Dispatch No. 1004 | 23 June 2025

Youth like Morocco's direction even as jobs remain scarce and interest in emigration grows

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 1004 | Maakwe Cumanzala

Summary

More than half of Morocco's population is under the age of 35, positioning youth at the centre of the country's development agenda (United States Census Bureau, 2025). As this demographic continues to grow, so do expectations around access to education, employment, and social mobility. However, these expectations are often met with limited opportunity. Job creation has not kept pace with the expanding working-age population, resulting in a widening gap between the number of young people entering the labour force and the availability of meaningful employment (Population Reference Bureau, 2019; World Bank, 2017).

Morocco ranks 82nd out of 183 countries – third-best in Africa – in the 2023 Global Youth Development Index (Commonwealth, 2024), which assesses countries based on a range of social, political, economic, health, and education measures. Yet roughly one in three young Moroccans are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), leaving a significant portion of the population excluded from both the formal economy and skills-building opportunities (Alfani, Clementi, Fabiani, Molini, & Valentini, 2023). Unemployment among youth aged 15-24 rose from 35.9% to 37.7% in the first quarter of 2025, highlighting the continued challenges of absorbing new labour-market entrants, even as overall joblessness declined (Hespress English, 2025).

In response, the government has introduced initiatives such as the Economic Inclusion Programme for Youth, which aims to promote entrepreneurship and skills development (World Bank, 2019). While efforts like this represent important steps toward addressing youth unemployment, the scale of the problem suggests that much more is needed to bridge the gap between Morocco's young population and the economic opportunities they need to thrive.

Findings from the Afrobarometer Round 10 survey (2024) confirm the disconnect between educational progress and labour-market outcomes. Moroccan youth are more educated than previous generations, yet many struggle to find employment. Job creation ranks as the top policy priority for youth. But despite economic pressures and rising interest in emigration, many remain hopeful and invested in the country's future.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Nine survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 10 surveys were launched in January 2024. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

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The Afrobarometer team in Morocco, led by Global for Survey and Consulting (GSC), interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult citizens of Morocco in February 2024. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Morocco in 2013, 2015, 2018, 2021, and 2022.

Key findings

- In Morocco, higher education has expanded, but labour-market outcomes remain weak.
    - Youth (aged 18-35) are more educated than previous generations. More than half (56%) have post-secondary education, compared to 9%-27% among older cohorts.
    - But one in five youth (21%) are not employed and are actively looking for jobs – triple the rate among 36- to 45-year-olds (7%). Only one in four (25%) have full-time jobs.
    - Youth identify a mismatch between education and job requirements (34%) and a lack of experience (18%) as the main obstacles to youth employment.
    - If the government could increase its spending on programmes to help youth, job creation would be young people's top priority for greater investment.
- Unemployment also tops the list of important problems that youth say their government must address, followed by the increasing cost of living, drought, and education.
- On their top priorities, youth express critical views of their government's performance. Only 20% approve of the government's efforts to create jobs, and even fewer (14%) commend its performance on keeping prices stable.
- Despite economic strain, youth remain broadly optimistic: 73% say Morocco is moving in "the right direction," and 54% expect economic conditions to improve in the next year.
- Even so, more than one in four youth (28%) say they have thought "a lot" about emigrating, up from 20% in 2017.

Level of education

Moroccan youth (aged 18-35) have more education than their elders (Figure 1). More than half (56%) of youth have post-secondary qualifications, compared to 9%-27% among older cohorts. One in 25 youth (4%) lack formal schooling, vs. 13%-44% of older groups.

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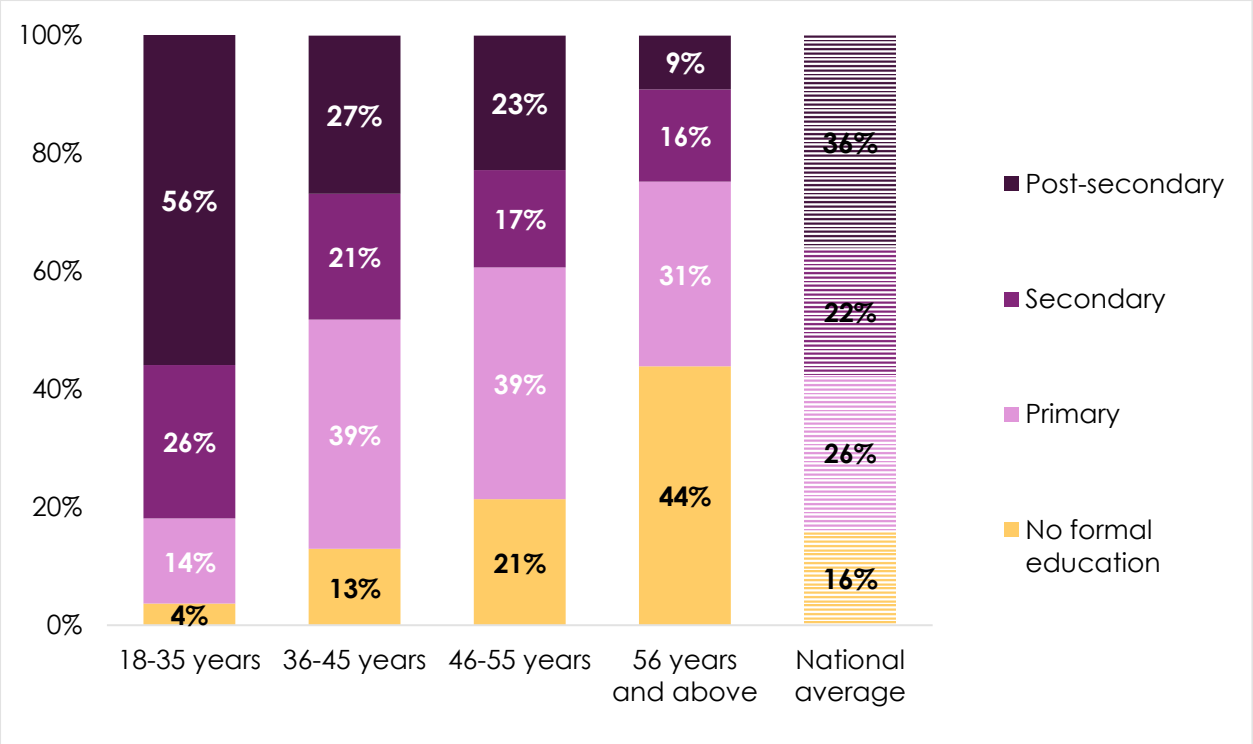
Figure 1: Level of education | by age group | Morocco | 2024



Respondents were asked: *What is your highest level of education?*

Employment status

Despite gains in education, the employment situation for Moroccan youth remains challenging, with significant proportions of young people not engaged in the labour market. Among individuals aged 18-35 years, a striking 63% are not employed, including 21% who are actively looking for jobs – triple the rate among 36- to 45-year-olds (7%) (Figure 2).

Only one in four youth (25%) are employed full-time, while 12% are working part-time. The share of unemployed youth looking for work includes 12% who identify as students, while the group without jobs and not actively looking for work (42%) includes 21% who say they are students (Figure 3).

The disconnect between educational attainment and employment outcomes may reflect a mismatch between the skills that young people acquire and the demands of the labour market. One-third (34%) of young respondents identify this mismatch as a major obstacle to youth employment, while another 14% point to inadequate training or preparation (Figure 4). Employers' demands for prior work experience compound the problem: 18% of youth cite lack of experience as a barrier. Others mention a lack of entrepreneurial skills or motivation among youth (15%) as well as an unwillingness to do certain types of work, such as agricultural or difficult jobs (9%).

Older cohorts offer similar analyses, though they are somewhat less likely to point to a mismatch between education and job requirements and somewhat more likely to blame young people's resistance to doing certain types of work. Across all age groups, just 3% of respondents say that youth face no particular barriers to employment at all.

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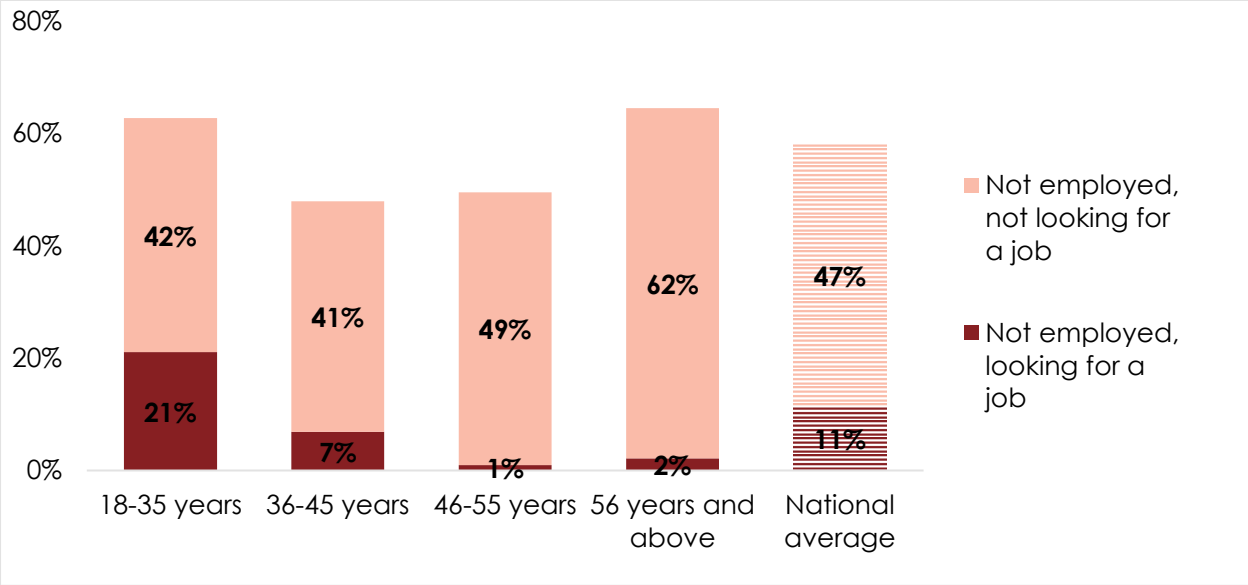
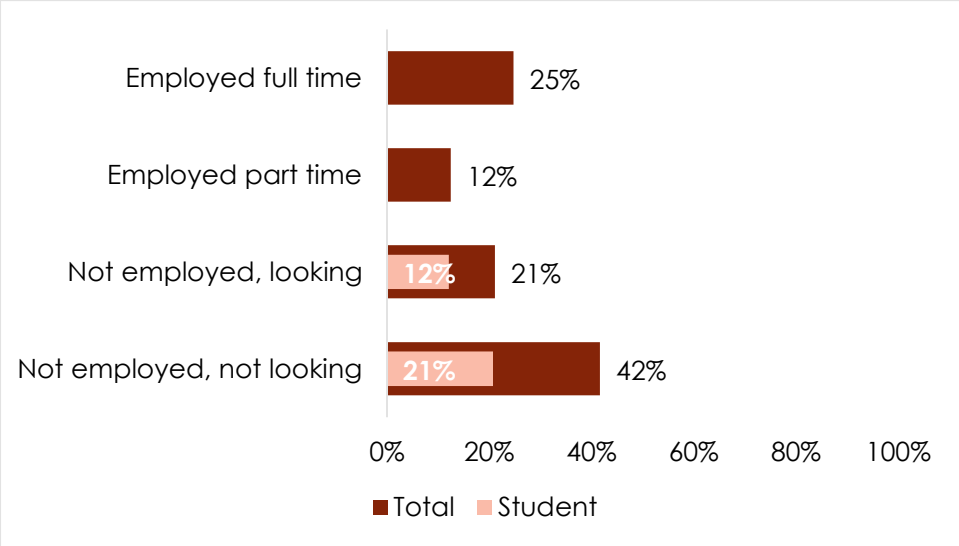
Figure 2: Not employed, looking vs. not looking for a job | by age group | Morocco | 2024



Respondents were asked: *Do you have a job that pays a cash income? [If yes:] Is it full time or part time? [If no:] Are you currently looking for a job?*

Figure 3: Employment and student status | respondents aged 18-35 | Morocco | 2024



Respondents were asked:

Do you have a job that pays a cash income? [If yes:] Is it full time or part time? [If no:] Are you currently looking for a job?

What is your main occupation? [If not currently working:] What was your last main occupation? (% who say "student")

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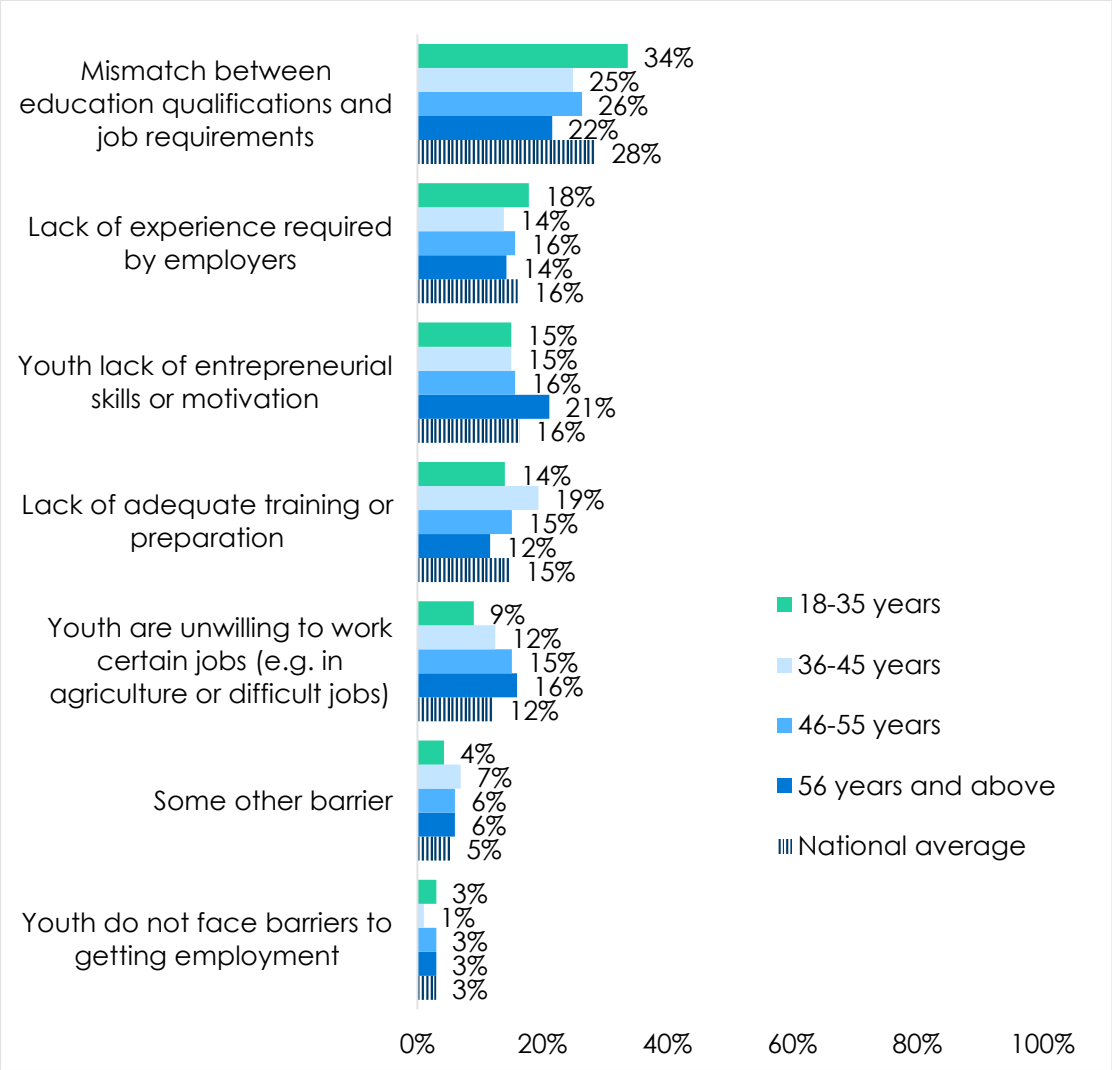
Figure 4: Barriers to youth employment | by age group | Morocco | 2024



Respondents were asked: *Aside from economic conditions and a shortage of jobs, which of the following factors, if any, would you say is the main barrier to young people getting jobs and entering the workforce?*

Despite the many challenges they face, Morocco's youth remain ambitious and entrepreneurial in their vision for the future. When asked about their preferred employment, nearly half (47%) of young Moroccans say they would like to start their own business – a level of interest that is only slightly below the national average (50%) (Figure 5). This strong preference for self-employment reflects optimism but perhaps also necessity, as formal job opportunities remain limited.

At the same time, many young Moroccans see public-sector employment as an attractive option. Nearly one-third (31%) say they would prefer to work for the government or public sector – a much larger share than among older adults. In contrast, few young people express a preference for working in the private sector (10%) or for non-governmental organisations (3%). The limited interest in private-sector employment may reflect both a shortage of quality jobs and persistent perceptions about the security and desirability of different sectors.

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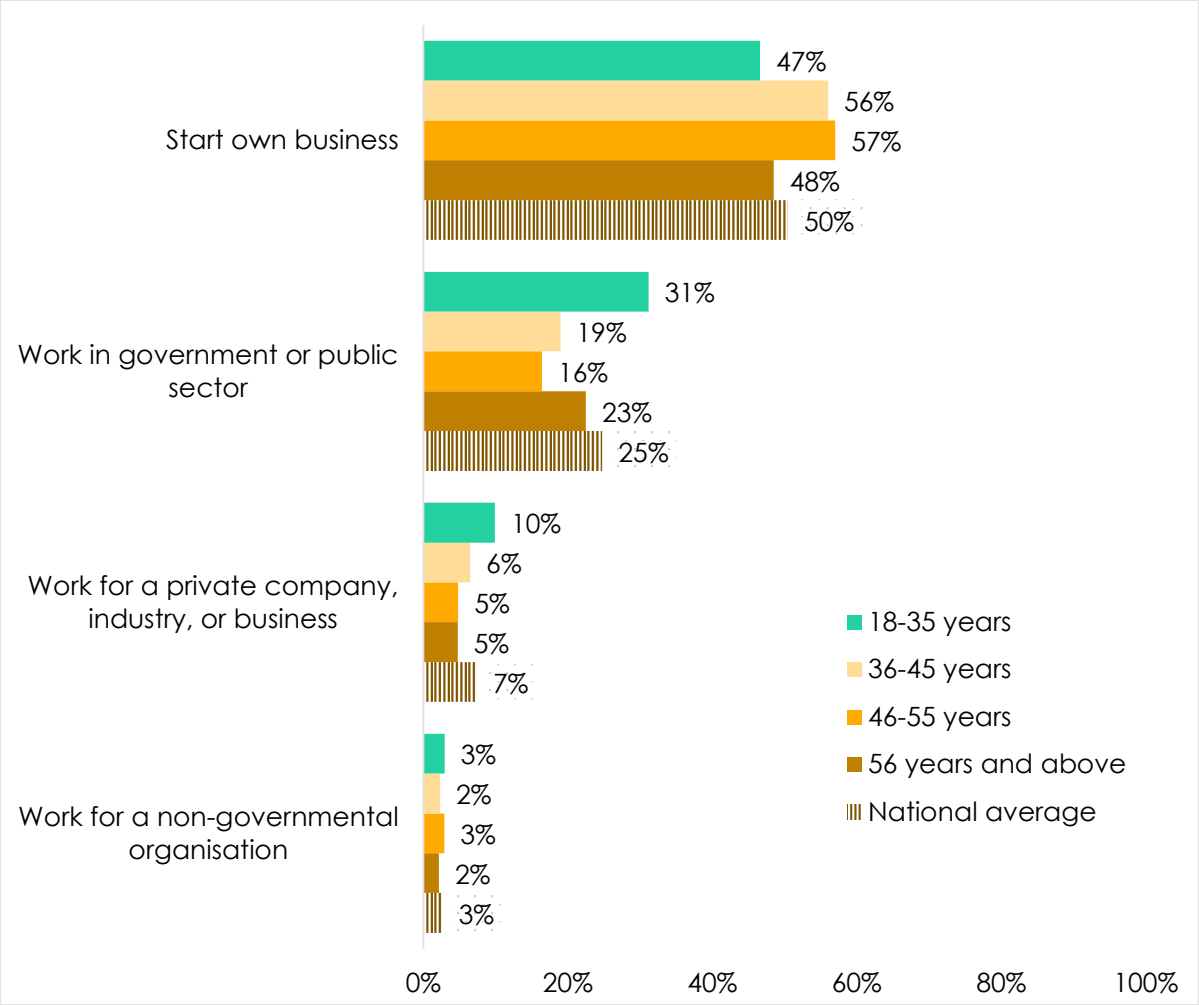
Figure 5: Preferred job sector | by age group | Morocco | 2024



Respondents were asked: *If you could work in any sector you wanted, which of the following would be your first choice?*

When asked where the government should focus its efforts to better support young people, Moroccans across all age groups deliver a remarkably consistent message: create jobs. About two-thirds or more of respondents in every cohort cite job creation as the top priority, including 65% of youth (Figure 6).

After job creation, access to business loans ranks second as a priority for additional investment. Youth place a somewhat greater emphasis on it (16%) than older cohorts, aligning with their strong interest in entrepreneurship as a career path.

Smaller shares prioritise additional investment in education (7% of youth, vs. 11%-13% of their elders) or job training (6% of youth). These modest levels suggest that while preparation is important, Moroccans may feel that the core issue lies not in training, but in the availability of jobs once training is completed.

Only 5% of youth prioritise expanded social services, such as health programmes or drug-abuse prevention, as the most urgent area for investment.

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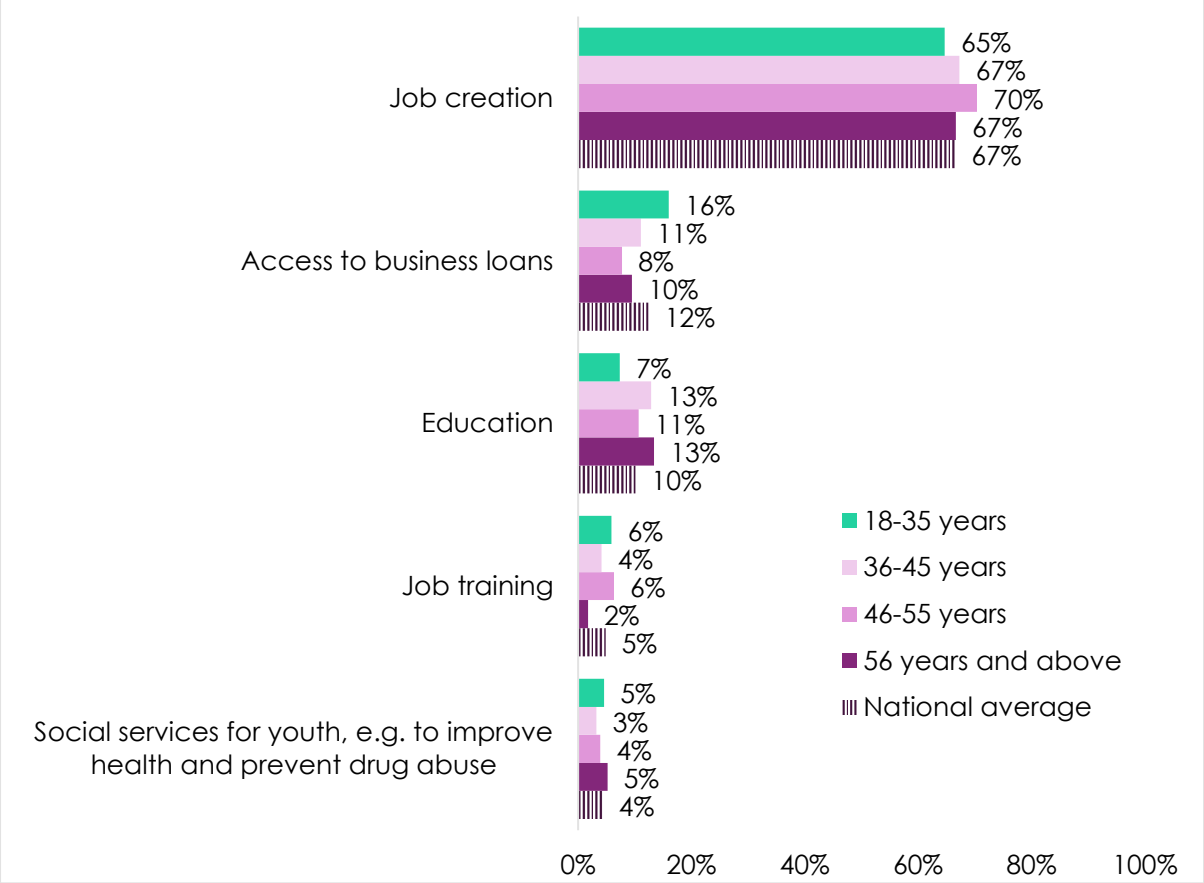
Figure 6: Government spending priority to help youth | by age group | Morocco | 2024



Respondents were asked: *If the government could increase its spending on programmes to help young people, which of the following areas do you think should be the highest priority for additional investment?*

Youth priorities

For young Moroccans, as for adults as a whole, unemployment stands at the very top of the country's most pressing problems (Figure 7). Seven in 10 youth (70%) identify a lack of jobs as one of the three most important problems that the government should address. While unemployment is a concern shared across generations, it is clearly a more urgent priority for youth: Older cohorts are 15-23 percentage points less likely to cite it as a top concern.

The rising cost of living ranks second among top-tier concerns, mentioned by 47% of youth and 52%-53% of older adults.

More than four in 10 youth (44%) identify drought as a major problem. Drought is an even more urgent concern among older cohorts (49%-63%).

Smaller shares of youth cite health (29%) and poverty (11%) as top priorities. Notably, youth are somewhat more likely than older adults to identify education as a national priority: 44% of young respondents list education among their top three concerns, compared to 30%-39% among older respondents. This greater emphasis may reflect both their own recent experiences in the education system and their awareness of the persistent gaps between education and employment.

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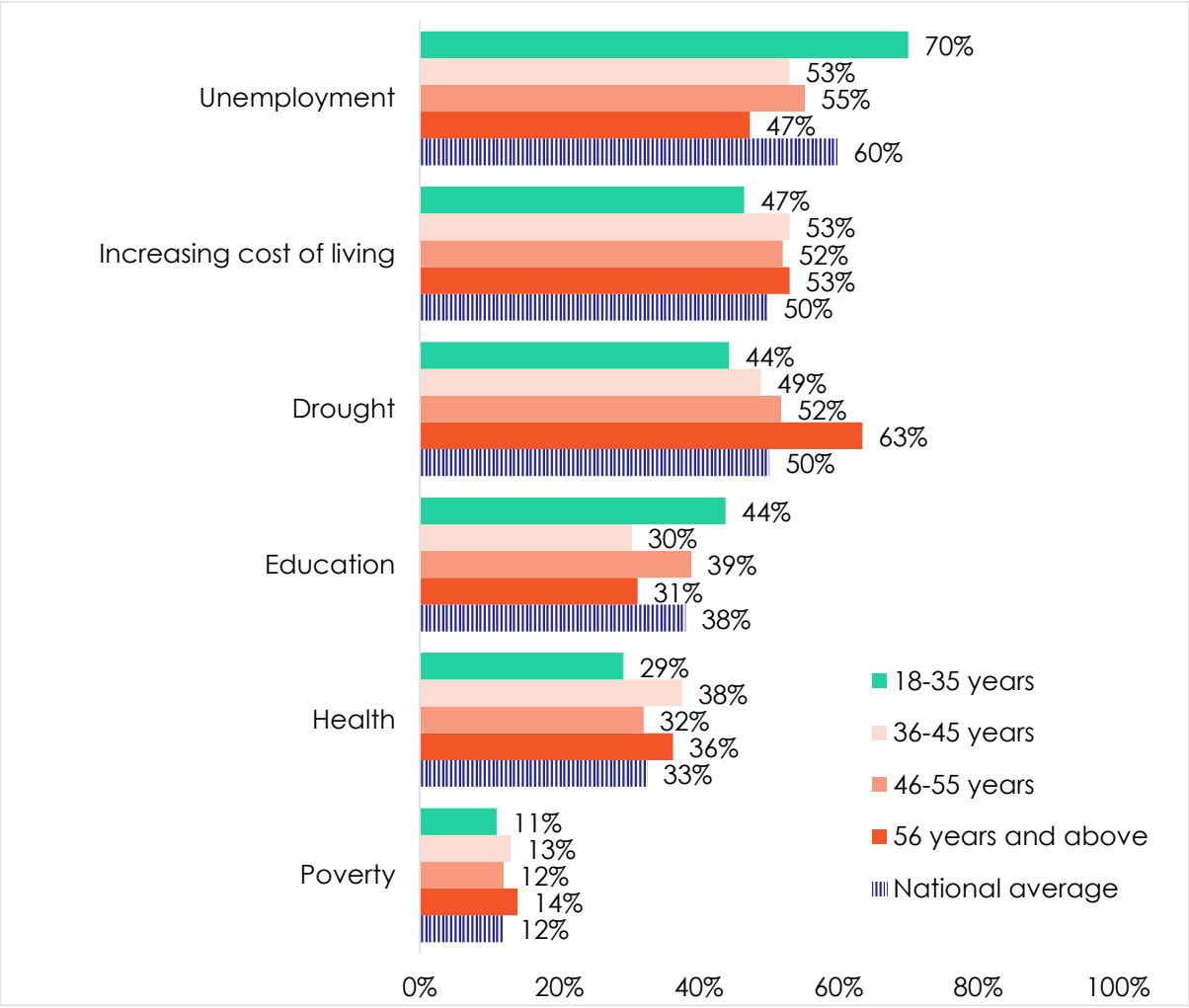
Figure 7: Most important problems | by age group | Morocco | 2024



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Up to three responses per person; figure shows % of respondents who cite each problem among their three priorities)*

Government performance on priority issues

On many of their priority concerns, Moroccan youth express critical views of the government's performance (Figure 8).

Fewer than half say the government is doing "fairly well" or "very well" on improving basic health services (45%) and addressing education needs (40%).

Ratings drop further on poverty reduction (28%) and job creation (20%). On keeping prices stable, just 14% of youth – and even fewer older adults – commend the government's efforts.

Overall, these results point to a sharp disconnect between government performance and public priorities, especially for young people facing persistent joblessness and rising costs.

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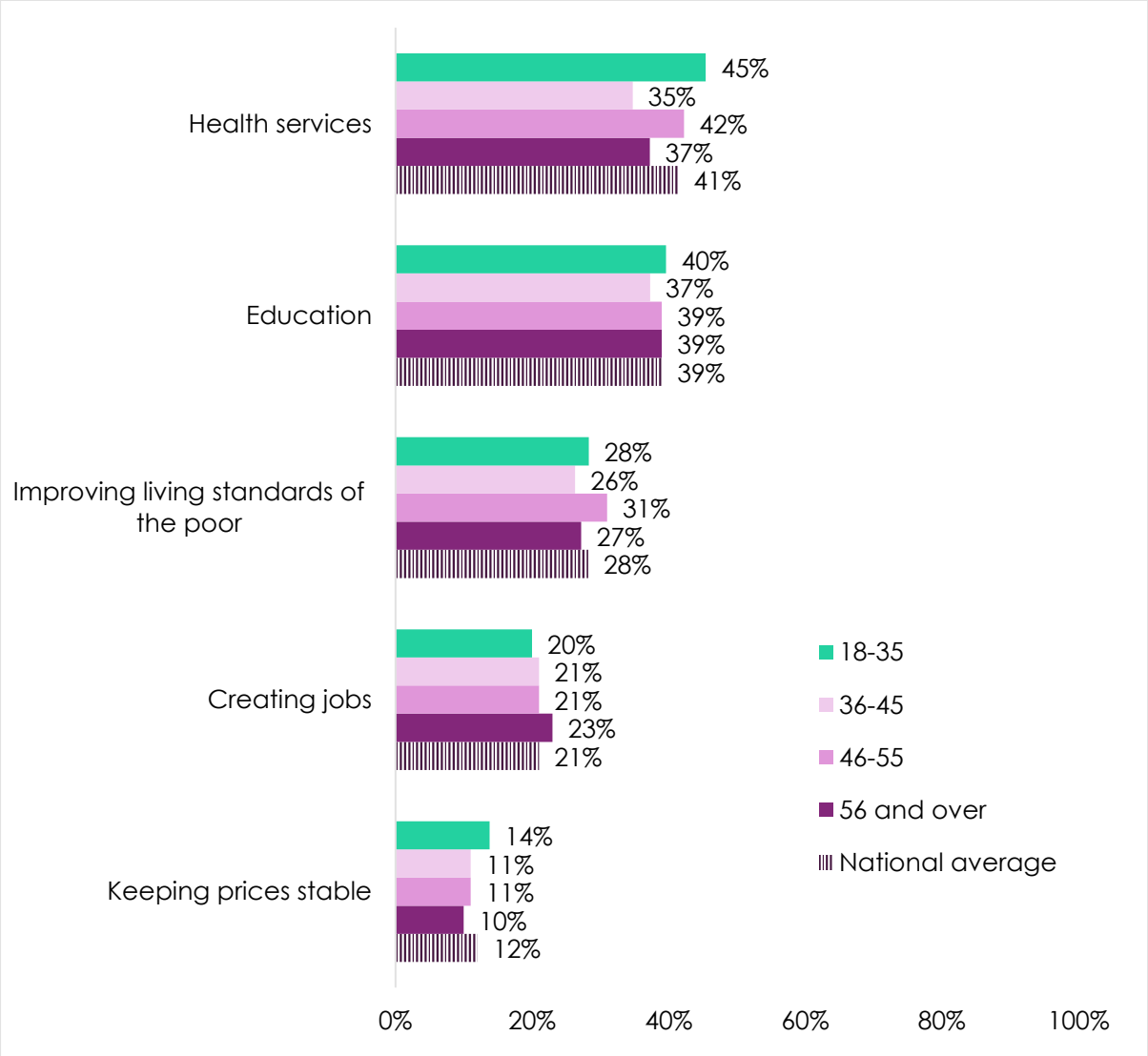
Figure 8: Government performance on youth priorities | by age group | Morocco | 2024



Respondents were asked: *How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")*

Over the past decade, government performance ratings have shown little sustained improvement (Figure 9). Approval on strengthening basic health services rose from 48% in 2013 to 82% in 2021 but has been dropping steadily since then.

On education, poverty, jobs, and prices, approval ratings have remained consistently low, never exceeding 40%.

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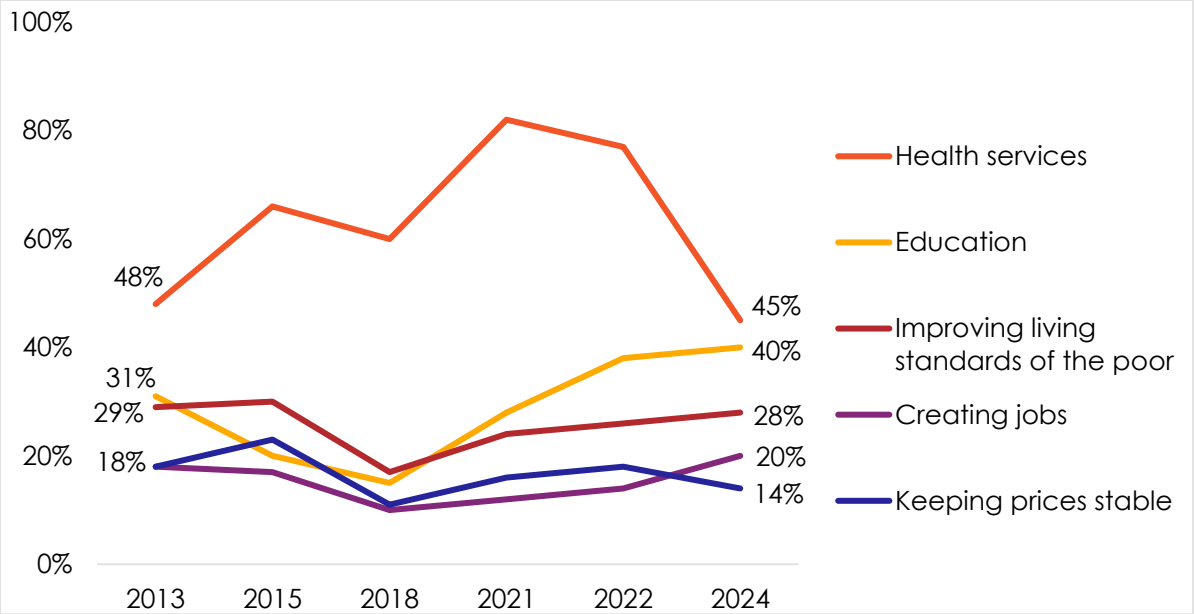
Figure 9: Youth approval of government performance | respondents aged 18-35 | Morocco | 2013-2024

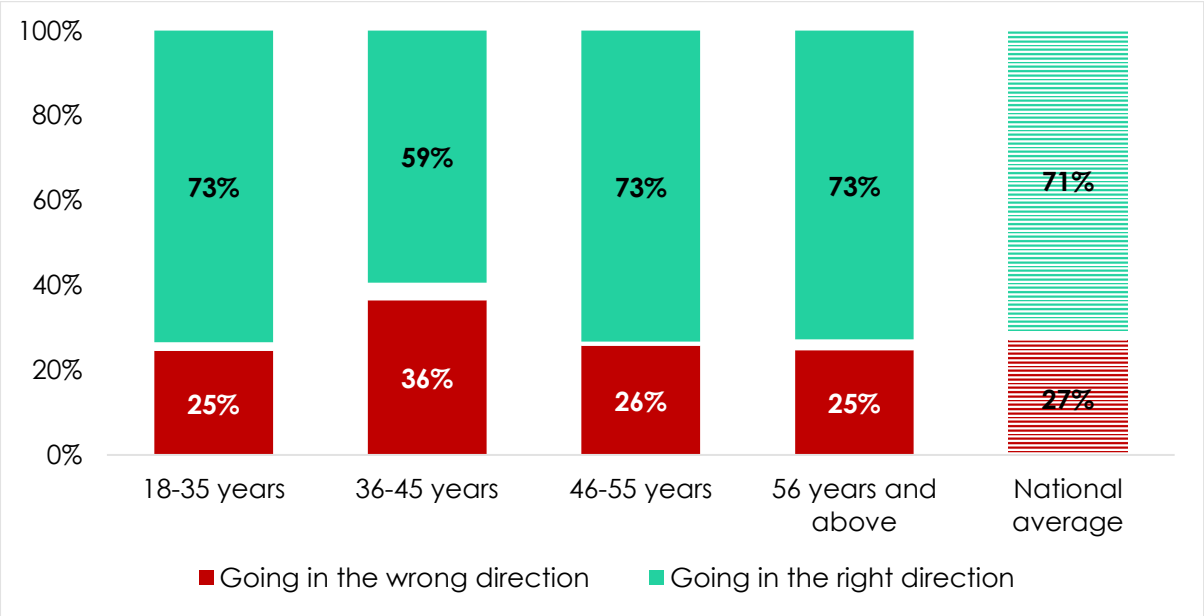


Respondents were asked: *How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")*

Country's overall direction and economic conditions

Despite economic challenges, most Moroccans are surprisingly positive about the country's overall direction (Figure 10). Almost three-fourths (73%) of youth say Morocco is headed in "the right direction," matching adults over age 46 in their optimistic outlook. Respondents aged 36-45 are less sure about the country's path (59% "right direction").

Figure 10: Country's overall direction | by age group | Morocco | 2024



Respondents were asked: *Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?*

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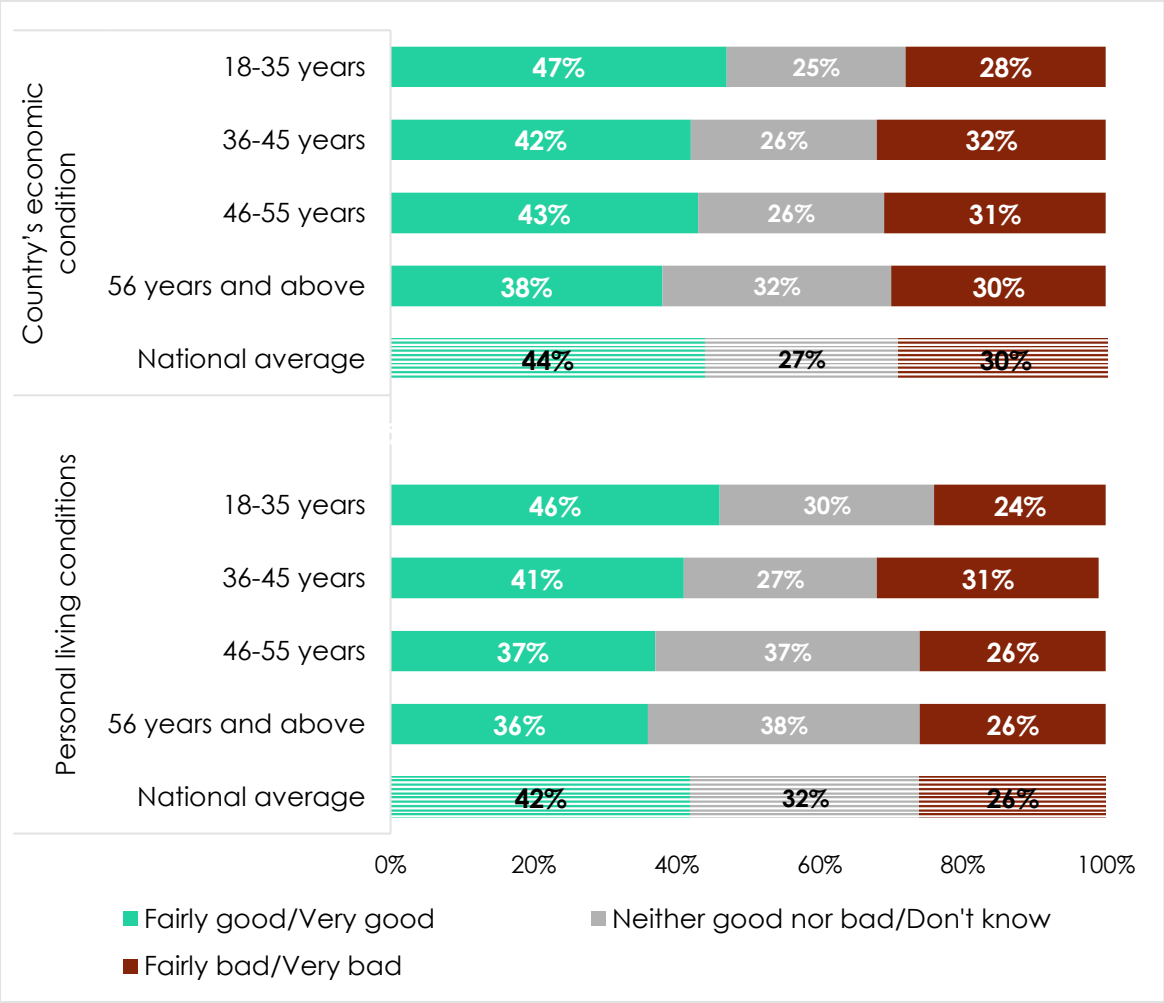
When assessing the national economy and their own living conditions, youth are slightly more positive than older adults (Figure 11). Almost half (47%) of youth rate the country's economic condition as "fairly good" or "very good," compared to 38%-43% among older groups.

Similarly, 46% of youth rate their own living conditions as good, while only 36%-41% of older adults say the same. However, one-quarter (24%) of youth still describe their personal situation as bad.

Figure 11: Economic and living conditions | by age group | Morocco | 2024



Respondents were asked: *In general, how would you describe: The present economic condition of this country? Your own present living conditions?*

Only three in 10 young citizens (30%) see progress on the economic front compared to a year ago, while 38% say things have worsened and 31% say nothing has changed (Figure 12).

Looking ahead, youth are more optimistic than their elders. More than half (54%) of young Moroccans expect the economy to improve over the next year, compared to just 39%-44% of older groups.

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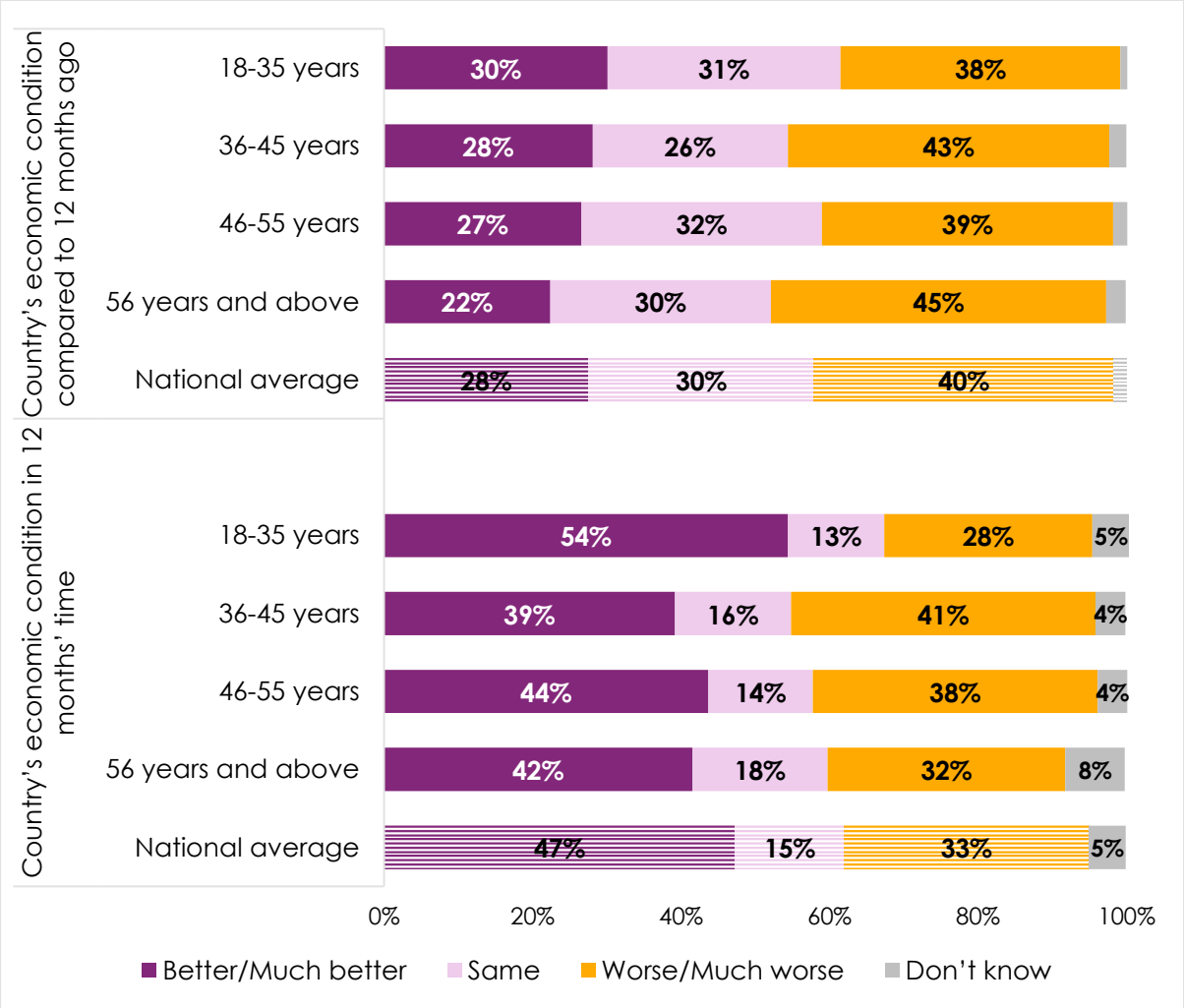
Figure 12: Country's economic condition compared to 12 months ago and in 12 months' time | by age group | Morocco | 2024



Respondents were asked:

Looking back, how do you rate economic conditions in this country compared to 12 months ago? Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months' time?

Over the past decade, young Moroccans' views on these economic indicators have fluctuated widely, generally showing drop-offs in surveys in 2018 and 2022 and peaks in 2015, 2021, and 2024 (Figure 13). Compared to results in 2013, the main gains have been on perceptions that the country is going in the right direction (from 52% to 73%) and assessments of national economic conditions as good (from 37% to 47%).

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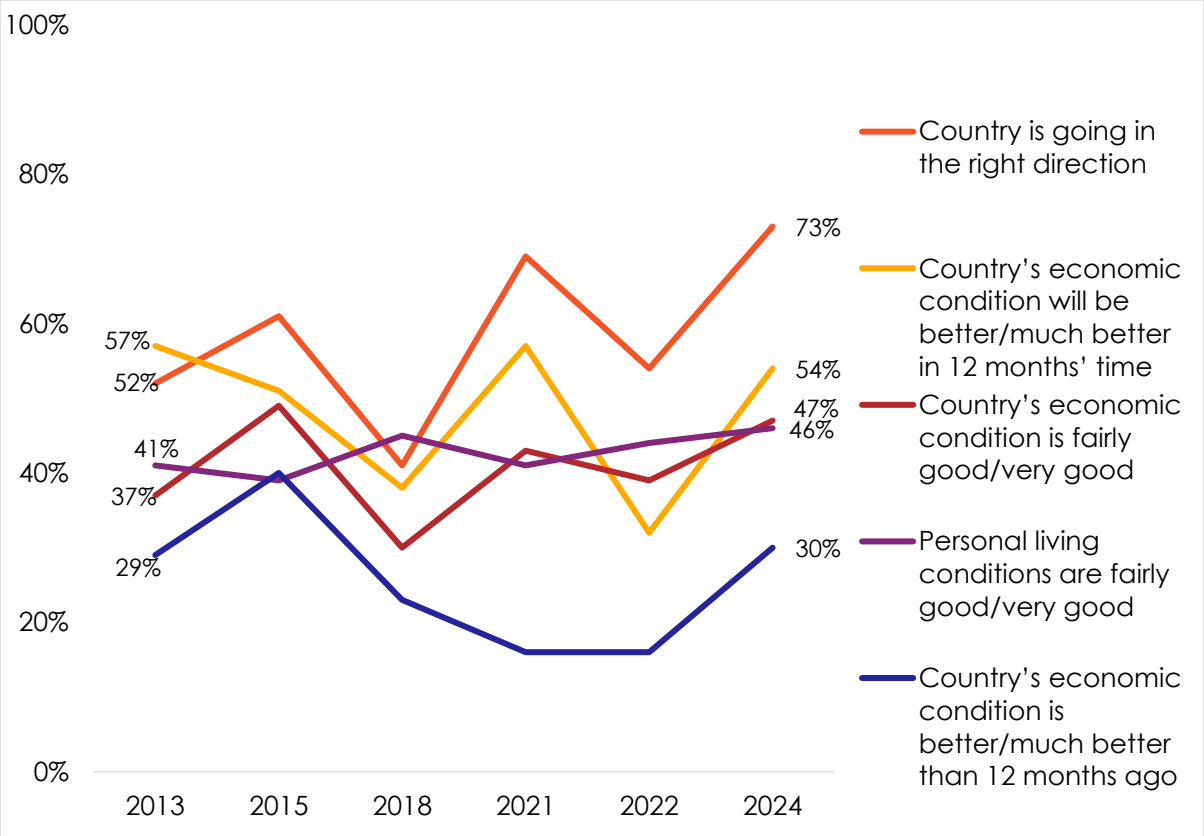
Figure 13: Economic assessments | respondents aged 18-35 | Morocco | 2014-2024



Respondents were asked:

Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?
In general, how would you describe: The present economic condition of this country? Your own present living conditions?
Looking back, how do you rate economic conditions in this country compared to 12 months ago?
Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months' time?

Emigration

Against this backdrop of widespread dissatisfaction with economic conditions and government performance, interest in emigration is high among Moroccan youth (Figure 14). More than one in four (28%) say they have thought "a lot" about leaving the country, while others have "somewhat" (15%) or "a little bit" (21%) considered emigrating. Only 36% say they have not thought about it.

Thoughts of leaving Morocco decline as respondents' age increases: 9%, 7%, and 3% of successive age cohorts say they have considered it "a lot."

But youth interest in leaving has grown over time (Figure 15). In 2017, 20% said they had considered emigration "a lot," a share that has risen by 8 percentage points.

For most youth, the motivation is economic (Figure 16). More than half (54%) of young respondents who have given emigration at least "a little bit" of thought cite finding better job opportunities as their main reason, and another 12% want to look for better business prospects. Others want to pursue their education (12%), escape poverty (10%), or travel (4%).

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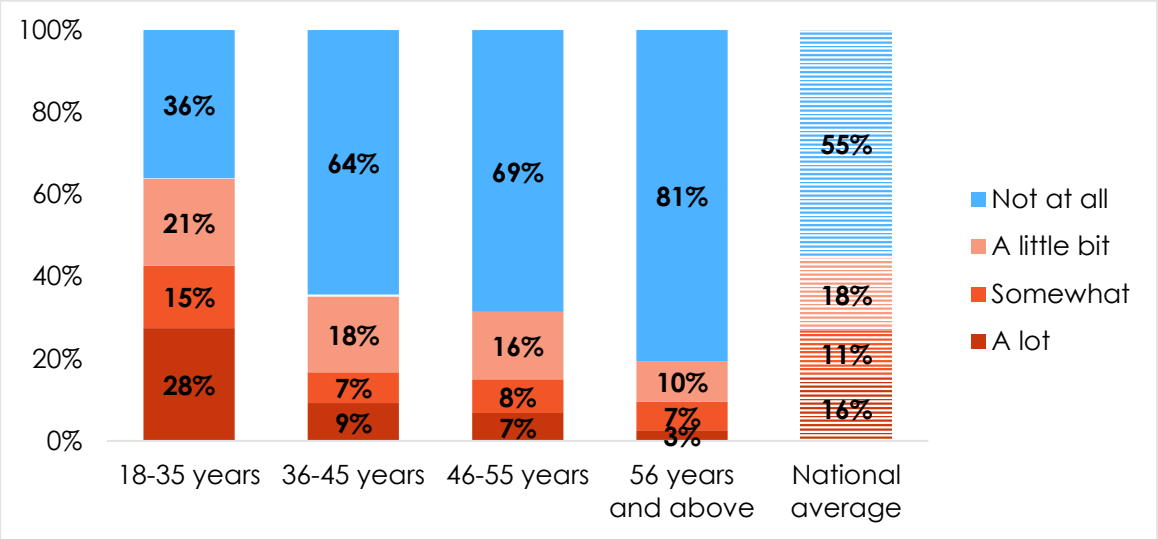
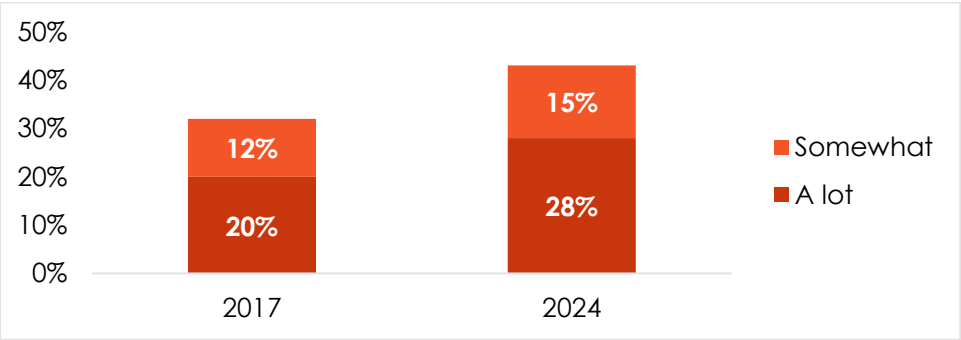
Figure 14: Considered emigrating | by age group | Morocco | 2024



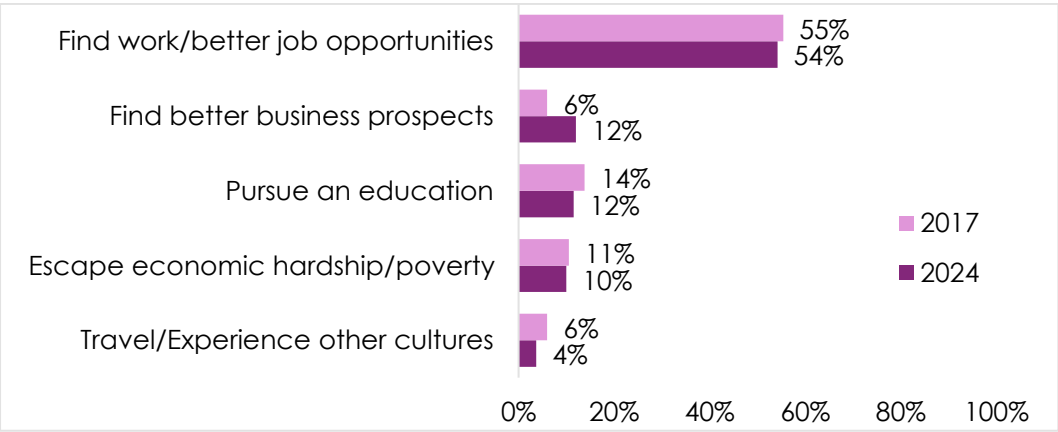
Respondents were asked: *How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live?*

Figure 15: Considered emigrating | respondents aged 18-35 | Morocco | 2024



Respondents were asked: *How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live?*

Figure 16: Reasons for considering emigration | respondents aged 18-35 | Morocco | 2024



Respondents who have considered leaving the country were asked: *There are several reasons why people leave their home to live in another country for an extended period of time. What about you? What is the most important reason why you would consider moving from Morocco? (Respondents who have not considered emigrating are excluded.)*

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Conclusion

Morocco's youth reflect both the progress and the pressure points in the country's development. Expanding education has raised aspirations, but job creation has lagged behind. Youth remain optimistic about the country's future, yet many are increasingly looking abroad for better opportunities. Without stronger job growth, better alignment between education and labour markets, and meaningful pathways into employment, Morocco risks losing much of the potential its educated youth represent.

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Maakwe Cumanzala is a Neubauer Family Economics and Public Policy PhD student at Tufts University and a research intern for Afrobarometer. Email: mcumanzala@afrobarometer.org.

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