TOGETHER WOMEN RISE
Collective action for global gender equality

Amal: A Pathway to Economic Self-Sufficiency

November 2026 Fact Sheet

Amal, which means “hope” in Arabic, is a nonprofit in Marrakech, Morocco. It teaches women to cook like professional chefs, and then it helps them find good jobs. Many of these women have been through very hard times. At Amal, they get a fresh start and a real chance to support themselves and their families.

Maria’s Story

Maria married young and later got divorced. She needed a new start, and Amal was the chance she had been waiting for: a chance to prove herself. Maria lives in the village of Oulad Hassoun, about 15 miles (24 kilometers) away. Her days were long, but she never gave up. She had already taught herself some English by watching movies and listening to music, and at Amal she gladly joined the English classes, too. Now she cheers on other women to join the program.

“When I applied for the Amal culinary training program, my only goal was to earn a diploma so that I wouldn't be exploited by employers,” she said. “Previously, I worked in a villa, cleaning and cooking Moroccan cuisine from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. When I complained about the long hours, my boss would tell me that since I didn’t have a diploma, I should be grateful for the opportunity to work, rather than

complain. But after starting the Amal program, I began learning new skills, like managing a storage room, and learning the art of customer service. Being at Amal opened my eyes to new horizons and the many possibilities. I never thought I could go abroad, but now I believe I can work toward that dream. Now, I have bigger dreams to pursue."

Watch a video of Maria sharing her story here.

Understanding the Issue in Context

Morocco has one of the lowest rates in the world of women in the paid workforce. In 2025, only about 1 in 5 women (20%) had a job or were looking for one. For men, it was 7 in 10 (70%). In most countries, the number of working women has been going up. In Morocco, it has gone down since 2008, when it was about 1 in 4 (26%).

This may be surprising, because more girls in Morocco are going to school than ever before. In the mid-1990s, girls were much less likely than boys to be in primary school. By 2020, girls and boys were enrolled at almost the same rate. The gap in secondary school has nearly closed, too.

But life in the countryside is different from life in the city. In rural areas, many girls still get less schooling than boys, and many women never learned to read. That makes it much harder to find work. In cities, many more women are well educated, but most of them still do not work outside the home.

Family life plays a big part, too. In many Moroccan families, men are expected to earn the money. Women are expected to cook, clean, and care for children and older relatives, all without pay. Some women's families do not want them to work outside the home. In a study by the Brookings Institution, young women in Moroccan cities were asked if they planned to work after finishing school. Most said no. Almost half (45%) said their family did not want them to. Almost 1 in 3 (30%) said they were too busy taking care of their homes and families.

Women face other hurdles, too. Many cannot find or afford childcare. Many new jobs in Morocco are in fields like car making, airplane parts, and technology, where most workers are men. There are fewer training programs for the kinds of jobs many women do. Without training or a diploma, women can end up stuck in jobs with very long hours and low pay. Amal helps fill that gap. It gives women the training and support they need to earn a steady income and stand on their own two feet.

Community-Based Solutions in Action

Together Women Rise's grant of $50,000 funds Amal's Culinary Training as a Pathway to Prosperity, a rigorous training program that helps remove barriers to dignified employment and the life skills participants need to advocate for their future.

Amal's training program is unlike any other in Morocco, with a 10-month training program for women to learn the skills of cooking in a professional setting.

The program is built on three foundational pillars:

- **Practical Culinary Training**: Amal students work in Amal's professional kitchens – each tailored to specific training needs. Gueliz prepares daily lunch menus, while Targa supports diverse catering events, and the Sign Language Café focuses on coffee and light snacks.
- **Theoretical and Language Training**: Classes are led by inhouse chefs and guest experts, complemented by English language instruction from Amal's partners at the Center for Language and Culture (CLC).
- **Life Skills Development**: Weekly group coaching sessions and team-building activities offer practical skills that are essential for navigating the hospitality industry. Amal students also participate in cultural exchanges and city outings to explore new cuisines and broaden their culinary perspectives.

Every trainee receives:

- culinary training
- wraparound support that can include housing and emergency assistance
- a living monthly stipend
- daily meals
- transport
- health insurance
- childcare support
- weekly language classes and
- life coaching.

The program is **free**, inclusive, and designed to address underserved women's needs holistically. Once accepted through a rigorous application and interview process, Amal students begin their

practical training, rotating through key kitchen stations every two weeks. This approach, guided by Amal's professional chefs, covers essential areas including Moroccan cuisine, international cuisine, pastries, salads, inventory management, bakery, and service.

Women who enroll in the program come without any financial support from a spouse. No diplomas or experience are required to enroll. Over half of the trainees are from Morocco's rural areas.

Upon graduation, Amal helps students secure their first job in the local food sector. Amal is deeply embedded in the restaurant industry in Marrakech where its training centers are located and has built a large network of employers who hire its graduates.

Amal's support for students does not end with job placement. It maintains an active alumni network which offers support, access to job opportunities, and valuable mentoring for its graduates. Amal also continuously reinvests in its training model by conducting exit surveys of its trainees, refining its curriculum, and expanding its employer network.

Impact and Transformation

Amal began with one mother and her baby. Nora Fitzgerald Belahcen met a mother who was feeding her baby sweet tea because she could not afford milk. Nora spent years raising money to help that mother and baby, and then others. Over time, she looked for a way to change the future for women like them. In 2012, she started Amal.

Nora was inspired by Aïcha Ech-Chenna, a beloved Moroccan hero. In 1985, Aïcha started a nonprofit in Casablanca called Association Solidarité Féminine. It helps single mothers learn job skills by working in its restaurants.

Nora brought this idea to Marrakech, and Amal started as a small baking business. Today, it has a main training center and two more restaurants. One of them is the Sign Language Café, which opened after several deaf women joined the program. It is the first café in Morocco built around deaf workers. Most of the team is deaf, and guests are invited to order in Moroccan Sign Language. A second Sign Language Café is planned at the French Institute of Marrakech.

Each year, Amal welcomes 35 women into its training program. Most of them (85%) complete the program, and more than 9 out of 10 graduates find jobs, enabling them to earn 2 to 5 times more than before. So far, more than 400 women have graduated. Amal also runs a catering business and teaches cooking classes, which show off the students' skills and bring people from different cultures together.

Amal also looks after its whole community. After the 2023 earthquake near Marrakech, Amal teamed up with World Central Kitchen to serve nearly 20,000 meals. Then Amal started a permanent earthquake relief team that provides housing and supplies, and helps rebuild local jobs. During the pandemic, Amal gave food and meals to thousands of frontline workers. And during Ramadan, it gives food baskets to families in need so they can observe the holy month with dignity.

The organization is guided by four values:

- **Women's wisdom:** The know-how passed down among women, recipes, instincts and resilience no school can teach.
- **The power of food:** A shared meal can do what speeches cannot.
- **Courage over perfection:** We take risks, knowing they may not always work out. Progress, not polish, changes lives.
- **We only have each other:** We stand in solidarity. When one woman rises at Amal, she lifts the next, that is the whole point.

DIRECT IMPACT: 35 WOMEN; INDIRECT IMPACT: 70 WOMEN AND GIRLS

Ghzala's Story

Ghzala is a 2022 graduate of Amal's training program. Along with two of her classmates, she is now thriving as an employee of a renowned restaurant in Marrakech.

Of the Amal program she says:

"I lost hope in life when my father, whom I considered my backbone, passed away. Life became dark and unbearable. Some people told me about Amal, so I decided to apply and give it a try. I thank the entire Amal team from the bottom of my heart. No matter how much I say, I won't be able to describe the immense gratitude I have for you."

Mission Alignment

This project removes the most immediate barrier to participation – lost income during the training period– by funding living stipends that make full-time training possible. It pairs high-quality culinary instruction with wraparound support (meals, medical care, emergency assistance), leading to proven placement outcomes (92%) and long-term alumni support. The model blends mission with market – training alongside earned income from restaurant and catering – while keeping participant feedback at the center of program design. It's practical, dignified, and built with the women it serves, resulting in exactly the kind of investment that turns potential into lasting opportunity.

Budget

Item	Description	Cost
Living Stipend	$140 per month for 10 months for 35 students	$49,000
Daily Meals	Portion of daily meals for 10 months for 35 students	$1,000
Total	Total project cost: $140,000. Rise funding: $50,000 (38%)	**$50,000**

Learn More

- Shop! Watch! Read! Listen!

- Proven Platter
- Recipes

Source Materials

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