation	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Youth work	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Human rights	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Equality for women	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Living conditions in the camps	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Military solution to the conflict	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Increased presence of religion	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Liberation of the Sahrawi people	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99

**Q46.** On a scale of 0 to 10, to what extent do you think the following ways can help to bring about a definitive solution to the conflict? (0 Not at all, 10 Completely)

	Not at all										Completely										NR		
Armed struggle	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
United Nations Resolutions	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Courts of law	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Reporting companies for illegal trade	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Peaceful activism	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99





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**Q47.** On a scale of 0 to 10, how much confidence do you have in these organisations (0 None, 10 Very much)?

	Not at all										Very much										NR		
Saharawi Government	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Algerian Government	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Moroccan Government	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Spanish Government	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
United Nations (UN)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Saharawi education system	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Saharawi health system	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
International cooperation organisations	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Extremist Islamic movements	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99
Associations of solidarity with the Sahara	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	99

**Q48.** How do you assess the Saharawi government's communication with the youth?

Very bad	1
Bad	2
Neither good nor bad	3
Good	4
Very good	5
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q49.** What is your assessment of the youth actions being carried out by the Saharawi government and the Ministry of Youth and Sport?

Very bad	1
Bad	2
Neither good nor bad	3
Good	4
Very good	5
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q50.** Identify three issues that you consider to be priorities for the Saharawi Government to address regarding youth: (Spontaneous response. DO NOT READ)

	1st.	2nd.	3rd.
Employment	1	1	1
Training	2	2	2
Sexuality	3	3	3
Health and mental health	4	4	4
Drug use	5	5	5
Women and gender	6	6	6
Sports	7	7	7
Culture	8	8	8
Technology and the internet	9	9	9
Social and political involvement	10	10	10
Grants and scholarships	11	11	11
Human rights	12	12	12
Equal opportunities	13	13	13
Help in getting married / family	14	14	14
Other. Which one(s)?	15	15	15
Prefer not to answer	99	99	99

**Q51.** Do you know or have you heard about the First Youth Plan that was carried out about ten years ago in the camps?

Yes	1
No	2
Prefer not to answer	99

**Q52.** Thinking of a Youth Plan of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, which three actions aimed at youth should be developed in the coming years? (Open question. 3 answers maximum. No priority)

	Original language	Spanish translation
1.		
2.		
3.		
Prefer not to answer		99

**Q53.** Do you think you have better living conditions than your parents did when they were your age?

Yes, I'm sure	1
Yes, maybe	2
I'm not sure	3
No, I don't think so	4
No, I'm sure I don't	5
Prefer not to answer	99

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Inspector: \_\_\_\_\_

**EXPLAIN THAT THIS INFORMATION IS REQUESTED SO THAT CHECKS CAN BE MADE TO CONFIRM THAT THE INTERVIEW HAS ACTUALLY TAKEN PLACE.**





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