



Africa :: Western Sahara

Introduction :: Western Sahara

Background:

Western Sahara is a disputed territory on the northwest coast of Africa bordered by Morocco, Mauritania, and Algeria. After Spain withdrew from its former colony of Spanish Sahara in 1976, Morocco annexed the northern two-thirds of Western Sahara and claimed the rest of the territory in 1979, following Mauritania's withdrawal. A guerrilla war with the Polisario Front contesting Morocco's sovereignty ended in a 1991 cease-fire and the establishment of a UN peacekeeping operation. As part of this effort, the UN sought to offer a choice to the peoples of the Western Sahara between independence (favored by the Polisario Front) or integration into Morocco. A proposed referendum never took place due to lack of agreement on voter eligibility. The 2,700 km- (1,700 mi-) long defensive sand berm, built by the Moroccans from 1980 to 1987 and running the length of the territory, continues to separate the opposing forces with Morocco controlling the roughly 80 percent of the territory west of the berm. Local demonstrations criticizing the Moroccan authorities occur regularly, and there are periodic ethnic tensions between the native Sahrawi population and Moroccan immigrants. Morocco maintains a heavy security presence in the territory.

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

country comparison to the world: 78

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 elevation 805 m

Natural resources:

phosphates, iron ore

Land use:

arable land: 0.02%
permanent crops: 0%
other: 99.98% (2011)

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

Geography - note:

the waters off the coast are particularly rich fishing areas

People and Society :: Western Sahara

Nationality:

noun: Sahrawi(s), Sahraoui(s)

adjective: Sahrawi, Sahrawian, Sahraouian

Ethnic groups:

Arab, Berber

Languages:

Standard Arabic (national), Hassaniya Arabic, Moroccan Arabic

Religions:

Muslim

Population:

554,795 (July 2013 est.)

country comparison to the world: 172

note: estimate is based on projections by age, sex, fertility, mortality, and migration; fertility and mortality are based on data from neighboring countries (July 2014 est.)

Age structure:

0-14 years: 38.1% (male 106,868/female 104,574)

15-24 years: 19.7% (male 54,970/female 54,217)

25-54 years: 33.7% (male 91,986/female 95,114)

55-64 years: 3.7% (male 12,408/female 14,159)

65 years and over: 3.6% (male 9,002/female 11,497) (2014 est.)

Dependency ratios:

total dependency ratio: 41.2 %

youth dependency ratio: 37.5 %

elderly dependency ratio: 3.7 %

potential support ratio: 27 (2013)

Median age:

total: 20.8 years

male: 20.3 years

female: 21.3 years (2014 est.)

Population growth rate:

2.89% (2014 est.)

country comparison to the world: 15

Birth rate:

30.71 births/1,000 population (2014 est.)

country comparison to the world: 40

Death rate:

8.49 deaths/1,000 population (2014 est.)

country comparison to the world: 80

Urbanization:

urban population: 82% of total population (2011)

rate of urbanization: 3.49% annual rate of change (2010-15 est.)

Major urban areas - population:

Laayoune 237,000 (2011)

Sex ratio:

at birth: 1.04 male(s)/female
0-14 years: 1.02 male(s)/female
15-24 years: 1.01 male(s)/female
25-54 years: 0.97 male(s)/female
55-64 years: 0.99 male(s)/female
65 years and over: 0.78 male(s)/female
total population: 0.98 male(s)/female (2014 est.)

Infant mortality rate:

total: 56.09 deaths/1,000 live births
country comparison to the world: 27
male: 61.04 deaths/1,000 live births
female: 50.93 deaths/1,000 live births (2014 est.)

Life expectancy at birth:

total population: 62.27 years
country comparison to the world: 189
male: 60 years
female: 64.63 years (2014 est.)

Total fertility rate:

4.07 children born/woman (2014 est.)
country comparison to the world: 38

HIV/AIDS - adult prevalence rate:

NA

HIV/AIDS - people living with HIV/AIDS:

NA

HIV/AIDS - deaths:

NA

Literacy:

NA

Government:: Western Sahara

Country name:

conventional long form: none
conventional short form: Western Sahara
former: Rio de Oro, Saguia el Hamra, 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, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), based out of refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria, led by President Mohamed ABDELAZIZ

Capital:

Laayoune (administrative center)
time difference: UTC 0 (5 hours ahead of Washington, DC during Standard Time)
daylight saving time: +1hr, begins last Sunday in April; ends last Sunday in September

Administrative divisions:

none (territory west of the berm under de facto Moroccan control)

Suffrage:

none; (residents of Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara participate in Moroccan elections)

Executive branch:

none

Political pressure groups and leaders:

none

International organization participation:

AU, CAN (observer), WFTU (NGOs)

Diplomatic representation in the US:

none

Diplomatic representation from the US:

none

Economy:: Western Sahara

Economy - overview:

Western Sahara has a small market-based economy whose main industries are fishing, phosphate mining, and pastoral nomadism. The territory's arid desert climate makes sedentary agriculture difficult, and Western Sahara imports much of its food. The Moroccan Government administers Western Sahara's economy and is a key source of employment, infrastructure development, and social spending in the territory. Western Sahara's unresolved legal status makes the exploitation of its natural resources a contentious issue between Morocco and the Polisario. Morocco and the EU in December 2013 finalized a four-year agreement allowing European vessels to fish off the coast of Morocco, including disputed waters off the coast of Western Sahara. Oil has never been found in Western Sahara in commercially significant quantities, but Morocco and the Polisario have quarreled over who has the right to authorize and benefit from oil exploration in the territory. Western Sahara's main long-term economic challenge is the development of a more diverse set of industries capable of providing greater employment and income to the territory.

GDP (purchasing power parity):

\$906.5 million (2007 est.)

country comparison to the world: 207

GDP (official exchange rate):

\$NA

GDP - real growth rate:

NA%

GDP - per capita (PPP):

\$2,500 (2007 est.)

country comparison to the world: 187

GDP - composition, by sector of origin:

agriculture: NA%

industry: NA%

services: 40% (2007 est.)

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%

Labor force:

144,000 (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 178

Labor force - by occupation:

agriculture: 50%

industry and services: 50% (2005 est.)

Unemployment rate:

NA%

Population below poverty line:

NA%

Household income or consumption by percentage share:

lowest 10%: NA%

highest 10%: NA%

Budget:

revenues: \$NA

expenditures: \$NA

Fiscal year:

calendar year

Inflation rate (consumer prices):

NA%

Exports:

\$NA

Exports - commodities:

phosphates 62%

Imports:

\$NA

Imports - commodities:

fuel for fishing fleet, foodstuffs

Debt - external:

\$NA

Exchange rates:

Moroccan dirhams (MAD) per US dollar -
8.439 (2013)
8.6026 (2012)
8.4172 (2010)
8.0571 (2009)
7.526 (2008)

Energy :: Western Sahara

Electricity - production:

90 million kWh (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 201

Electricity - consumption:

83.7 million kWh (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 200

Electricity - exports:

0 kWh (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 213

Electricity - imports:

0 kWh (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 214

Electricity - installed generating capacity:

58,000 kW (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 184

Electricity - from fossil fuels:

100% of total installed capacity (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 42

Electricity - from nuclear fuels:

0% of total installed capacity (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 205

Electricity - from hydroelectric plants:

0% of total installed capacity (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 209

Electricity - from other renewable sources:

0% of total installed capacity (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 141

Crude oil - production:

0 bbl/day (2012 est.)

country comparison to the world: 145

Crude oil - exports:

0 bbl/day (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 206

Crude oil - imports:

0 bbl/day (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 142

Crude oil - proved reserves:

0 bbl (1 January 2013 es)

country comparison to the world: 207

Refined petroleum products - production:

0 bbl/day (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 209

Refined petroleum products - consumption:

1,948 bbl/day (2011 est.)

country comparison to the world: 188

Refined petroleum products - exports:

0 bbl/day (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 144

Refined petroleum products - imports:

1,702 bbl/day (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 184

Natural gas - production:

0 cu m (2011 est.)

country comparison to the world: 209

Natural gas - consumption:

0 cu m (2010 est.)

country comparison to the world: 209

Natural gas - exports:

0 cu m (2011 est.)

country comparison to the world: 208

Natural gas - imports:

0 cu m (2011 est.)

country comparison to the world: 79

Natural gas - proved reserves:

0 cu m (1 January 2013 es)

country comparison to the world: 207

Carbon dioxide emissions from consumption of energy:

316,700 Mt (2011 est.)

country comparison to the world: 187

Communications :: Western Sahara

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 (2008)

Broadcast media:

Morocco's state-owned broadcaster, Radio-Television Marocaine (RTM), operates a radio service from Laayoune and relays TV service; a Polisario-backed radio station also broadcasts (2008)

Internet country code:

.eh

Transportation :: Western Sahara

Airports:

6 (2013)

country comparison to the world: 174

Airports - with paved runways:

total: 3

2,438 to 3,047 m: 3 (2013)

Airports - with unpaved runways:

total: 3

1,524 to 2,437 m: 1

914 to 1,523 m: 1

under 914 m:

1 (2013)

Ports and terminals:

major seaport(s): Ad Dakhla, Laayoune (El Aaiun)

Military :: Western Sahara

Manpower fit for military service:

males age 16-49: 79,489

females age 16-49: 87,362 (2010 est.)

Manpower reaching militarily significant age annually:

male: 5,523

female: 5,429 (2010 est.)

Transnational Issues :: Western Sahara

Disputes - international:

many neighboring states reject Moroccan administration of Western Sahara; several states have extended diplomatic relations to the "Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic" represented by the Polisario Front in exile in Algeria, while others recognize Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara; most of the approximately 90,000 Sahrawi refugees have been sheltered in camps in Tindouf, Algeria since the 1980s