



Violence against women is a hot topic in Morocco, where women's rights activists in have criticised the Islamist-led government for excluding them from drafting a proposed legislation to combat [violence against women](#) . They also accuse the government for seeking to dilute the bill through changes.

The long-awaited bill, currently under study, comes after the adoption of a new constitution in 2011 that enshrines gender equality and urges the state to promote it.

In the preliminary version of the bill, prison sentences of up to 25 years threaten perpetrators of violence against women.

The bill, still in drafting state, would take unprecedented steps towards criminalising sexual harassment, risking possible three-year prison terms for suspects.

"We have waited for years for this law and we are now very disappointed by its content," said Najat Errazi, who heads the Moroccan Association for Women's Rights, speaking at a meeting in Casablanca, to discuss the bill, according to AFP news agency.

Facing several objections, the government has been forced to establish a committee, headed by Abdelilah Benkirane, the country's prime minister from the Islamist Party of Justice and

Development, to review the draft law and demonstrate its willingness to cooperate.

The progress is being closely followed in Morocco, where many have had traumatic personal experiences of violence, whether domestic or committed by strangers.

According to a study by the state planning commission, [HCP](#) , around one in every two unmarried women in Morocco was subjected to physical and/or verbal sexual violence during the year that it was carried out.

According to the [study](#) , nearly nine percent of women in Morocco have been physically subjected to sexual violence at least once.

Sexual violence of a physical or psychological nature has affected some 25 percent of women overall, and a startling 40 percent among 18- to 24-year-olds.

During an official visit to Morocco in October, UN Women Deputy Executive Director Lakshmi Puri visited the Nejma Centre, where women survivors of violence benefit from counselling, training, information, psychological support and legal advice.

At the Nejma Centre, Ms. Puri met with women as well as the staff members of the NGO. Sitting around a table, the women shared their stories.

“My husband kicked me and my child out at 2:00 a.m. at night and without money. I went to the police station but I realized my husband had already bribed them. My family is modest and couldn’t help me. I came to Nejma Centre. Mounia [one of the counselors] gave me advice and put me in touch with a lawyer to help me take the right steps,” said one of the women.

Another woman recounted that she was so desperate when she first arrived that she “wanted to die”. But sharing her story helped her to focus on her child and “to fight for her rights”. “We know our rights and we feel empowered to face our perpetrators and start legal proceedings against them,” she added.

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