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**Gendered Competencies on the Move:  
The Case of High Skilled Moroccan Females Migrating to Canada**

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**Abstract**

Moroccan immigration has gone through several shifts, like the rise of family reunification, more female educated migrants, and new destinations like Italy, Spain, the Middle East and North America. However, the make-up of migrants is getting more urbanized, more gender-balanced, and more educated. There is growing debate about the significance of this flow of high skilled migration to Canada, as it is becoming the favorite destination for many of them. For these reasons, a qualitative approach is appropriate to explore the main motives and mindset behind this surge of female high skilled workers' intention to immigrate to Canada. The significance of this research is in its approach to understanding this innovative uptick of new young female immigrants to Canada and its links with the general context of Morocco.

*Keywords:* female high skilled migrants, Morocco, immigration to Canada



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## **Introduction**

Migration is often described as a primarily personal act decided by the migrant, with unwitting economic, political and social implications for receiving and sending countries (Collier, 2013). But it is hard to deny that the general situation often plays a big part in this “personal” decision. After the Arab Spring, Morocco swiftly introduced a constitutional reform, then legislative elections which gave the Islamists a “role” to play in governing the country. However, the widespread malcontent can’t be missed, with growing protests in different regions in Morocco, and over 40 % of young Moroccans want to leave (Higher Planning Commission, 2020).

On the other side of the border, the general trend is that host countries are doing their level best to limit the access of undocumented, refugees and low skilled migrants (Uma et al., 2010). Instead, high skilled migrants stand out as the favourite group for developed countries, despite governments’ positions on the political spectrum (Natter et al., 2020). To attract educated immigrants, host countries have set up a unique system to grant permanent residency to applicants meeting their requirements. Accordingly, the Canadian system of immigration stands out as innovative, efficient, and adjustable. Its point-based system of management has been adopted by many countries so far, like Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and South Korea (Library of Congress, 2020). As host countries are the ones setting the rules for immigration, most evaluations of the system are based on their national interests, while little is known about how this new system is influencing women immigration applicants’ perceptions, experiences and their countries of origin.

In this regard, the purpose of this paper is to explore how the idea of migration has involved female high skilled Moroccan migrants and understand/trace their experience of applying via Express Entry to Canada. Specifically, the aim is to understand the interplay of factors and triggers from the personal, and the professional environment of highly skilled female migrants as they are leading the new wave of immigration from Morocco.

To do this, this paper is divided into four main sections in addition to an introduction and a conclusion. The first section is a review of the literature focusing on the history of different



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trends of migration in Morocco and the reasons for the rise of Canada as a new destination for educated female workers. The aim is to get a deep understanding of the main reasons for the surge of female high skilled intention to immigrate and the reasons behind their choice of Canada as a destination. The second section discusses the research methodology adopted in this study. The purpose is to reveal the research approach and research design adopted, identify the target population and discuss how the data have been collected, analyzed and discussed. The third and fourth sections respectively analyze and discuss the data collected.

## **Literature Review**

### **History of Immigration from Morocco**

After World War II, Europe finds itself in a human crisis. The displacement of millions of its population and the urge to rebuild its economy made it desperately need to open its borders to migrants (Iskander, 2010), at least temporarily. Many European countries turned to North Africa to import cheap labour to fill the gap. But since then, the immigration flow has been maintained even after imposing restrictions; first by family reunification, undocumented migration, and then the uptick of high skilled migrants.

On the eve of independence, Morocco wasn't much interested in the prospect of sending Moroccans to work in Europe, to begin with; yet, the growing unrest in several parts of the country, the monarchy struggles with political parties and skyrocketed unemployment figures (between 30 and 50% in 1960) have paved the way for the kingdom to sign deals with European nations to export its workforce (Iskander, 2010). In 1963, Morocco and West Germany signed the first deal to send guest workers. Straightaway, France, Belgium and Netherland stroke their deals, one after the other<sup>1</sup>. The agreements gave the Moroccan authorities the power to select regions from where to send migrants. To follow through, The government recruiters' meticulously selected men from rural areas with mounting uprisings, like the Rif and Souss (Iskander, 2010)

Starting from the late 70s onward, restrictions on immigration and border controls have been curbing the flow of Moroccans to Europe, or old destinations. The post-war economic

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<sup>1</sup>These are the first nations to seal the deal with Morocco are referred to, within the literature, as the old destinations of Moroccan migrants.



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boom, which was the main motivation to bring foreign workers, had slowed down (Iskander, 2010). Moreover, the expansion of the EU to middle and eastern Europe has increased the mobility of workers within the EU (Kahanec et al., 2010). These factors have made non-EU unskilled workers unwelcome.

In reaction to that, Moroccan immigration has gone through several shifts, like the rise of family reunification, the emergence of new destinations like Italy, Spain, the Middle East and North America, and the rise of female educated migrants<sup>2</sup>. To illustrate, the sex ratio of Moroccan migrants in Europe is more balanced and the Netherlands is having more Moroccan female migrants (Heering et al., 2004). Also, in 2014, Spain reported more Moroccan female workers than males with 75 males for 100 females (de Bel-Air, 2016). The Moroccan migrant typical profile of the solo man from the countryside with little or no education leaving his family behind is no longer dominant.

On the top of that, the make-up of migrants is getting more urbanized, more gender-balanced, and more skilled. The level of education of Moroccan migrants is higher than general Moroccans; and among those with higher education, 74 % studied in Morocco. The official report bites the bullet and calls it an illustration of the scale of brain drain (Higher Planning Commission, 2020.)

It goes even further to strike an alarming tone: “Does Morocco have a vocation to train skills for emigration, especially to industrial countries?” the report asks. Also, in comparing the destinations of migrants, the study concluded that Moroccan competencies are more drained by the US and Canada because 76% of North America’s migrants are high skilled if compared with 48.9 for the old European destinations (Higher Planning Commission, 2020). This conclusion is inaccurate as the numbers of migrants to North America are far lower than old destinations.

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<sup>2</sup>44,7% of female migrants reported higher education compared to only 28,4 % for male migrants (Higher Planning Commission, 2020).



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Taking over France, the former colonial power, Canada is becoming the favourite destination of the high skilled migrant in Morocco (Rekrute, 2018), and depending on Canadian immigration policy, this trend can develop more in the future. In tandem, there is growing evidence that the EU image is losing some brightness for talented migrants (Kahanec & Zimmermann, 2011).

The gender factor is an understudied variable in discerning the current direction of migration to Canada. According to the high commission of planning, more than 17.7% of the female population expresses the intention to migrate, 40,3 % for the youth between 15 and 29, and 40.6 % for those holding professional qualifications. Also, female migration is no longer dominated by family reunification (only 2.5 %); employment (42%), quality of life (10.8%), education (14 %), better social and healthcare services (7.3), more rights and liberties (5.9%), and other reasons, are the reported reasons (Higher Planning Commission, 2020). Still, this official study doesn't go deep in analyzing their findings and doesn't provide raw data to make it easier for other analysts to explore more correlations and patterns regarding female reasons of migrants.

### **Reasons of high skilled women migration from Morocco**

Morocco's rooted history with migration makes migration, primarily, at the core of its culture. Without exaggeration, moving north is so popular in Morocco that it is hard to find someone the idea of migration hasn't crossed his/her mind at some point. This factor is called by many researchers "migration culture" (Heering et al., 2004). The high planning commission (2020) reports that potential migrants are about 26 per cent of the population and 40 per cent for the age range between 19 and 29. Also, what's striking is that among participants with no intention to migrate, only 28,5% expressed their satisfaction with living in Morocco, and the remaining 45,7% are not potential migrants because of family issues like caring for parents, children, partner preference or visa restrictions for family (Higher Planning Commission, 2020). It seems that family issues expressed by 45,7% to not immigrate don't rule out their interest in migration, as their circumstances may change.



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Besides, another study, which uses different questions, reported a higher intention to leave. Rekrute, an African company specializing in human resources, asked 1889 Moroccan participants: “If you had the opportunity, would you go and work abroad?” 91 % responded in favor of migration (Rekrute, 2018). Apart from the survey wording<sup>3</sup>, which has significant implications, this study’s sample includes more youth, as 87% are less than 44. Either way, the numbers seem to differ, but it confirms that the intention to migrate is unmistakably high among high skilled educated Moroccans.

More specifically, a study about the motive of female migration from Morocco proves three main categories for women to migrate:” the trailing wife, female labour migration, and escape migration” (Heering et al., 2004). The share of these three types of female migrants is subject to constant changes, depending on the destination.

To explain this trend, the push and pull theory is one of the most effective attempts to explain the reasons for migration. The push factors are the conditions in the sending country like the lack of economic opportunities, social and political context of the sending country; and the pull factors are increased opportunities in the receiving country, freedom, safety, and diaspora (Uma et al., 2010). For the case of Morocco, maybe indicators like the rate of unemployment, poverty, low GDP growth, and other economic aspects of the economy won’t be of use to understand this exodus of skilled workers. Most of these migrants are not affected (at least directly) by these pointers. Nevertheless, it could be of great benefit to put them in the general context of the experience of the middle class in Morocco.

While the middle class is suffering from rising costs and low-quality services, it is disproportionately affecting the population, as women are the ones bearing the brunt. In general, The growing expenses of education, healthcare services and housing sector irregularities are shielding the middle class from spending and stalling social mobility (CESE, 2021). However,

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<sup>3</sup>The literature is conclusive about how can the design and the wording of a survey sway results. In 2003, Pew Research Center asked Americans “favour or oppose taking military action in Iraq to end Saddam Hussein’s rule,” 68% said they favoured military action while 25% said they opposed military action. However, when asked whether they would “favour or oppose taking military action in Iraq to end Saddam Hussein’s rule even if it meant that U.S. forces might suffer thousands of casualties,” responses were dramatically different; only 43% said they favoured military action, while 48% said they opposed it.” (Pew Research Center, 2021).



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the World Bank raises the alarm about women's low labour participation, and the situation is getting worse from 2004 onward. Despite significant improvement of women's access to education, the female labour force represents only 22 of the job market, lower than two decades ago; and constraints in the labour market, skills mismatch, cultural norms vulnerabilities like unpaid and informal work are prevalent (Cerda, Gladys Lopez-Acevedo Florencia, Devoto Matías Morales & Roche, 2021).

With a striking high intention to migrate coupled with inadequate labor protections, particularly for women, many countries are demonstrating commitment to bring more trained workers from abroad to fill their shortages. The new Canadian system of immigration is proving creative in inviting educated candidates, operating transparent digital applications to speed up procedures, and listening to the need of businesses and provinces.

### **How the Canadian Point-based System of Immigration is Affecting Women Immigrants?**

Apart from EU free movement, receiving countries are setting up immigration systems to make sure that immigration is embedded in its political, social and economic context. The general purpose for most wealthy receiving countries is to increase the share of skilled migrants from its inflow of migrants. While “compassion fatigue” (Uma et al., 2010) is kicking in, the prominent trend around the world is to limit refugee flow and to stop undocumented migrants from crossing borders, as much as possible.

To select the best migrants, according to every system, many receiving countries have policies to attract young educated workers to make up for their low birthrate and maintain economic prosperity. To that end, the points-based system has been praised for its efficiency to pick immigrants according to a score based on several factors like age, education credentials, languages, job offer, a family member in Canada, etc (Government of Canada, 2020). These factors are perceived as a precursor of smooth integration into society and costing less for welfare services. A study conducted by Statistics Canada and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) concluded that the pay gap between immigrants women and Canadian-born is shrinking between the period 2015-2019 compared to the period between 2000-2015, right after the introduction of the new system of selection (Crossman et al., 2021).



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Canada has a long experience in adopting that system, and it is cited as exemplary in managing and readjusting its immigration policies.

This approach is influencing the gender representation of immigrants by rendering female migrants empowered by their skills. For women, getting extra points from an arranged job for Canada seems difficult, and the 2019 IRCC report notes that women got only 30% of invitations to apply by arranged employment; But still, women represents 54% of Admissions (principal applicant) through Express Entry by the federal skilled program (IRCC, 2019). Hence, female migrants are offsetting the challenging Canadian labour market by getting extra points from other factors related to their skills.

The Canadian Avenue regards immigration as a strategic long-term project, as opposed to the US system requiring a job offer sponsored by the employer. Nevertheless, Kara Somerville and Scott Walsworth believe that the US system of immigration makes it easier for an immigrant to integrate after securing a job, to avoid credentials hurdles and job market discrimination (Somerville & Walsworth, 2009); While its northern neighbour is sending immigrants to provinces to face growing difficulties finding jobs matching their credentials (Subedi & Rosenberg, 2016). Nevertheless, this comparison misses the differences in political systems. Immigration policies are still political choices made by governments. The Canadian law makes the power to bring people a matter of the federal government and less about businesses. And even US employers are starting to invite more temporary workers, as it is faster, but it provides fewer rights for workers (Somerville & Walsworth, 2009).

What's interesting is that female immigration applicants are the forgotten part of the equation, most studies cover integration or selection, while immigration applicants are less studied. Receiving countries are changing their policies regarding immigration and adjusting their needs; they are determining the conditions of people crossing their borders. But these systems are having an impact on the decision of migration, the gender dynamics, the choice of destination, and the sending countries too.





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## Methodology

As stated above, the primary purpose of this research is to explore this trend of high skilled migration to Canada as a new destination for Moroccan immigrants. The aim is to get a deep understanding of the main reasons for this surge of female high skilled intention to immigrate and the reasons behind their choice of Canada as a destination. Therefore, the research questions are as follows: (i) what are the main reasons for female high skilled migrants to immigrate to Canada in comparison to their male counterparts? (ii) What are the reasons behind their choice of Canada as their destination? In practice, the study interviews eight Moroccan immigration applicants to Canada.

To this end, this research employed a qualitative case study research design and relied on interviews and observations as the main instruments of collecting data. This choice is due to the nature of the questions intending to explain the growing numbers of professional young Moroccans leaving their countries for various reasons.

This study used purposeful sampling. It was by no means representative of this population. Participants were contacted outside language test centers where many immigration applicants were taking their tests to apply for immigration to Canada, or reached in online Facebook groups dedicated to immigration to Canada or to prepare for language tests like IELTS, TEF Canada or TCF. The main characters for selection: first, they had to be at least eligible for immigration under the Express Entry program for high skilled workers as explained in the review of literature, which means they had at least the minimum criteria<sup>4</sup> like a university degree, one language test (French or English). Second, they had to be willing to accept being interviewed either directly, by phone or in writing (flexibility was necessary due to the context of the Covid-19 pandemic). Third, gender balance had to be respected during the selection. Fourth, age should be between 21 and 39.

The participants were provided with a general idea of the research and assurances that their identity will be protected. Seven interviewees accepted being recorded using a digital recorder and one by writing. The interviews were conducted at convenient times and locations and were carried out by minimizing interruptions. Because qualitative research requires

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<sup>4</sup>Minimum criteria don't guarantee selection as candidates with the highest scores are selected first.



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interpretation of the data being collected as qualitative interpretations are not inherent in the interview text but are constructed by the researcher, the interviews were transcribed and translated to English then coded using ATLAS.ti software (Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2022), which is a powerful tool to assist in analyzing qualitative data. It did provide the possibility to create codes, classify them into themes, and move across interviews and codes more efficiently to spot connections and compare responses between the two genders. Besides, names were changed for anonymity. The analysis focuses mainly on female interviewees' responses, as it is the main interest of this article; but comparisons are made between male and female responses when it is relevant.

## **Findings**

Interviewees' responses to questions about their reasons to migrate and their choice of Canada are rich, deep and diverse. Thus, it is not practical to present all their experiences and nuances. Notably, the finding section focuses mainly on the reasons for female participants' immigration to Canada; while comparing some of their responses with male participants when necessary.

As agreed with interviewees before taking part in this study, the findings and discussion section use different names instead of the real ones. Also, any information that can identify participants is removed, like names, locations, or workplace specific culture. Some views are strong, offensive, personal or describe their professional experiences that may have some consequences for their career.

### **Reasons to Migrate to Canada**

Going over immigration candidates' responses and their reasons to migrate, it is noticeable how diverse and personal. Still, they represent solid common themes and feelings. Most of the interviewees report that the idea of immigration crossed their minds at some point in their life. Meanwhile, when pressed about how they took it to the next level and start the paperwork, they recall an emotionally charged story, with some nuances related to gender. Almost every one of the participants has a story that includes a turning point, a key event, a series of events, experiences, or an understanding that living conditions in Morocco are dire with no hope or a



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prospect of swift positive change. All these factors either sudden or growing over time make them unflinching to follow through with their dream to immigrate to Canada.

To illustrate, during her customer-facing role in her first job after graduating, Leila experienced rudeness from many Moroccan clients. She says “I was working directly with clients, and you know our Moroccan silly clients, unlike foreigners”. After experiencing a contrast between her unpleasant experience with Moroccan customers’ behaviors and foreigners’ politeness, she started doing her research online to immigrate.

Meryem has thought about immigration before but the birth of her child made her serious about immigration. “I thought, I want to immigrate, I want to immigrate but it wasn’t serious; once I gave birth to my baby, I started to think about migration,” she said. When asked why? she replies:

Because we have corruption, everything is done by favouritism. The quality of life, Look, generally, the quality of life. For me, I’m looking for a good quality of life, especially for my baby. I want something better for her: education and healthcare.

Her pent-up dissatisfaction with the general state of Morocco in terms of accountability, quality of education and healthcare services have come out stronger after giving birth. It becomes something bigger than her. During the interview, she kept repeating the phrase “quality of life” as clearly illustrated in the last excerpt.

A leap of faith regarding immigration isn’t something reserved for female participants. Kamal experienced a key event that put him on track to migrate. He recalls:

It was about work, my (female) manager shouted at me. I made software and it was as it should be. Despite that, she shouted at me and told me that it wasn’t good. It hurt me. But I tried to swallow it because it was an internship and, you know, in Morocco a job is something very valuable.

Regardless of their status, female responders shared their concerns about the life quality of the future generations as a reason to migrate. Leila mentioned how difficult in Morocco to study, work and have children at the same time. For Safa, she worries about the hefty cost of quality



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education, leisure activities and the quality of food provided to children in Morocco. “Food is a problem, and our children are eating it. There are many things that we can’t export abroad and it is sold here because they don’t comply with health standards”.

Most participants share similar themes and concerns; however, for the interviewed males, no one mentioned children’s quality of life or their prospects in Morocco as a direct reason to migrate. Equally important, participants’ professional life is meticulously dominating their responses.

### **Professional life in limbo**

Depending on the established level of trust during the interview, participants disclosed their professional life and work culture which is at the heart of their determination to migrate to Canada. Some of them expressed how their career path is stuck with no prospect of growth; one engineer described how corruption runs rampant in her department; or the feeling of resentment that the career of less competent favourite candidates is fast-tracked. On top of that, women are reporting other challenges and mistreatment within the workplace.

Leila describes her work life as a vicious cycle with a dead-end, she says “here I’m working below my qualifications... you work for 12 hours with no results... you cannot (work and study)... one will outpace the other. That’s the problem. It is difficult, especially if you are married with children.” They see no prospect of growth, if further education is denied, qualifications are not valued, and no respect for legal working hours.

Another source of disdain in the work culture is favouritism. It is described by responders as the deciding factor, not only in the hiring process but also in promotions in the job market, while their qualifications are overlooked. “Here in Morocco, educated youth struggle to find a job even when they have years of experience. While a favoured candidate, with no experience, can be selected instead of you” Souad reports.

Besides, According to Souad, favouritism is inflaming her with resentment. she explains:

In any domain (she means the private sector), there are no criteria to determine your salary or to get what you deserve. It generally depends on your luck or the person who



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brought you. In general, you feel resentment, and nobody recognizes the value of your work.

What's more is that many female interviewees reported an epidemic of women mistreatment in the workplace.” Another thing is that while working in different companies, despite that women are forcing their ways in the workplace, still, they are regarded differently, and disrespectfully.” Souad spells it out as much as she can.

These Moroccan immigrants evaluate their experiences as employees who lack growth, terrible working conditions, and widespread mistreatment of women. This status quo is pushing them to compare their current state and what may be possible abroad or in Canada according to their collected information or understanding.

### **The Dichotomy: Morocco vs. Canada**

Comparing Morocco and Canada, or here and there (as Moroccans often express it), is shaping immigration candidates' mindsets. Wherever something is discussed during the interviews, it is seen through the lens of this comparison. They perceive Canada as more secure, offering more rights for them and their children, more opportunities, better education, more independence for women, and healthcare services, more open cultural norms for women. Yet, they depict Morocco as insecure, with failing education and healthcare system, and worst of all has no prospect of positive change.

The security situation in Morocco, or the perception of it, is described by both males and female immigrants as troubling in comparison to Canada. Souad describes her situation as a woman “Canada is a secure country, something we don't have, either during the day or at night, especially for a woman”.

Also, the quality of services in Morocco is often compared to Canada. Meryem is looking for more support for her girl” Canada grants you plenty of rights and good things, especially for children... What pushed me more to migrate to Canada is that they encourage children migration, they want the younger generation, which is something good and for the quality of life”. Leila adds that “They consider life as sacred, and they care about health. And they



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emphasize education. They have fewer people. People who go there are educated and informed.”

To support their claims and determination to migrate, Leila expresses her despise at the situation of hospitals “Just look at the hospitals. When my father had an internal hemorrhagic, I took him to Swiss hospital, it is a disaster. It has increased my hatred. I want to leave, just to receive my residency and leave”. Also, Safa tells the story of how her illnesses misdiagnose left her crippling with fear:

For healthcare, I’m sure that I will never be accurately diagnosed. Lately, a doctor examined me and told me that I need surgery to remove my goiter or risk cancer... When I went to the doctor, he asked me to remove them. Then I retok all the tests, went to another clinic, and received another diagnosis that I don’t have to have surgery. The new specialist told me that I had nothing serious; all I had to do is to take some medication and rest... I’m afraid of this.

Another key point is that female interviewee likes the way Canada selects permanent residents by giving additional points for high education and the mastery of French and English. For example, when asked about Canada’s advantages, Leila responds “They consider life as sacred, and they care about health. And they emphasize education. They have fewer people. People who go there are educated and informed”

In the same vein, these migrants are complaining about how their education in their home country is worthless, Safa reports the experience of her immigrant uncle in Canada:

He was working and studying at university. He told me that a university degree is something of value, so when you get a good job after that. Unlike Morocco, after graduating you find a job as a small employee, or you start from the bottom of the ladder. There, once you finish your studies, you find an adequate job depending on your education status, without going up slowly.

Further, the comparison here is about the quality of education, how it resonates within the Moroccan labour market, and how fast workers are promoted within the workplace. For these reasons, responders are motivated to study abroad, “I’m like a lot of people (Moroccans), I think



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studying abroad will be better for me, the opportunities will be better for me. And the lifestyle too” Safa explains.

Speaking of lifestyle, comparisons between the sending and the receiving country go further to lament many cultural aspects influencing the daily life of women in Morocco. Safa delivers an emotional detailed account of how painful it is:

The way of thinking is schizophrenic, they say what they don't do and they do what they don't say. For me, I dislike it. Someone recites Quran for you and preach to you that women need to wear a veil, and in the fact, the things that he does in his life have nothing to do with that. He tells you to cover up... and he sleeps around with several girls, drinking (alcohol), and after Aid (Aid Alfitar) he starts looking for a beer. That's the reality. These are sicknesses. I hate it. It is not only about men, but also women. At a certain time, it is frustrating me, it is annoying, I don't want to live the rest of my life in such an environment. I don't feel that I'm comfortable at all, in my clothes. It is frustrating and it is tiring. They absorb your energy.

Safa expresses how men, and even women, subject women to sexist comments and patriarchal mentality by denying their freedom to wear what they like, while male sexual adventures are very much tolerated. Furthermore, immigration means for some interviewees more independence from family support and that their energy and efforts are not wasted in fighting for basic rights. Safa says:

I won't have my father or mother forever to cover my back, and one day, I will face society, alone. I know that I'm strong enough and smart enough, thanks to God; but I don't want to use this smartness and power in something that has to be in the society, something basic.

Those immigrants are from the Moroccan middle class (at least using the official classification) and they express the frustration of the middle-class quality of life. Safa summarizes it as follow:

If you want to live well in Morocco you need to be a millionaire, minimum; So you can send your children to the French mission school, to sign up to good sports club, to take



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them to good places, to eat good food, to have a good house, to travel 2 or 3 times a year. You can't do it. Unlike abroad, even if you are not a millionaire, you live like one.

According to her, you need to be rich to get a decent standard of living, while in Canada, people live better without being rich.

These comparisons are extended to the Moroccan diaspora. Safa confirms that the conditions of Moroccan immigrants abroad are better “When you see Moroccans come back to Morocco, you feel it, from their clothes, from everything. It is clear”

Maybe the worst thing is that whenever these immigration applicants are asked about how they see the prospect of change in Morocco or something that they believe could change for them to stay, they seem relentlessly hopeless. Souad says “I don't think that something may change my decision, because we have experienced enough and we go back to the start. The mentality here and the whole system is moving slowly toward change”. And Leila put it more fervently “I have no attachment, even staying for my family. I don't have these feelings. Maybe to take them is better because here there is nothing”. Last, Safa argues that she is pessimistic about any meaningful change due to the Moroccan media environment “No, nothing will change. Look, I will be political now...we don't have journalism that can transmit the truth to the public. For these reasons, I feel that there is no hope and because we are witnessing that for long ago”.

## **Discussion**

### **The Clock is Ticking for Young Female Professionals**

After 2011, hundreds of thousands of Moroccans went to the streets to protest against the political situation in the kingdom, they demanded serious democratic reforms, the crackdown on corruption, and better education and healthcare services. Afterwards, there were constitutional changes, which some observers consider revolutionary and others regard as mere cosmetics. But, the dissatisfaction of the general population is hard to miss. The rise of social protest in different regions, GDP growth average between 2010 and 2019 is 3.47<sup>5</sup> (World bank,

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<sup>5</sup>The 2020 GDP growth wasn't counted in the average because, exceptionally, the economy shrunk by more than 7 % due to the Covid-19 crisis.





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2021a), unemployment is still high especially for women and Morocco rank 148 in gender inequality in terms of economic participation and opportunities (World bank, 2021b). The general disappointment about delayed political, social and economic reforms can take many forms like protests, boycotts, online activism, etc.; however, for many young ambitious middle class high skilled workers the clock is ticking and the only way out is to immigrate.

It is naïve to assume that the latest growing number of students applying to study abroad is just about seeking quality education. The interviews show that boundaries between education and workers visas are blurring. Many students are seeking a student's visa intending to migrate and to reside in the receiving country, like the example of Safa, as it is faster to process and many countries are offering university's graduates permanent residency or open working permits. And the opposite is true, many workers are seeking workers' visas or permanent residency for skilled workers to advance their studies, as many female migrants express the challenges of working and studying simultaneously in Morocco, let alone having children. Also, their decision to study abroad is a way to secure their professional success, either abroad or in Morocco.

These female young professionals are feeling the pressure of time and a political system failure to deliver promises. It is appealing to say that this exodus is driven by higher wages in the developed world, while it is much more complex. After they graduated, they experienced harsh conditions, long working hours, mismanagement, corruption, favouritism, sexism and no recognition of their efforts and education. So, as women, they developed a hopeless understanding of their current profession prospect of growth. Most of all, the pressure to grow professionally is not only a question of some highly ambitious professionals, but the low quality of education and healthcare pushes people to seek higher wages to be able to pay the growing cost of housing, private education for their children and leisure activities.

The interviewees' reasons for migration echoes the frustration of the middle class in Morocco. First, unemployment and widespread poverty are considered more urgent than supporting the middle-class lifestyle by state institutions and any support of the middle class is not high on the agenda. Second, the low quality of services makes professionals spend most of their wages paying for basic things. Third, delays in putting reforms in place coupled with



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strong engagement on social networks with the Moroccan diaspora make them live in comparisons between Morocco and Canada.

The problem is that the anger of these young immigrants against the failure of many essential services and the low quality of life is not expressed in more engagement in political parties or kickstarting activism. Similarly, Hannah Ritchie writes in the context of climate change “Once anger transitions into hopelessness, we struggle to achieve much at all. Hopelessness is no better than denial” (Ritchie, 2021). The limited space for youth to express their fury in the mainstream media, political parties, or other social actions is contributing to more hopelessness and more pressure to leave. They find themselves with their backs to the wall.

### **Immigration to Canada as Female Empowerment**

If immigration to Canada is a kind of professional promotion or a way to seek better services for many male immigrants, for female immigrants it is more than that. The challenges facing women in Morocco either in their professional career, access to services, rights, freedoms, the burdens of childcare, and the patriarchal cultural boundaries make immigration a source for their empowerment. For the interviewed sample, no matter their differences, personal circumstances, whether they are dependents or not, single or married, they look upon their project to immigrate to Canada as a way to have more control over their choices, self-worth, and rights.

The Canadian immigration system seems to be empowering for women. Unlike many receiving countries, the procedure offers permanent residency, which grants the same rights as citizenship<sup>6</sup>, to eligible immigration candidates without necessarily getting a job offer in Canada, which women struggle to find. Their language level in English and/or French and their education credentials are evaluated as part of the process of selection. Also, this status hands immigrants the needed stability unequal to temporary workers visas, which make workers more vulnerable to abuse. Still, new-comers are facing many challenges related to their foreign

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<sup>6</sup>The Canadian permanent residency grants the same rights as Canadian citizenship, except for the right to vote, run for office or to work in positions with special security clearance.



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credentials and the pay gap with Canadian-born, but the gap seems to shrink over the years (Crossman et al., 2021).

Likewise, the protection of children's rights, supporting their upbringing and education, offering child benefits to women<sup>7</sup> and making childcare affordable are liberating for women. Many Moroccan women are like Souad, one of the interviewees, who feel anxious after the birth of their first child; they are not only worried about the future of their newborn, their education and health, but also about how they are going to manage their professional life with a child, as they are the primary caregivers in the Moroccan dominant cultural norms.

These cultural norms are making women more dependent on the support of their parents or family, which can be scary for them too. Their immigration project is labeled as a form to secure independence and focus on their ambitions and dreams as they trust the receiving country institution for future support. It's an underreported reason for the immigration of many Moroccan women.

Given that, successful professional life is becoming more and more the trademark of success and fulfillment in life for female participants. They are willing, heartily or not, to be far from their families, social support, and the sunny weather of their home country to fulfill that dream. They believe that their current circumstances, the work conditions and the limited education opportunities are putting a ceiling to their aspirations for more career opportunities, better work-life balance and high-quality social services.

In brief, Moroccan society is having some significant cultural shift toward more ambitious and adventurous women willing to take risks to feel empowered. In contrast, the current political, economic and social systems in the kingdom are failing them and putting brakes on their ways, which lay the groundwork for more female immigration.

## **Conclusion**

This study offers an insightful understanding and a contribution to the debate about high skilled migration in general and Canada specifically. It manages to frame this new shift in the long history of migration in Morocco as part of the changing gendered roles within the Morocco

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<sup>7</sup> The Canadian send childcare benefits money to women, as they are presumed to be primarily responsible for the care of the child (Government of Canada, 2021).



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society and how many female young educated immigrants are feeling hopeless about the general political, economic and social climate and willing to risk it all for a better quality of life in the receiving country.

They represent an overlooked middle class, which is neither poor (at least by the Moroccan standards), nor rich and struggling to find an acceptable quality of life for themselves and their children. Strongly expressed, they have no intention to stay or hope for a better future in their home country, which is an alarming conclusion for policymakers to consider.

The general dissatisfaction with social services and education within the society is often expressed publicly. But, mismanagement, favoritism, and lack of investment in human resources within the private sector are taking a toll on the spirit of female workers and driving them to look for immigration not only as a solution but as a source for empowerment. They regard immigration to Canada as a gateway for more control over their choices, self-worth, and rights. Also, the implications of delayed reforms and postponed decisions go unnoticed, as though it has no effect. The more time slips away without any meaningful changes, the more high-skilled migrants are going to seek migration instead of waiting for unfulfilled promises.

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