



المجلس الوطني لحقوق الإنسان  
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Conseil national des droits de l'Homme

# **For equal and fair access to education and training**

Contribution to public debate series - No.6







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# CONTRIBUTION TO PUBLIC DEBATE FOR EQUAL AND FAIR ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING

## INTRODUCTION

1. The Moroccan education and training system has undergone multiple comprehensive and relevant assessments and diagnoses. Today, education sector stakeholders and all Moroccans are unanimous that the future of younger generations and society in general depends on the country's ability to introduce deep and structural changes in its education and training system. The nature and extent of these changes found broad consensus as part of the National Education and Training Charter (1999), a document which still constitutes today a strategic reference framework for the overhaul and modernization of the education and training system. However, to date, the efforts exerted do not seem to have produced the desired results despite the huge investments made by the State, particularly as part of implementing the Emergency Plan 2009-2012. In this connection, the royal speech of August 20, 2013 was a strong call for stakeholders and the wider society to reflect on, rally and deploy an unprecedented effort for the reform and modernization of the national educational system, which should be up to the socioeconomic, scientific and cultural challenges facing the country.

2. In accordance with its mandate and prerogatives, the National Human Rights Council (CNDH) wishes to contribute to this "objective examination of conscience" to which the Head of State invited all Moroccan men and women. This contribution comes in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and Morocco's national and international commitments. Indeed, as a national institution for the protection and promotion of human rights, the CNDH considers that rebuilding the Moroccan school and progress towards the protection and respect of human rights are two sides of the same society project. The latter makes of education reform the major driving force for transition to a fairer, more caring and more developed society. In this sense, education is a key tool for the appropriation of human rights culture and repository, insofar as it empowers citizens to take ownership of their own future and exercise their rights and duties in full knowledge of the social contract that binds them to the State, institutions and communities of belonging. Unaware of their rights and obligations, citizens cannot fully participate in building democracy and sustainable human development in a society based on equity and respect for fundamental human rights: social, economic, political and cultural rights. This consubstantial unity of the right to education and the cause of human rights is explicitly affirmed in the second paragraph of Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This Article reinforces the quantitative orientation of the first paragraph (right of everyone to education) by focusing on the qualitative meaning of the educational enterprise that "shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups...".

3. Several structural priority projects need to be strengthened or launched to illustrate this determination necessary to fully implement the right to quality education for all and enhance the promotion of human rights culture in the education system. Some of these projects affect the areas of interest to the CNDH, as they clearly fall within its mission of promoting and protecting fundamental human rights. In this spirit, this memorandum is intended to contribute to the mobilization and commitment for a modern, efficient and citizen school. The goal is to establish a school which, by developing equal opportunities, allows everyone to assert his/her merits and talents, increases and enhances social mobility, integration and cohesion, and promotes the values of democracy, freedom and equality between men and women. Two major issues are of concern to the CNDH and justify its desire to give them priority in the changes to be made because their successful implementation will pave the way for the upgrading and adaptation of the Moroccan educational system to present-time requirements as well as to the democratic aspirations for dignity and equal opportunities for broad segments of society:

- Fair and equal access for all to lifelong education as a fundamental right enshrined in the Constitution. This requires continuing efforts aimed at fighting against all forms of discrimination, strengthening inclusiveness, promoting accountability and ensuring fair distribution of public resources.
- Fair and equal access to a quality education that fosters personal development, critical thinking, participation, respect for difference and openness on sexual, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity without exclusion.

## REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

4. Morocco has clearly defined the reference framework of its education policy; a framework whose components embrace the entire fundamental values and elements on which all initiatives and measures to overhaul the education system should be based.

### 4.1 National references

- In accordance with Article 31 of the Constitution, the State, public institutions and local authorities must mobilize all means to “facilitate equal access of citizens to the conditions” allowing them to enjoy their rights to a “modern, accessible and quality education” as well as to “vocational training and physical and artistic education”. Furthermore, Article 32 focuses on basic education which it considers as “a child right and a binding obligation for the family and the State”.
- The National Charter of Education and Training, which garnered broad national consensus, laid down in 1999 the philosophy and orientations likely to implement the principle of equal right of all to a modern and quality education. It set (in paragraph 28) the timing for a rapid quantitative progress towards widespread access to different levels of education, the medium-term goal being that 40% of students enrolled in the first grade will obtain the

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Baccalaureate in 2011. The Charter also stresses, in the same paragraph, that “the realization of these quantitative targets cannot be achieved to the detriment of the quality of education”.

## 4.2 Morocco’s international commitments

Morocco has ratified and adopted several international declarations and conventions that involve commitments to provide universal access to all levels of education and to vocational training, ensure quality education, implement the principle of equal opportunities and establish a timetable for achieving the goals set.

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 26 sets out the principles of education as a fundamental right of every human person and stresses that education should be directed “to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” and “promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups”.

- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reaffirms (in Articles 13 and 14) the principles outlined by the 1948 Declaration on States obligations in planning to achieve the full realization of compulsory primary education free for all.

- The Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Morocco in 1993, draws the attention of States to their duty to “encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates”, humanize school discipline by ensuring that it is “administered in a manner consistent with the child’s human dignity”, and promote and encourage international cooperation “with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods” (Articles 28 and 29). This Convention reiterates the goals of a humanistic and modern education that should be directed to “the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”, “the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations”, and “the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin”.

- The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 19, 2011)<sup>1</sup>, to whose drafting Morocco contributed actively, states in Article 2 paragraph 2 that “human rights education and training encompasses: (a) Education about human rights, which includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection; (b) Education through human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners; (c) Education for human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others”.

- The Millennium Development Goals (2000) aim in the second and third goals “to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling” and to “eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015”.

## **MAJOR DEFICIENCIES AND IMBALANCES OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

**5.** Inequalities in access to education: Despite the progress and efforts made in schooling, inequalities in access to quality education still seriously affect children in rural areas, particularly girls, as well as those living in urban peripheral neighborhoods and children with disabilities. These inequalities heavily compromise the exercise by these children of their rights and hinder them from fully participating in the country’s economic and social development. In fact, while the gender equality indicator for junior secondary education stands at 91% in urban areas, it is merely at 55% in rural areas. Moreover, the Moroccan school largely remains a space for reproducing social inequality and contributes little to the renewal of elites. This is illustrated by the results of the survey conducted in 2011 by the High Commission for Planning on “Intergenerational Social Mobility”, which show that upward mobility is more common in urban than rural areas (51% and 14.1% respectively) and concerns men more than women (43.7% and 17.9% respectively). This upward mobility, fostered by educational level and type of degree, ranges between 26.5% among non-graduates to 84.3% among graduates of colleges and institutes.

**6.** Delays in preschooling: The cornerstone of every modern educational system, preschooling in Morocco is marked by a general fragmentation, mostly because of the multiplicity of stakeholders, the coordination gaps between them and the use of contrasting teaching practices that are not part of common educational paradigms, ranging from traditional modes of learning (in *kuttabs* [Quranic preschools]) to more or less modern teaching methods applied in some schools of large urban centers intended for middle and upper classes. This heterogeneity is reflected both in the educational methods and content of socialization as well as in the preferred language of communication and education. With an enrollment capacity limited to nearly 700,000 children (2010-2011), preschool education is far from achieving the education for all objective defined by the Charter, because of its concentration in urban areas and the low enrollment of girls in rural *kuttabs* (about 39%). These disparities are compounded by poor infrastructure and low qualification of preschool educators. In the absence of a policy capable of inventing a modern preschool concept tailored to the needs of children and the specificities of the Moroccan social context, as proposed by the report of the Higher Council of Education

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(2008), the first years of school socialization of young children (3-5 years) are largely determined by a kind of Malthusian logic reproducing social inequalities.

**7.** Persistence of illiteracy and low school retention: Many findings have confirmed the persistence of illiteracy and school dropout phenomenon, with the resulting increase in the number of semi-literate or illiterate young people. Only 46% of the age group enrolled in the first year of primary education reaches the final year of compulsory education, which remains well below the 80% target set by the Charter. Despite the significant efforts made to extend access to education, retention, the system's profitability and public investment in education still pose serious problems. This observation applies to both academic education and vocational training in dedicated structures, not to mention in-service training which should be the real and essential engine for lifelong education. This is illustrated by the situation of out-of-school children and those who drop out of school each year before completing compulsory education cycle, whose number was estimated at nearly 340,000 at the end of the previous decade.

**8.** Chronic deficits in higher education: The implementation of the last academic reform since 2003 has enabled many institutional and educational gains and led to various advances in scientific research structure and governance. However, this reform is far from redressing the chronic delays from which the sector has been suffering for many decades. These delays are first reflected in the number of students admitted to the various higher education institutions. In 2010, the total number of students enrolled in post-secondary education, all cycles combined, did not exceed 447,000. The shortcomings of the Moroccan student demographics become manifest when compared to other Maghreb and Arab countries. In fact, the Moroccan tertiary education has one of the lowest inhabitant ratios, reaching 15 per 1,000, as against 34 in Tunisia, 32 in Algeria and 40 in Jordan. Moreover, while the number of enrolled students is increasing (as of 2010), mainly due to higher number of students completing secondary education (22% annually), the number of faculty has paradoxically shrunk by 3.6% between 2005 and 2009, moving down from 14,416 to 13,909 teachers, while the trend in the rest of the Arab world is marked by a rapid increase in the number of university teachers.

**9.** Scientific research still at an initial stage: The above elements relating to tertiary education have a negative impact on scientific research, the data of which are not encouraging. As a result of the small number of students enrolled in graduate programs (less than 40,000 students), the annual average of doctoral degrees awarded by Moroccan universities between 1999 and 2009 did not exceed 786, reflecting a stagnation that has lasted for years. Without a dynamic scientific research, Moroccan university campuses are devoid of the necessary conditions that can make them genuine intelligence hubs.

**10. Absent quality:** The existence of a national tool for the monitoring of students' learning and achievement in core subjects, such as the National Learning Assessment Program, and international surveys like Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), helps measure major deficiencies in the achievements of Moroccan students in elementary and secondary education. Actually, the results of TIMSS 2011 show a declining performance of Moroccan students from TIMSS 2007 and lower achievements in science and math compared with international averages or Arab countries like Jordan and Tunisia. This is also the case for the reading and writing performance of Moroccan 4th grade students. The conclusions of PIRLS 2011 reveal that they all have serious difficulties in reading and writing and that their results worsened markedly from those of 2006, with a score of 310 points, far behind other countries in the region. The same applies to language proficiency, as highlighted by the report on "50 Years of Human Development in Morocco" and the reports issued by the Higher Council of Education. The latter point in particular to a series of imbalances that create a real "language divide" between students in public schools and those attending private or foreign institutions. This is compounded by the differences between students' mother tongues (Darija and Tamazight) and the languages of reading and writing (classical Arabic and French). The educational system finds it difficult to overcome these discrepancies despite the significant time devoted to key learning languages (Arabic and French). Such a quality gap has seemingly stigmatized the public educational system, seen as inefficient and generating unease and low employability for many young people.

**11. A narrow view of education:** The many examples of early school leaving and dropouts among a significant portion of children, particularly in rural areas, attest to the very relative interest actually paid to the school in the hierarchy of vital needs. This hierarchy affects the entire components of the system's management, based on a vision giving a prominent place to the learning of academic knowledge without real consideration of the other components of socialization that constitute the major vector of citizen shaping with preschool and extracurricular education as the most important factors. This is the result of low government investment in training and fair reward for skills. It is also reflected in the lack of attention to the cultural, artistic and sports activities in school curricula.

## **AREAS OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM**

**12. Equity and quality:** These two principles should guide the projects of reforming and overhauling the national educational system. Equity involves the break with an easy propensity to adopt a supposedly egalitarian treatment in response to objectively unequal situations. In this context, inclusive education should be a common basis for all education stakeholders, which would make it possible to take into consideration the specific situation

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of children most vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion, namely rural girls, children with disabilities, children living in urban underprivileged areas, street children, children of immigrants, etc. As for quality, it implies that all arrangements for the management, control, accountability, motivation and support of education professionals should constitute a key element to enhance the system's quality. In this context, a special effort should be devoted to the awareness-raising and training of stakeholders (educators, professional organizations, businesses, unions) to the culture of human rights and its different variations in their context of intervention and life. The targeting and customization of sensitization policy would promote better awareness and involvement of these actors in the national effort to improve the education system quality, in line with the modern and democratic society project enshrined in the Constitution.

**13.** The right to fair access to initial and ongoing quality education for every child, teen or adult according to his/her situation, constraints and intellectual, cultural physical and geographical predispositions: The realization of this right requires the development of a standardized educational offer targeting young children and its gradual universalization by integrating it in compulsory schooling (4-5 years to 15 years). The widespread access to education for rural children requires a comprehensive overhaul of the current educational offer, mainly through the mobilization and provision of resources necessary for the rollout of the "community school" model developed for several years in a pilot phase. To ensure the schooling of girls, especially in rural areas, the governance bodies of the educational system at its different levels of implementation (national, regional and local) should absolutely encourage all stakeholders, through regulatory measures, to get involved in specific institutional arrangements whose primary purpose would be to formulate and implement initiatives to support girls to successfully complete their education, especially at the crucial moment of transition between primary school and junior high school. They should also introduce ad-hoc structures specifically dedicated to the integration of children with special needs in the school system. These bodies should also place the prevention of dropout and early school leaving at the top of their priorities, by making of the monitoring and reporting of data related to this problem a core variable to analyze the system's performance and efficiency and develop educational policies and strategies.

**14.** The institutionalization of the human rights approach as a condition for the approval, dissemination and implementation of education projects and programs: The CNDH could contribute in this regard, given its mission and its knowledge in this area. The institutionalization of the human rights frame of reference will particularly concern content, media (textbooks), teaching methods and mechanisms of educational management and initial and continuing training.

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**15.** Non-discrimination must be enshrined as an operational and cross-cutting principle applicable to all components of educational action, management and programming, whether it be discrimination based on sex or geographic, ethnic, cultural/ linguistic and social origin or discrimination against children and youth with disabilities.

**16.** Participation in full compliance with the goals of strengthening democracy requires promoting the involvement of all stakeholders and actors concerned (pupils, students, parents, teaching and administrative staff, etc.) in the definition, management and implementation of education policies.

**17.** Free and fair access to knowledge: Public authorities should commit to promote access to knowledge for wider sections of the population in order to provide them with scientific, intellectual and artistic resources empowering them to fully exercise their role as responsible and active citizens. This requires strengthening knowledge dissemination mechanisms, particularly through enhanced access and further optimized management of modern communication channels, mainly the mass media and new information and communication technologies. The aim to ensure the schooling of children up to the age of 15 would only make sense if all students completing their initial education acquire the knowledge and skills constituting the “common core basis” essential for living together, citizenship and democracy.

**18.** The acceptance and management of sexual, geographic, linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity: This is a substantive work that aims at developing open mindedness, tolerance and peaceful management of differences among learners and educators, whether these differences are doctrinal, ideological, scientific or educational. This particularly requires encouraging means of arbitration and conciliation in educational choices, fostering healthy competition and free choice of teaching materials and methods as long as they meet the specifications and principles contained in the Education and Training Charter; and opening on the specificities of the school's cultural, linguistic and geographic environment.

**19.** Promoting critical thinking and freedom of thought as the main pillars of learning: In accordance with the fundamental human rights values, this means promoting the learning of debate and confrontation of ideas in educational institutions, without any physical, institutional or symbolic violence. This is tantamount to combating all forms of totalitarian intellectual or ideological terrorism wherever it comes from, as well as any form of restriction on the freedom of expression and inquiry among students.

**20.** Management, governance and control of public property: This means promoting the monitoring and control of the proper management of tools and resources available for

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the education sector, in a bid to ensure efficiency and optimization. This involves the fight against all forms of corruption, violation of the rights and dignity of children and teenagers, abuse of power, and use or misappropriation of public property for personal purposes or in an unjustified manner in favor of a social, cultural, geographic or political group.

**21. Partnership:** The CNDH has recalled the above fundamental principles pursuant to the partnership agreement signed on December 26, 1994 between the Ministries of Human Rights and National Education that marked the birth of the National Program for Human Rights Education. Nearly twenty years later, this project that has mobilized significant human and financial resources needs a new impetus, given Morocco's achievements in the field of human rights and the great ambition of the Citizenship Platform for the Promotion of Human Rights Culture. This program, whose implementation has drawn so much energy, must be anchored in the educational environment.

## CONCLUSION

**22.** The various aforementioned projects constitute the axes of a broad political consensus and simply need to be reinvested with more commitment from key educational system stakeholders. However, the primary responsibility rests with the State, local authorities, education professionals and families to lead and unify efforts around a strong, determined initiative capable of making the necessary breaks and producing the qualitative change expected by the whole society. The CNDH is willing to contribute all of its resources to this supreme mission in the framework of partnerships and programs for the promotion of the human rights and citizenship culture.





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