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# The Tribulations of Moroccan Child Laborers: A Forced Existence and Loss of Innocence

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**The Tribulations of Moroccan Child  
Laborers: A Forced Existence and  
Loss of Innocence**

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### Abstract

The principal focus of this research paper is to analyze the prevalence and status of child labor in the Kingdom of Morocco and reflect upon the compounding conditions perpetuating its use in the labor market, especially pertaining to the domestic sphere. Despite several regulations outlawing its practice, the use of child labor is common across many industries but working conditions found in the domestic sectors are particularly severe. Consequently, the primary subjects of this study are concentrated around children employed within the household as maids known as “petite bonne” or little maids<sup>1</sup>. Many of these child maids suffer physical, verbal, sexual and

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<sup>1</sup>Human Rights Watch, *Lonely Servitude: Child Domestic Labor in Morocco*, November 15, 2012. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/11/15/lonely-servitude/child-domestic-labor-morocco#page>

psychological abuses by their employers. Additionally, they are sometimes forced to work long hours and are paid far less than the standard minimum wage. Despite efforts by the government and others to discontinue the practice through legislation and education campaigns, child labor remains a significant issue within the entirety of the Moroccan labor market with thousands of minors working illegally<sup>2</sup>, many suffering under unjust conditions and treatment. Leaving aside these existing human rights violations, the exploitation of these children comes at a great expense to Moroccan society depriving the next generation opportunities for success and a better quality of life through venues like education. My thesis posits present-day child labor practices are a necessary evil stemming from the monetary needs of lower-income families as they struggle to stay above the poverty line. To explore this issue further I've reviewed previous literature and government legislation on the subject. I also contacted and visited NGOs working within the field and met with experts on child labor. Lastly, I interviewed previously employed domestic maids to hear their stories and attitudes. From these sources I concluded that the use of child labor has been substantially reduced in recent years due to efforts by local, international, and government associations. However, because of income inequalities in rural areas, deeply rooted Moroccan social norms, weak implementation of regulations, insufficient funding, misappropriation of funds, and a lack of coordination between government departments and partners, child labor in Morocco remains a significant problem and will persist as a social malady unless there is a more integrated effort at the institutional and grassroots level. Further aid and proper allocation of funds to fill in the

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<sup>2</sup> UNICEF, *Situation of Children and Women in Morocco*, September 2014

gaps in infrastructure and education are crucial measures to have a more effective impact in eliminating child labor permanently.

**Key Terms: Child Labor, Domestic Maid, Petite Bonne**

### **Operational Definitions**

For the purposes of this study a “child” and “children” will refer to persons under the age of 18 concurrent with the United Nations definition of a child<sup>3</sup>.

## **Introduction**

Morocco has one of the highest child labor rates in the Middle East and North Africa, at around 8% of the entire labor market<sup>4</sup>. This research paper examines the working conditions encountered by segments of the employed child populations in the domestic sphere. More precisely, I ask what aspects of the social and economic structures of Moroccan society are generating the need for such a significant child workforce and in what ways do gender and socio-economic status play a role in determining the identity of these child laborers? By exploring these elements further, I hope to gain a better understanding of this isolated group and raise awareness about these severe human rights abuses affecting child maids in Morocco. Additionally, I will offer some possible theories as to what further actions remain necessary to reduce the exploitation of these child laborers.

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<sup>3</sup>United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child, November 1989

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF, *Morocco: Mena Gender Equality Profile*, October 2011 available at <https://www.unicef.org/gender/files/Morocco-Gender-Equality-Profile-2011.pdf>

This report is organized into four sections. The first section reviews the previous research and current programs undertaken by different groups working within the field of child labor as well as the existing legislation enacted by the government. This portion also appraises the noteworthy progress Morocco has made since entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century and outlines what problems still remain. The second section explains my postulations and the methods used to collect data as well as the difficulties I encountered. The third segment contains my findings and an analysis of the material with subsections ascertaining the extent of the phenomenon, some of the conditions found in the industry, and the main motivators propagating child domestic labor. Additionally, this segment clarifies the different circles involved in child labor and who is benefiting from its usage. Lastly, the conclusion will recap the findings and provide suggestions for further action. If shared qualities can be identified among the child labor populations, these commonalities can be valuable in understanding the primary motives prompting them to work, providing useful information to better pinpoint the source of the problem.

## **Literature Review**

There has been sizeable interest and concern by both the local and international community as well as the Moroccan government on the issue of child labor practices in the Kingdom. In 2001 the government, partnered with the Norwegian-based Fafo Institute for Applied Social Science, conducted a nationwide survey revealing there was up to 86,000 girls under the age of 15 working as domestic maids in defiance of both Moroccan

and international law<sup>5</sup>. Since this 2001 survey, multiple organizations have published studies containing substantial and applicable information on juvenile labor. This section reviews these reports followed by an examination of current statutes regarding the protection of children.

In 2012 Human Rights Watch (HRW) issued a 73-page report titled “Lonely Servitude: Child Labor in Morocco” investigating the abuses faced by child domestic workers and the harsh conditions these young maids struggle with. The HRW report offers a comprehensive overview of the different actors and societal structures surrounding the situation of this exclusively female population. Many of these child maids come from impoverished households in rural areas and are forced to work to support their family. Through numerous interviews with juvenile maids, the study provides a glimpse into the world of this marginalized group of young girls. These interviews presented these girls an opportunity to tell their difficult story of abuse and neglect.

The HRW study also reviews the various international agreements and legislation Morocco has signed such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), an international treaty outlawing hiring children for dangerous work that hinders their growth and damages their wellbeing. The report references Morocco’s ratification in 2001 of the International Labor Organization Convention (ILO) on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, prohibiting “work which is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.”<sup>6</sup> This is part of a global initiative under the ILO’s International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC). Slightly more recently, in June 2011, the ILO voted

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<sup>5</sup>Human Rights Watch, *Lonely Servitude: Child Domestic Labor in Morocco*, November 15, 2012. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/11/15/lonely-servitude/child-domestic-labor-morocco#page>

<sup>6</sup> International Labor Organization, *Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor*, June 1999, United Nations, No. 182



to adopt the Domestic Workers Convention, the first international treaty to establish global labor standards for domestic workers<sup>7</sup>. In the Convention, domestic workers are given protections such as, a standard minimum wage, days off, overtime compensation, and a clear contract between employer and child outlining terms and conditions of work. Morocco has voted in favor of adopting the Domestic Workers Convention but has not yet ratified it<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, the HRW study also reviews the substantial progress Morocco has made in dealing with the child labor issue since their previous report published in 2005 titled “Inside the Home, Outside the Law: Abuse of Child Domestic Workers in Morocco.” They claim that in the 7 years since the publication of the 2005 report there has been a reduction in the numbers of children working at young ages and an increase in school enrollment. They credit these successes to efforts by NGOs, UN agencies, and government action in promoting awareness and nationalizing the subject. Furthermore, there was increased attention by the Moroccan media after a 31-year-old woman severely beat a 12-year-old domestic maid resulting in the girl’s death from the injuries.<sup>9</sup> The woman was sentenced to 10 years in prison. The study also proposes several more recommendations to continue improving the protections of child maids. They urge the government to sign into law more protections for domestic workers, as they “are still excluded from Morocco’s Labor Code”<sup>10</sup>.

UNICEF has also recently issued a 234-page report titled “The Situation of Children and Women in Morocco” presenting an in-depth analysis of the current status of

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<sup>7</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Lonely Servitude: Child Domestic Labor in Morocco*, November 15, 2012. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/11/15/lonely-servitude/child-domestic-labor-morocco#page>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

children and women and the systems put in place to aid in their development. The report offers an abundance of statistical data and reviews government actions and departments working on the development of children. These departments include the Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development (MSFFDS) and the Ministry of Employment and Vocational training (MEFP). In 2006 MSFFDS started a program called INQAD, conducted in collaboration with institutional partners, civil society and international organizations to combat child labor<sup>11</sup>. However, due to a “lack of coordination and proper management, the INQAD program was ineffective in accessing the root of the problem<sup>12</sup>. (Interview, Omar) According to the UNICEF report “domestic girls are targeted through the Government Plan for equality (2012-2016) "ICRAM" piloted by the MSFFDS.”<sup>13</sup> The UNICEF report also reviews the general government budget for the protection of children. The budget totals 306,168,374,000 billion dirhams (DHs) with 199,353,163,000 DHs allocated for operating expenses, 49,502,282,000 DHs for investment spending, and 57,312,929,000 DHs for depreciable debt and floating debt expenses<sup>14</sup>.

<b>Operating Expenses</b>	<b>199,353,163,000 (in dirhams DHs)</b>
<b>Investment Spending</b>	<b>49,502,282,000</b>
<b>Depreciable debt and floating debt expenses</b>	<b>57,312,929,000</b>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>306,168,374,000</b>

<sup>11</sup>UNICEF, *Situation of Children and Women in Morocco*, September 2014

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Omar Saadoun of INSAF on April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017

<sup>13</sup>UNICEF, *Situation of Children and Women in Morocco*, September 2014

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

UNICEF points out that the budget for operating expenses is more than triple that of the money allocated for actual investments for protections. The Ministry of National Education (MEN) holds the highest budget at 42.1 billion DHs and the MSFFDS has the lowest budget at only 605.23 million DHs<sup>15</sup>. An analysis of the budget shows the portions allocated for investment and protections are too limited for the scale of the problem. Therefore funding for programs for the defense of children is insufficient compared to the resources allocated for operating expenses that uses the majority of the budget.

Another source used in my research is a UNICEF video from 2005 titled “Saeed’s Song” documenting the extent of child labor in the city of Fez in the traditional labor market. The documentary featured interviews with child laborers, allowing them to have their voices and stories heard. The film mentions the creation of a Child Labor Project in Fez, a joint partnership between the government and artisanal workshops to reduce child labor<sup>16</sup>. Many of the children toil up to 50 hours a week receiving less than \$20 for the entire month<sup>17</sup>. The video remarks the small hands of children are perfectly suited for the delicate and intricate work required for artisanal work. The film also highlights the potential health risks existing in many of the industries including dust from sculpting traditional artisanal artifacts, extreme heat from high oven temperatures, and the use of toxic substances used in dyeing clothing and textiles. The video emphasizes the human rights abuses experienced by these laborers, stating they are being deprived of a childhood and their right to education. In one of the interviews with a domestic maid, a

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<sup>15</sup> UNICEF, *Situation of Children and Women in Morocco*, September 2014

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF Documentary, “Saeed’s Song” available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpXukVmOrCs>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

12-year-old girl told UNICEF she and her sister were both sent to live and work for a wealthy family in Fez. However, the girls' employers decided without consent which one would work and which one would go to school. In another interview with a different child laborer, a young boy describes his greatest wishes are to attend school and own a pair of shoes so he will not be cold in the mornings<sup>18</sup>.

Another source of information I used derived from research by the Institution Nationale de Solidarité avec les Femmes en Détresse (INSAF), a Casablanca based NGO that works with child domestic workers and single mothers in an effort to reintegrate them into a normal life. I visited their Casablanca office and in a meeting with Lamia Nejjar learned about their organization and its programs. Ms. Nejjar explained that single mothers and their children are often heavily stigmatized due to traditional Muslim values of bearing children out of wedlock. INSAF helps these mothers by providing them with free housing, meals, medical care, and psychological services<sup>19</sup>. They further assist mothers by helping them register their children so the Moroccan government can legally recognize them. INSAF also acts as a mediator between the family and the single mother to try and reconcile their relationship. Additionally, INSAF offers women a chance to gain professional skills in areas such as nursing, cooking, sewing, and hairdressing<sup>20</sup>. Although INSAF does not offer diplomas (they are not a qualified institution), they give these women the ability to become successful in a professional work setting. They also assist single mothers in finding new housing and employment. Moreover, INSAF covers the cost of for their housing and food during the transition period until their first paycheck

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Visit to INSAF in Casablanca on April 28, 2017

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

arrives<sup>21</sup>. These services not only benefit the mothers but can also be seen as preventative measures to safeguard their children from having to work at an early age. By supporting struggling single mothers, INSAF encourages a positive upbringing, ensuring the child receives the proper care and education down the line. Without fundamental support systems like these, many child workers can end up on the street or enter into the sex tourism industry.

In terms of child domestic laborers, INSAF has helped over 300 child maids escape abusive environments. The majority of their programs are regionally focused, aiding domestic child maids from rural areas mainly in Chichaoua and Kalaâ in the south of Morocco. Like the single mothers, INSAF works to incorporate former child domestic workers back into their family and school atmosphere. To accomplish a positive reentry into a healthier family setting, INSAF has “put in place support protocols in the form of scholarships, schooling, and distribution of clothing and foodstuffs.”<sup>22</sup> In addition, they are the only NGO that currently provides monthly financial assistance to the families of former domestic maids to supplement the income the child was contributing to the family<sup>23</sup>. INSAF was labeled as a “public utility” by the government of Morocco due to the success of their pilot programs. By assisting in nationalizing the issue, INSAF has helped to bring child labor out of the darkness so it is no longer a taboo subject. The organization’s website also offers statistics on child maids, their families, and the families who hire the maids. This data includes socioeconomic status, regularity of income, and literacy rates among mothers and fathers.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> INSAF website available at [www.insaf.ma](http://www.insaf.ma)

<sup>23</sup> Visit to INSAF office, discussion with Lamia Nejjar.

In reviewing government legislation, conventions, and programs there are multiple protocols put in place for the development and protection of children. In addition to the CRC and Prevention of the Worst Forms of Child Labor, an important Moroccan ruling is the compulsory schooling of all children. The act provides free mandatory education for children until age 15<sup>24</sup>. The law requires parents to register their children for school by age six and a failure to do so results in a fine. However, implementation of the law is weak, especially in more rural areas without strong governmental supervision. Despite weak application of the law, there has been an increase in school enrollment. This is seen as a positive step forward, as girls enrolled in school are less prone to leave school to enter into the workforce at a young age. In 2008 Morocco created the “Tayssir” program to provide financial help to poor families, on the condition that they send their children to school<sup>25</sup>. In addition to monetary payments, assistance comes in the form of school supplies, cafeteria meals, and transportation services for children living in rural areas far away from the school campus. As a result of this initiative, school enrollment increased from 90.4 percent in 2007-2008 to 96.4 percent in 2010-2011.<sup>26</sup>

In terms of punishments for not observing child labor laws, those found employing children are subject to heavy fines ranging from 25,000 to 30,000 dirhams<sup>27</sup>. With backing from the ILO and UNICEF, the Ministry of Employment and Vocational training, has created specialized Child Labor Units that work to identify focal points of child labor. Inspectors trained by the ILO have conducted investigations into child labor

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<sup>24</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Lonely Servitude: Child Domestic Labor in Morocco*, November 15, 2012. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/11/15/lonely-servitude/child-domestic-labor-morocco#page>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

in commercial enterprises discovering multiple instances and issuing subsequent fines. However a significant obstacle in enforcing child labor laws, especially for domestic labor, is the inability of investigators to access private homes. Thus, no fines or offenses were issued against those employing child maids.<sup>28</sup> Under the government's National Plan for Childhood, five Child Protection Units have been created in Casablanca, Marakesh, Tangiers, Meknès, and Essaouira<sup>29</sup>. In reality, these units have been incapable of assisting many child domestic workers. The director of the Casablanca unit cited the biggest problem was the "inaccessibility of children employed in domestic work."<sup>30</sup> The Moroccan government notes the new 2011 constitution provides children systems to report abuses to authorities. However, many child domestic workers are unaware of these support systems or have no way to ask for help because they cannot leave their employers home.

The Moroccan High Commission for Planning (HCP), a governmental body accountable for creating economic, social, and demographic statistics, reported a substantial decline in child labor generally between 1999 and 2011. In 1999 there were an estimated 452,000 child laborers in Morocco, today that number has dropped to 86,000<sup>31</sup>. This can be attributed to education campaigns and an increased enrollment in school.

## **Assumptions and Methodology**

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<sup>28</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Lonely Servitude: Child Domestic Labor in Morocco*, November 15, 2012. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/11/15/lonely-servitude/child-domestic-labor-morocco#page>

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> UNICEF, *Situation of Children and Women in Morocco*, September 2014

My main sources of information are from the aforementioned reports by civil society organizations, my personal investigations into the issue, and interviews with previous domestic maids and experts on child labor. As stated earlier, my expectations before beginning research stand that because of a scarcity of money within some families, financial problems force parents to send their child to work in order to maintain some quality of life. I believe this may also be rooted in traditional Moroccan customs of children working at a young age.

In terms of gathering data, my methodology comprised a review of reports and documentaries by civil societies organizations and an analysis of their findings. I also contacted NGOs and government ministries for interviews; however, after repeated attempts I was unable to receive a response from any of the ministries I contacted. After going to the ministries in person without an official response, I was told that no one was available to speak with me and I needed an appointment.

I did receive a reply from a few NGOs but only one, Association INSAF, was available to meet with me. Some of the NGO's stated their communication specialist was on vacation or traveling elsewhere. Although I was only able to arrange one visit to INSAF, this meeting was valuable in helping me answer some of my key questions on child labor in the domestic sphere. Due to the inaccessibility of the target population and ethical concerns, I was unable to locate any current child maids willing to speak with me. Not only ethically but also logistically it was very hard to put myself in a position to enter into a home with a child maid due to Muslim customs of privacy in the domestic environment. However, after visiting Association INSAF to learn more about the organization and programs, their supportive staff was able to use their connections with contacts in the field to coordinate interviews with two previously employed domestic



maids. Unfortunately, they were unable to arrange the interview until the day after the deadline for the ISP paper. Therefore a revised report is required to incorporate the additional information obtained from those interviews. Lastly, I struggled extensively with translating the source material into English, as many documents were only available in French or Arabic. With the help of my Moroccan friends who are tri-lingual, I was able to overcome this language barrier. I also used translation software from Microsoft Word.

In total the difficulties I encountered during my four-week research period include a failure to reach any government departments for official statements on child labor; a limited response from NGOs, difficulty accessing the target population, an inability to conduct an interview with a child maid before the deadline of ISP, and trouble translating documents into an English format.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Extent of the Phenomenon**

In analyzing the data I found that despite tremendous progress in lessening child labor in the past decade, child employment is still a widespread occurrence with tens of thousands of children working in dismal situations. The extent of child labor stretches from the agricultural to domestic sphere. However, the work of children remains a largely rural phenomenon<sup>32</sup>. At the regional level, in the last five years, more than 70% of children's

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<sup>32</sup>UNICEF, *Situation of Children and Women in Morocco*, September 2014

work was concentrated in four regions of the Kingdom<sup>33</sup>. The region of Doukkala-Abda contained almost a quarter.

- ❖ 24.8% in Doukkala-Abda;
- ❖ 18.2% in Marrakech-Tensift-AI Haouz;
- ❖ 16.1% in Chaouia-Ouardigha;
- ❖ 10% in the region of El Gharb-Chrarda - BeniHssein<sup>34</sup>

According to a national employment survey conducted in 2013 by the HCP they found more than 86,000 children between the ages of 7 and 15 employed in underage labor, representing 1.8% of total population for this age group<sup>35</sup>. Of the estimated 86,000 children working in 2013, approximately 76,000 originated from rural areas. This means roughly 9 out of 10 child laborers come from rural regions. There are numerous factors proliferating child labor and using the above-mentioned sources I have identified the key reasons for its occurrence in the domestic sphere. The main reasons are poverty, illiteracy, lack of formal education and traditional or unfavorable social norms. Multiple international organizations, government associations, and local NGO groups are working to combat the issue. However, legislation on child labor, especially in the domestic sphere, is sparse and not heavily enforced. There appears to be a large disconnect between government theory and practice in the field. This can be attributed to a lack of coordination between governmental departments and a misuse of funds. In speaking with Moroccan locals I learned they believe there is widespread corruption in the Moroccan

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<sup>33</sup>UNICEF, *Situation of Children and Women in Morocco*, September 2014

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

government<sup>36</sup>, taking away from those who truly need help and disrupting the path towards societal growth.

It is important to acknowledge the complexity within this field and recognize the multiple actors involved at different levels within this widespread social phenomenon. In terms of the domestic sphere, aside from the child maids themselves, some of these participants include the traditional family unit family putting their child to work, the family hiring the maid, and the negotiators who are responsible as the intermediary between the two families. In a discussion with Ms. Nejjar of INSAF she claimed these intermediaries were part of the so-called “Moroccan Mafia” responsible for part of the black market trade in Morocco<sup>37</sup>. However, Human Rights Watch labels these liaisons as “Deceptive Intermediaries” in their report, stating they trick some rural families into sending their children to work by fabricating the working conditions to create a false sense of security<sup>38</sup>. These intermediaries collect fees for their services ranging from 200-500 dirhams<sup>39</sup>. Each time they successfully set up a maid in a home they collect the fee, therefore they have a financial incentive to recruit more child maids. They also try to encourage the maids to switch households so they can collect more payment.

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<sup>36</sup> Discussion with Moroccan locals.

<sup>37</sup> Meeting with Lamia Nejjar of INSAF

<sup>38</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Lonely Servitude: Child Domestic Labor in Morocco*, November 15, 2012. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/11/15/lonely-servitude/child-domestic-labor-morocco#page>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

## **Conditions in Domestic Housework**

According to the Human Rights Watch report, some of the conditions found in child domestic work include long hours with little or no breaks, insufficient nourishment, physical beating, as well as verbal and sexual abuse by employers. Child Domestic maids also do not receive the standard minimum wage earning only \$0.11 an hour.<sup>40</sup>The conditions and treatment of child maids is completely unacceptable and is in violation of their basic human rights. In interviews with child maids, girls as young as 8 told HRW that they were tasked with most of the household duties for large families, including taking care of the children who were their same age<sup>41</sup>. They stated if they were to break something while cleaning they may be beaten or verbally attacked. Additionally, some of the child maids expressed their fears of being sexual assaulted by male members of the household who tried to rape them. Some of the girls are confined to their employer's home and are not allowed to leave to see their families for months at a time. The young girls also said when they were allowed to call home their employers would listen in to the phone call. This abusive treatment can cause psychological trauma and scar the young girl for the rest of her life.

However, not all of the families who have child maids are abusive towards them. In an interview featured in the Human Rights Watch report, one child maid said she was working in a good home with a nice family that treated her well and helped her with the work but an intermediary convinced her father to switch to a different house that paid a

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<sup>40</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Lonely Servitude: Child Domestic Labor in Morocco*, November 15, 2012. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/11/15/lonely-servitude/child-domestic-labor-morocco#page>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

higher salary. The maid went on to say her next employer treated her badly and made her work very hard.

### **Economic and Social Factors**

At the economic level Morocco is perceived as a developing nation and is often labeled as a third world country. However, recent industrial development strategies and an increase in infrastructure are improving Morocco's competitiveness in the global market. To encourage exports "Morocco has entered into a bilateral Free Trade agreement with the US in 2006 and an Advanced Status Agreement with the EU in 2008"<sup>42</sup>. Despite economic advances, The Kingdom still struggles with high unemployment rates estimated at 9.9% in 2016<sup>43</sup>. According to the Central Intelligence Agency's online World Fact Book, 15% of families live below the poverty line, particularly in rural areas<sup>44</sup>. Morocco's GDP currently stand at around \$104.9 billion with 13.1% originating from agriculture, 29.8% from industry, and 57.2% from services<sup>45</sup>. Although agriculture makes up only 13.1% of Morocco's total GDP it employs almost 40% of Morocco's total labor force<sup>46</sup>. With Morocco's climate being classified as semi-desert with unpredictable rainfall, the reliance on agriculture has caused huge problems in the past when, in 1982, a large drought struck leaving many people without work or

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<sup>42</sup> CIA World Fact Book: Morocco available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mo.html>

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Agriculture\\_statistics\\_-\\_North\\_Africa\\_and\\_Eastern\\_Mediterranean](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Agriculture_statistics_-_North_Africa_and_Eastern_Mediterranean)

food<sup>47</sup>. Tourism also plays a key role in the economy, as millions of tourists visit Morocco's countless historic sites each year.

From a legaleconomic standpoint, child labor in Morocco can be considered part of the underground or informal economy since many child laborers have only verbal contracts or agreements between the parents and the employers<sup>48</sup>. More regulations and proper enforcement of legislation is necessary to take child laborers out of the black market.

At the societal level Moroccan traditions of children working to support their family are ingrained in the culture, especially in rural environments where these practices are common and even expected. Revisiting the INSAF's data on families in rural areas they found that of the sending families of child domestic maids:

- 47% are poor,
- 28% are very poor,
- 16% have no irregular income,
- 9% have regular incomes,
- 94% of mothers and 72% of fathers are illiterate.

Of the Recipient Families:

- 54% are in the so-called "middle class" category,
- 20% are in the so-called "well-off" category,
- 53% of mothers and 68% of fathers have completed higher education,
- 23% have irregular incomes,
- Only 5% have completed primary schooling or are illiterate.<sup>49</sup>

In analyzing this data, it is apparent there is a correlation between low socio-economic status and the sending families. Due to the irregularity of income these rural families are in need of additional money and are thus forced to send their child to work at an early age. Some child laborers work for their own families, helping to care for farm

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<sup>47</sup> <http://agris.fao.org/agris-search/search.do?recordID=QC2008600188>

<sup>48</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Lonely Servitude: Child Domestic Labor in Morocco*, November 15, 2012. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/11/15/lonely-servitude/child-domestic-labor-morocco#page>

<sup>49</sup> INSAF website [www.insaf.ma](http://www.insaf.ma)

animals or working in their father's shop<sup>50</sup>. The "highest degree of conservatism" can be found in some rural villages where practices are still very much in a traditional mindset<sup>51</sup>. A crucial step in eliminating child labor is to change the traditional mentality of previous generations to recognize the benefits of education and schooling. However, this is easier said than done, and will take time to see any tangible changes in outlooks, primarily in remote rural areas disconnected from the outside world. The work of NGOs and government programs are slowly altering attitudes toward child labor.

In terms of the recipient families, more than half of mothers and fathers in this category have some form of higher education and are classified as wealthy or middle class. In speaking with local Moroccans about the practice of hiring maids many told me that having a maid was seen as a status symbol for the upper classes<sup>52</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, child labor in Morocco has come a long way since the turn of the century. Multiple government programs have been initiated and legislation for the protection of children ratified. However, the fight is not over and there is still much more work to be done. Further effort is needed to ensure proper implementation of these laws and regulations. Parents and employers need to be better informed about decrees and educated about the dangers and repercussions of child labor. In the domestic environment child maids are still subject to terrible conditions and treatment. Legislation regarding the work of child domestics is difficult to properly enforce because there is no law allowing investigators to enter into private homes. The lack of a normative

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<sup>50</sup> Personal experiences in Tarmilat

<sup>51</sup> Discussion with local Moroccans in Rabat

<sup>52</sup> Discussion with local Moroccans in Rabat

framework to assist these child domestic maids is a barrier in the fight to eliminate the “petite bonne” phenomenon. These child maids are being deprived of their basic human rights despite regulations offering them quality of life and basic education. The difficult economic situations experienced by families in rural communities are the main force driving these children to work. However, social structural systems are also proliferating child labor. These deep-rooted social norms condone the work of children in defiance of both international and Moroccan laws. To mitigate these traditional customs, more efforts must be focused at the *grassroots* level in terms of educating the population about the deleterious ramifications of child labor and the benefits of sending children to school.

Suggestions for further action include an increase in the budget for programs dedicated to the protection of children and to the education of the Moroccan public. These programs should work to create a plan for a regulatory outline of additional securities for child laborers. Most importantly, it is crucial for these laws to be implemented in the correct manner. In order for these laws to be applied and accepted, there is a need for more instructive campaigns to warn families of what can happen to their children if they force them to work and inform them of the free access to educational opportunities provided by the government.

Specifically in terms of child domestic labor, more regulations need to be put in place to stop the use and recruitment of new child maids. If the same severe fines that are present in manufacturing and commercial enterprises are applied to the domestic sphere, it is likely to discourage families thinking of hiring a child maid. Additionally, if severe punishments for those “deceptive intermediaries” are instituted then it is likely they will be deterred from trying to recruit more maids. Moreover, a loophole needs to be created



that allows investigators into a private home if they suspect a childmaid is being abused. Similar to the probable cause clause in the United States, investigators would be able to enter a residence if they believed someone's life or wellbeing was at risk.

The fight against child labor is far from over but significant advances have been made in decreasing its use. With further efforts from the international and local communities the use of child labor can be ceased altogether if existing laws are more strictly enforced, more protections are put in place for children, and additional access to education for people in rural areas is made available. If these protocols are implemented they can potentially have a large impact in reducing child labor practices indefinitely.

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