

## Western Sahara



### Introduction Western Sahara

**Background:** Morocco virtually annexed the northern two-thirds of Western Sahara (formerly Spanish Sahara) in 1976, and the rest of the territory in 1979, following Mauritania's withdrawal. A guerrilla war with the Polisario Front contesting Rabat's sovereignty ended in a 1991 UN-brokered cease-fire; a UN-organized referendum on final status has been repeatedly postponed.

### Geography Western Sahara

**Location:** Northern Africa, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, between Mauritania and Morocco

**Geographic coordinates:** 24 30 N, 13 00 W

**Map references:** Africa

**Area:** *total:* 266,000 sq km  
*land:* 266,000 sq km  
*water:* 0 sq km

**Area - comparative:** about the size of Colorado

**Land boundaries:** *total:* 2,046 km  
*border countries:* Algeria 42 km, Mauritania 1,561 km, Morocco 443 km

**Coastline:** 1,110 km

**Maritime claims:** contingent upon resolution of sovereignty issue

**Climate:** hot, dry desert; rain is rare; cold offshore air currents produce fog and heavy dew

**Terrain:** mostly low, flat desert with large areas of rocky or sandy surfaces rising to small mountains in south and northeast

**Elevation extremes:** *lowest point:* Sebjet Tah -55 m  
*highest point:* unnamed location 463 m

**Natural resources:** phosphates, iron ore

**Land use:** *arable land:* 0.02%  
*permanent crops:* 0%  
*other:* 99.98% (2005)

**Irrigated land:** NA

**Natural hazards:** hot, dry, dust/sand-laden sirocco wind can occur during winter and spring; widespread harmattan haze exists 60% of time, often severely restricting visibility

**Environment - current issues:** sparse water and lack of arable land

**Environment international agreements:** *party to:* none of the selected agreements  
- *signed, but not ratified:* none of the selected agreements

**Geography - note:** the waters off the coast are particularly rich fishing areas

People	Western Sahara
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**Population:** 273,008 (July 2006 est.)

**Age structure:** *0-14 years:* NA  
*15-64 years:* NA  
*65 years and over:* NA (2006 est.)

**Population growth rate:** NA

**Birth rate:** NA births/1,000 population

**Death rate:** NA deaths/1,000 population

**Sex ratio:** NA

**Infant mortality rate:** *total:* NA  
*male:* NA  
*female:* NA

**Life expectancy at birth:** *total population:* NA years  
*male:* NA years  
*female:* NA years

**Total fertility rate:** NA children born/woman

**HIV/AIDS - adult prevalence rate:** NA

**HIV/AIDS - people living with HIV/AIDS:** NA

**HIV/AIDS - deaths:** NA

**Major infectious diseases:** *degree of risk:* intermediate  
*food or waterborne diseases:* bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever  
*vectorborne diseases:* may be a significant risk in some locations during the transmission season (typically April through November) (2005)

**Nationality:** *noun:* Sahrawi(s), Sahraoui(s)  
*adjective:* Sahrawi, Sahrawian, Sahraouian

**Ethnic groups:** Arab, Berber

**Religions:** Muslim

**Languages:** Hassaniya Arabic, Moroccan Arabic

**Literacy:** NA

<b>Government</b>	<b>Western Sahara</b>
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**Country name:** *conventional long form:* none  
*conventional short form:* Western Sahara  
*former:* Spanish Sahara

**Government type:** legal status of territory and issue of sovereignty unresolved; territory contested by Morocco and Polisario Front (Popular Front for the Liberation of the Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro), which in February 1976 formally proclaimed a government-in-exile of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), led by President Mohamed ABDELAZIZ; territory partitioned between Morocco and Mauritania in April 1976, with Morocco acquiring northern two-thirds; Mauritania, under pressure from Polisario guerrillas, abandoned all claims to its portion in August 1979; Morocco moved to occupy that sector shortly thereafter and has since asserted administrative control; the Polisario's government-in-exile was seated as an Organization of African Unity (OAU) member in 1984; guerrilla activities continued sporadically, until a UN-monitored cease-fire was implemented 6 September 1991

**Capital:** none  
*time difference:* UTC 0 (5 hours ahead of Washington, DC during Standard Time)

**Administrative divisions:** none (under de facto control of Morocco)

**Suffrage:** none; a UN-sponsored voter identification campaign not yet completed

**Executive branch:** none

**Political pressure groups and leaders:** none

**International organization participation:** none

**Diplomatic representation in the US:** none

**Diplomatic representation from the US:** none

Economy	Western Sahara
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**Economy - overview:** Western Sahara depends on pastoral nomadism, fishing, and phosphate mining as the principal sources of income for the population. The territory lacks sufficient rainfall for sustainable agricultural production, and most of the

food for the urban population must be imported. Incomes in Western Sahara are substantially below the Moroccan level. The Moroccan Government controls all trade and other economic activities in Western Sahara. Morocco and the European Union signed a four-year agreement in July 2006 allowing European vessels to fish off the coast of Morocco, including the disputed waters off the coast of Western Sahara. Moroccan energy interests in 2001 signed contracts to explore for oil off the coast of Western Sahara, which has angered the Polisario. However, in 2006, the Polisario awarded similar exploration licenses in the disputed territory, which would come into force if Morocco and the Polisario resolve their dispute over Western Sahara.

<b>GDP (purchasing power parity):</b>	\$NA
<b>GDP (official exchange rate):</b>	NA
<b>GDP - real growth rate:</b>	NA%
<b>GDP - per capita (PPP):</b>	\$NA
<b>GDP - composition by sector:</b>	<i>agriculture: NA%</i> <i>industry: NA%</i> <i>services: 40%</i>
<b>Labor force:</b>	12,000
<b>Labor force - by occupation:</b>	<i>agriculture: 50%</i> <i>industry and services: 50%</i>
<b>Unemployment rate:</b>	NA%
<b>Population below poverty line:</b>	NA%
<b>Household income or consumption by percentage share:</b>	<i>lowest 10%: NA%</i> <i>highest 10%: NA%</i>
<b>Inflation rate (consumer prices):</b>	NA%

**Budget:** *revenues:* \$NA  
*expenditures:* \$NA

**Agriculture - products:** fruits and vegetables (grown in the few oases); camels, sheep, goats (kept by nomads); fish

**Industries:** phosphate mining, handicrafts

**Industrial production growth rate:** NA%

**Electricity - production:** 85 million kWh (2004)

**Electricity - production by source:** *fossil fuel:* 100%  
*hydro:* 0%  
*nuclear:* 0%  
*other:* 0% (2001)

**Electricity - consumption:** 79.05 million kWh (2004)

**Electricity - exports:** 0 kWh (2004)

**Electricity - imports:** 0 kWh (2004)

**Oil - production:** 0 bbl/day (2004 est.)

**Oil - consumption:** 1,800 bbl/day (2004 est.)

**Oil - exports:** NA bbl/day (2001)

**Oil - imports:** NA bbl/day (2001)

**Natural gas - production:** 0 cu m (2004 est.)

**Natural gas - consumption:** 0 cu m (2004 est.)

**Exports:** \$NA

**Exports - commodities:** phosphates 62%

**Exports - partners:** Morocco claims and administers Western Sahara, so trade partners are included in overall Moroccan accounts (2006)

**Imports:** \$NA

**Imports -** fuel for fishing fleet, foodstuffs

**commodities:**

**Imports - partners:** Morocco claims and administers Western Sahara, so trade partners are included in overall Moroccan accounts (2006)

**Debt - external:** \$NA

**Economic aid - recipient:** \$NA

**Currency (code):** Moroccan dirham (MAD)

**Currency code:** MAD

**Exchange rates:** Moroccan dirhams per US dollar - 8.865 (2005), 8.868 (2004), 9.5744 (2003), 11.0206 (2002)

**Fiscal year:** calendar year

**Communications Western Sahara**

**Telephones - main lines in use:** about 2,000 (1999 est.)

**Telephones - mobile cellular:** 0 (1999)

**Telephone system:** *general assessment:* sparse and limited system  
*domestic:* NA  
*international:* country code - 212; tied into Morocco's system by microwave radio relay, tropospheric scatter, and satellite; satellite earth stations - 2 Intelsat (Atlantic Ocean) linked to Rabat, Morocco

**Radio broadcast stations:** AM 2, FM 0, shortwave 0 (1998)

**Radios:** 56,000 (1997)

**Television broadcast stations:** NA

**Televisions:** 6,000 (1997)

**Internet country code:** .eh

**Internet Service Providers (ISPs):** 1 (2000)

**Internet users:** NA

## Transportation Western Sahara

**Airports:** 11 (2006)

**Airports - with paved runways:** *total: 3*  
2,438 to 3,047 m: 3 (2006)

**Airports - with unpaved runways:** *total: 8*  
1,524 to 2,437 m: 1  
914 to 1,523 m: 4  
*under 914 m: 3 (2006)*

**Ports and terminals:** Ad Dakhla, Cabo Bojador, Laayoune (El Aaiun)

## Military Western Sahara

**Military expenditures - dollar figure:** \$992.2 million

## Transnational Issues Western Sahara

**Disputes - international:** Morocco claims and administers Western Sahara, whose sovereignty remains unresolved; UN-administered cease-fire has remained in effect since September 1991, administered by the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), but attempts to hold a referendum have failed and parties thus far have rejected all brokered proposals