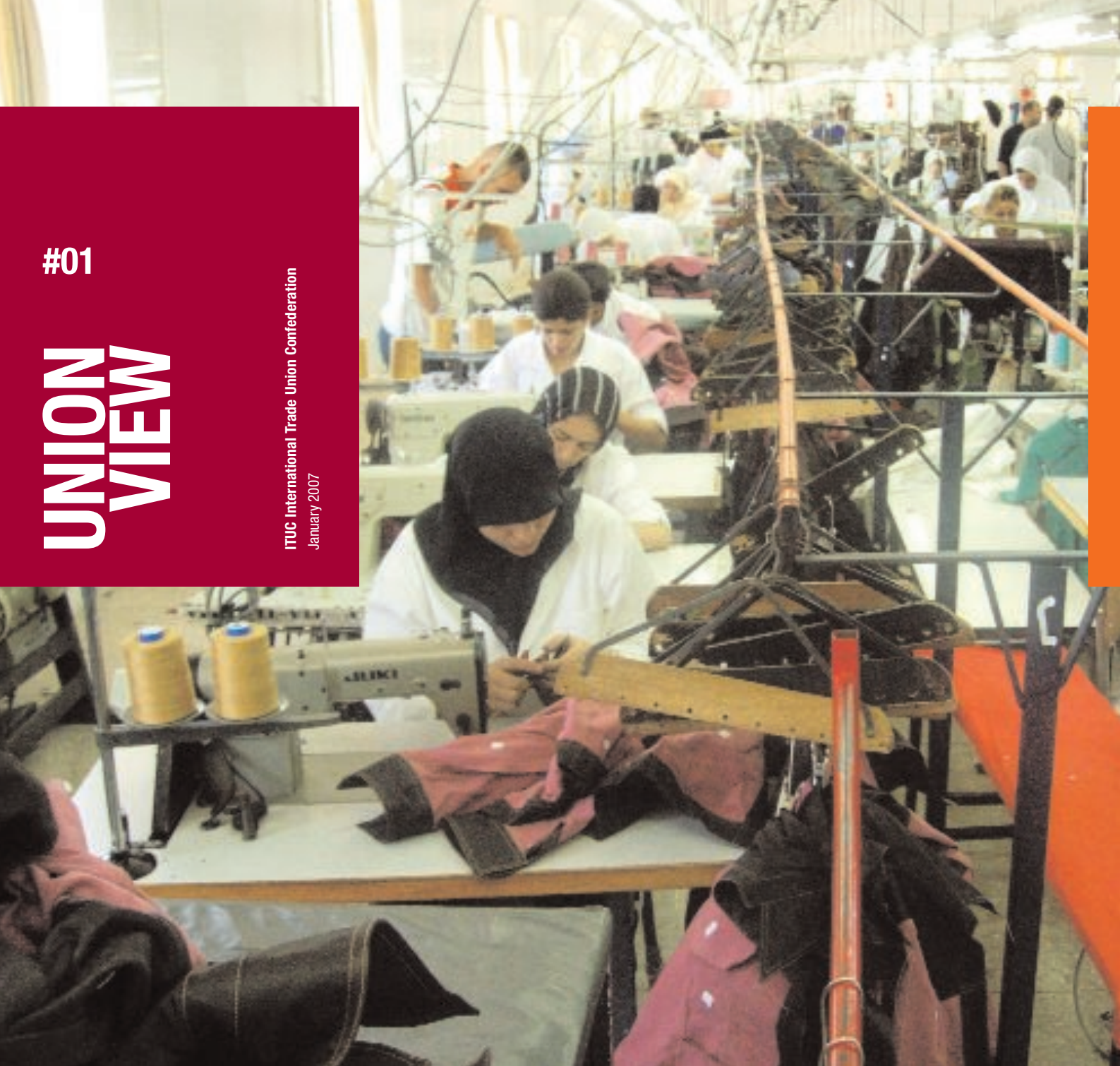


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UNION VIEW

ITUC International Trade Union Confederation
January 2007



→ InfoSud-Syria



Morocco – Raising Awareness and Visibility: Women Make Progress

The UMT Women's Committee has gone into action, battling with the socio-economic and cultural obstacles that undermine the role of women in society, in the labour market and trade unions. An initial assessment and testimonies of the progress made so far.

Widespread discrimination and the feminisation of poverty

Despite the rise in the number of women on the Moroccan labour market (26%), a variety of factors continue to keep them in the lowest paid and most insecure jobs.



→ REUTERS

Key figures

- Literacy: Total population: 51.7%; men: 64.1%; women: 39.4%
- Unemployment 11% in 2005 (estimated at 10.2% for 2006) and close to 20% in urban areas. 35.5% of female graduates are unemployed as compared with 22.6% of male graduates
- Population living below the poverty line: 19%
- Female employment as a percentage of the total: 26% (2001) as compared with 19% in 1982
- Wage discrimination: the average salary for men is 35.8% higher than that of women among the urban employee population

Source: Haut Commissariat au plan marocain (HCP) 2006

"Imbalance" between men and women

There is a "striking imbalance" between men and women on the Moroccan labour market, admits the HCP, underlining that "only one in four employees are women and that a man's salary is three times higher than a woman's".

The cultural heritage and traditions sustaining the notion of women's inferiority continue to weigh heavily on Moroccan society. "Some women are forced to enter the world of work for financial reasons, but they remain limited by their traditional status as inferiors. Illiteracy also continues to be a major obstacle, especially in remote rural areas. Discrimination starts from the very beginning of the education cycle," laments Khadija Rhamiri, general secretary of the UMT regional office in Rabat and coordinator for the textile and garment sector.

Although the Statutes of the public service and public enterprises lay down the principle of sexual equality, female public sector workers are nevertheless discriminated against in the areas of wages, promotion, social protection and access to decision-making posts. "Women, who occupy a third of the posts in the public service, are confined to the bottom of the hierarchy. They are also highly concentrated in activities perceived as an extension of their perceived role as women, working in education, health and the services sectors," adds Khadija Rhamiri, also pointing to fact that "women are often offered jobs in remote areas where they is no security, leaving them with no option but to refuse such postings".

Low skilled work

In the private sector, women are confined to jobs requiring few skills or qualifications, such as in textiles or the agri-food sector, which is also a reflection the fact that the rate of illiteracy among women is greater than among men.

"Working continuous shifts has a particularly negative impact on women. The absence of childcare and other practical

provisions combined with the incompatibility of their working hours with the school day creates organisational problems that are a constant source of stress for women. It is also a source of insecurity for those working in unsafe areas."

Unrecognised work

The UMT Women's Committee also denounces the "invisible" work done by many women as well as the growing feminisation of poverty. "Women's work in certain areas such as agricultural plantations or home-based work is not even recognised, despite the extremely difficult working conditions and the undeniable source of wealth they produce. We are also witnessing a feminisation of poverty as a result of the drastic fall in purchasing power affecting their ability to cover their most basic needs, against the background of protracted wage freezes. Unemployment is very high, especially among young graduates," explains Amal El Amri, head of the UMT Women's Committee, a member of the ITUC Women's Committee and coordinator of the UMT campaign to unionise women.

Maternity protection also remains highly deficient and many women die in childbirth for lack of adequate medical attention.

"Despite the legislative arsenal, violence against women is another very serious problem," underlines Khadija Rhamiri. "Thanks to the work of the women from the UMT, confronting sexual harassment at work is no longer taboo, but we have to keep up the fight to ensure it is made punishable by law."

The campaign has made women aware of their strength

The aims, the obstacles, the gains ... an initial campaign assessment

Female membership of the UMT stands at 57,600, out of a total membership of 320,000 (2006). This female presence in the union is largely concentrated in the service branches (banks, social security and social protection, utilities, textile and garments, occupational training, agri-food, agriculture, health and public institutions).

"The mass redundancies, factory closures and the development of atypical forms of employment generated by the globalisation of the economy have led to a fall in members, especially women," explains Amal el Amri, a member of the ITUC Women's Committee and coordinator of the national campaign to unionise women in Morocco, which is linked to the international trade union campaign "Unions for Women – Women for Unions" (see page 7).

In Morocco, the campaign objectives include increasing female membership by 5%, identifying the obstacles to the unionisation of women and the solutions to overcome them, reinforcing the training of women trade union trainers, setting up or strengthening local, regional and sectoral women's committees, and feminising trade union structures at all levels, particularly leadership structures.

One plus one strategy

The campaign is targeting women working in predominantly female sectors (textile, agri-food, services, chemical products, agriculture), placing special emphasis on those in low skilled jobs, with the poorest working conditions and the greatest restrictions on trade union rights and freedoms (textile and agri-food), who often work in the informal economy.

The method promoted is the "one plus one" strategy, whereby each woman recruits another one. Casablanca, Mohammedia, Rabat, Tangier, Marrakech, Safi/el Jadida, Meknes. ... all these towns and regions have been targeted one after another by the campaign. A wide range of activities have been organised such as seminars, sessions to raise

awareness of among both men and women, training and the setting up of the women's committees at regional, sectoral and national level.

"National seminars on women's integration within unions and campaigning techniques were organised by the Women's Committee, followed by regional seminars to train campaign groups in charge of raising women's awareness about the need to organise. The campaign groups, along with the women's committees of the local and regional unions, have organised activities and meetings as well as visits to the workers in their production units and elsewhere," explains Amal El Amri. "We have taken advantage of each and every trade union event (congresses, national councils, International Women's Day, the 50th anniversary of the UMT) to publicise the campaign.

Targeting specific needs

"It's obviously much easier in unionised companies, because the campaign can count on the trade unions nucleus that already exists, convincing the members of the need to create a specific framework for women, to target their specific needs and bring a trade union response to their problems. It's more difficult, however, in companies where there is no union, where we have to start from scratch, setting up an organising committee and a calendar of activities, placing emphasis on gender specific issues and showing how the strength of the union can help women," explains Khadija Rhamiri. "To be able to organise more women, it's important to start with cultural activities, presentations about subjects of interest to the women targeted, or literacy classes, which allow us to get closer to women workers and their concerns."

As Amal El Amri explains, "We tell women that if they all join a union together, en masse, the employer will ultimately have

...

Workers' rights violations

Morocco has not yet ratified ILO Convention 87. "Under the Labour Code, trade union action is still punishable by law and many trade unionists are often maltreated and arrested," denounces Khadija Rhamiri. "Everything is done to restrict the right to strike by insidious means. Although improvements in labour legislation have been achieved thanks to the fight led by the UMT and others, employers don't respect it. The health and safety conditions are terrible in marginalized sectors such as agri-food, textiles and tourism. Legal working hours are often violated and abusive use is made of fixed term contracts. Apprenticeships are also used as a pretext for exploitation. The legal minimum wage (between 180 and 200 euros) is not respected and employers are currently campaigning to undermine this principle by trying to impose regional and sectoral minimum wages. The right to breastfeed at work is not respected."

The agricultural sector under scrutiny

"Agriculture is the sector where women workers are often faced with the worst conditions and the most blatant discrimination. Many are not declared and have no social security coverage. Sexual harassment is considered the norm, with farm managers doing whatever they please, as if the women were their property. Women who refuse their advances are sacked. They are "rights-free zones", which is why the UMT is putting great efforts into trying to organise women in the agricultural sector," says Khadija Rhamiri.

The UMT and women

- Out of a total membership of 320,000 in 2006, 57,600 are women, i.e. 12%.
- Female trade union membership is concentrated in the services.
- The UMT trade union confederation has had a specific structure for organising women since the sixties, the "Union Progressiste des femmes du Maroc", which even organises housewives.
- In 1995, the National Committee of Working Women was created, comprising 23 members and represented on the Administrative Committee, which is a decision-making body. The National Committee of Women Workers meets every quarter and reports to the Executive Bureau.
- Since then, the integration of women has progressed at all levels of the UMT (decision-making bodies, congresses, national councils, sectoral federations, regional and local unions, workplace unions and committees).
- At the last UMT Congress, female representation was 20%.
- The UMT is also represented by a woman, Khadija Rhamiri, who is also a member of the lower house of the Moroccan parliament.
- Only one out of the seven seats on the National Bureau of the UMT is occupied by a woman. The Bureau is elected every four years.
- "Whilst a number of women hold posts of responsibility within the national federations, the sectoral and local unions, as well as in a variety of departments, the number of women seconded to full-time posts has not increased," laments Amal El Amri.



The campaign has also led to an increase in the number of women representatives within decision-making structures, Amal El Amri."



...

to give in, because he cannot dismiss all of them at once." This statement was published in the Moroccan press, which testifies to the unquestionable progress made by the campaign: making women aware of their strength.

The campaign has also shown great determination in coordinating activities with civil society groups, especially women's organisations and associations defending human rights and women's rights.

The double workload obstacle

Moroccan women are torn between their countless tasks, a burden that often prevents them from getting involved in a union. "The domestic tasks they are bundled with prevent them from getting fully involving the public sphere," laments Khadija Rhamiri.

Another obstacle to the unionisation of women is the traditional view that trade unions are the exclusive realm of men, in which women suffer from the same alienation and discrimination as in the workplace and rarely have access to decision-making posts.

"People still hold the view that the trade union movement is a man's world. Some women even propagate this idea. Women underestimate their abilities and stop themselves from seizing certain opportunities. Men and women have to fight together to change these images within society. When we deal with issues specific to women, it's essential that men also take part, so they understand that women really do face specific problems, as they are often unaware of the fact or prefer to ignore it. But thanks to our campaign work, I think we have really made progress in the fight against such beliefs," says Khadija Rhamiri.

Better women's representation

The campaign has succeeded in setting up women's committees in certain regional unions such as in Safi and Meknès, whilst those already existing, such as in Marrakech and El Jadida, have been injected with new dynamic. Sectoral women's committees have also been set up in the textiles, utilities, Social Security, railways, health, public service and occupational training sectors.

"The campaign has also led to an increase in the number of women representatives within decision-making structures, such as the National Council, which is an intermediary body between the National Secretariat and the Administrative Committee," says Amal El Amri. But "whilst a number of women hold post of responsibility within the national federations, local and sectoral unions, as well as in a variety of departments, the number of women seconded to full-time posts has not increased," adds Amal El Amri.

"Thanks to the ICFTU and ILO campaigns to raise the rate of female participation in trade union activities to at least 30%, we have managed to surpass the 30% mark in trade union seminars and general training activities. This is very important as a means of raising women's awareness about their situation and helping them to overcome the obstacles hindering their full involvement in trade unions. Women are becoming ever more present on negotiating teams, including social dialogue with the government," says Amal.

There are, however, certain limitations on the application of this minimum participation rate of 30%. "There are objective limitations. In areas where the workforce is predominantly male, such as port and oil activities, there is virtually no female presence. One exception is the railways, where great efforts are being made to integrate women despite the predominance of men in this sector. As regards missions abroad, the obstacles to reaching the 30% target include the nature of the mission and the type of trade union post or profile required to take part in it, in addition to all-too-often objective limitations linked to the predominance of male culture," adds Amal el Amri.

"Only a few federations have amended their statutes to include quotas for women, but we plan to take advantage of the congresses held by local unions, federations and national organisations to propose changes to the statutes with a view to better integrating women within their trade union structures," says Amal, adding that "efforts still have to be made to give an official and statutory character to women's representation within trade union structures, using specific integration mechanisms such as quotas".

Capacity building

"The campaign has undoubtedly been successful in the area of recruitment, although the increase in membership cannot only be attributed to the campaign; the efforts of the organising committee have also contributed," says Amal el Amri.

Asma Elbassir (1), a member of the youth committee and the women committee adds: "We have strengthened our skills as trade unionists by boosting self-confidence. Women have strengthened their capabilities and are better equipped to take on trade union responsibilities."

(1) Read the full interview of Asma Elbassir at <http://www.ituc-csi.org/slip.php?article512&lang=en>



Fired on the spot!

The formation of the Organisation of Women in the Agricultural Sector (OFSA) in 1999 has been followed up by action plans to unionise the women in the sector. "We started with the women in administrative posts, organising a campaign lasting almost three years on sexual harassment and women's working conditions in the sector. In 2003, as members the UMT's national women's committee, we joined in the 'Unions for Women – Women for Unions' campaign, integrating it within our action plan," explains Samira Kinami (1) of the agricultural branch of the UMT. We then took on the difficult task of organising female agricultural labourers, who are faced with the abuses of their employers and the non respect of trade union rights. The case that marked me the most is that of "mi Aicha". Mi Aicha was working at La Clementine, a farm producing flowers for export, which respects neither the labour laws, nor the human and economic rights guaranteed by international law. "Mi Aicha" had worked there for over thirty years, without ever receiving



the minimum wage or being subscribed to the social security fund. She had no right to holiday leave and worked seven days a week, except on the day of the annual sheep festival. When the boss found out that she had joined a union, she was sacked on the spot!

(1) Read the full interview of Samira Kinami at <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article517&lang=en>



(*) The International Trade Union Confederation is carrying out an ambitious international campaign with the Global Union Federations (GUFs) aimed at organising women workers around the world called "Unions for women, women for unions". The campaign is focusing primarily on women workers in the exporting processing zones and the informal economy, and on migrant women workers. Fifty-five ITUC-affiliated trade unions from 43 different countries and at least 20 GUF affiliates from 20 different countries are involved in this global campaign, which is part of the campaign to organise women workers originally launched by the former ICFTU in 2002 and then re-launched in 2004.

Under that global campaign the former ICFTU had launched a two-year organising campaign in three countries in the Maghrib region: Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania, supported by the publication of a campaign guide in Arabic.

In September 2006 a seminar was held in Marrakech to evaluate the campaign's achievements in Morocco and Algeria with the support of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). Over forty Moroccan and Algerian women trade unionists were thereby given the opportunity to evaluate the initial results of the campaign in their respective countries and to exchange their experiences at local level.

Textile workers' frayed rights

Over 71% of the employees in Morocco's garment industry are women, many of whom are under 30. "The new labour law came into force in July 2004, but serious problems remain as regards its application in the textile sector, such as bringing working hours down from 48 to 44 hours without wage cuts. In reality, when the working hours are cut, the wages are too," explains Khadija Ramiri. "The bosses are pushing for increased productivity by means of piecework. A daily quota has to be met, and no pay is given for any alterations that may have to be made."

Employers are taking ever more frequent recourse to fixed term contracts (6-month renewable contracts). "Since supply outstrips demand, the bosses do everything in their power to get rid of the workers that have been there for a long time, some for as long as ten to fifteen years."

The non ratification of ILO Convention 87 on freedom of association and protection of the right to organize poses a serious problem in the textile sector. As soon as a trade union bureau is set up, its members are arrested or dismissed. According to the law, workers who want to join a union risk prosecution," says Khadija Ramiri, going on to quote the

example of the legal action taken against 15 women working for the Portuguese garment manufacturer DOVTEX in Casablanca.

As regards the small informal units, often based in workers' homes, the opacity is total.

Insecurity

Safety is a major preoccupation among women textile workers, whether it be in the immediate surroundings of the factory or the transport to and from work. "The women have to be accompanied by a man, their husband or a brother, on pay days. On 8 March, we organised a mass sit-in in Rabat on the issue of women's safety in the industrial zones," recounts Khadija Ramiri.



Tangier: penetrating the EPZ fortress

Textiles, automobile assembly, services... spurred by the ambitious Tangier-Med project aimed at making the port of Tangier the "Dubai of the Mediterranean", the export processing zones in the region are developing fast, attracting floods of job seekers from economically depressed regions of the country.

The subcontracting circuits between the factories inside and outside the zones are highly developed. "There three categories of working conditions, according to the size of the factory. The smaller the production unit the poorer the working conditions. In the smallest units, the working conditions are medieval: the workers receive no pay slips, have no employment contracts and no social security coverage," explains Khamlichi Boubker, a trade unionist with the UMT and human rights activist.

"Comparatively better-off, thanks to their proximity to the port (unlike those in Rabat), the large factories in Tangier respect the legal minimum wage, but the wages in the subcontracting workshops are very low. The conditions are worse in the port's old zone than in the large electronic and automobile parts factories in the new zone. The former labour code established a 48 hour working week for a legal minimum wage of 1826 dirhams (less than 180 euros). The new code has cut the working week to 44 hours, but the bosses only pay for 44 hours, which means an actual fall in the minimum wage to an average of 1500 dirhams in most companies (less than 150 euros). As regards the payment of overtime, it varies according to the employers," adds Khamlichi Boubker.

Scattered among the various new districts on the outskirts of Tangiers where the living conditions are deplorable, young women workers live in a highly precarious environment, running the risk of falling into prostitution during slack periods in the factories.

Unions prohibited

Many of the factories that were unionised in the past were closed down in the eighties, only to be later reopened en

masse, with the difference that any trade union activity was strictly prohibited.

The fear of losing their jobs prevents many workers from joining a union, which is why the unionists on the ground and human rights activists have set up an association called "Attaasoul" (communication) as a first step in the process of organising women textile workers in the export processing zones of Tangiers. "We raise the women's awareness about their rights; it's an initial, gentle approach to teaching them about solidarity mechanisms. But the idea in the long term is to prepare the ground for their future unionisation, to mobilise women textile workers and create a genuine movement," explains Khamlichi Boubker.

An awareness raising association

Dismissed for her trade union activism at a Belgian-owned textile factory in the port zone, Fouzilla, an active member of the awareness raising association is now working for a Moroccan factory that subcontracts for major international brands in the airport zone, which is fenced off as if it were a military base. "I receive no pay slip. Yesterday, once again, I did unpaid overtime," recounts Fouzilla, going on to list the difficulties facing textile workers: "no refectory for eating, difficulty breastfeeding, no company doctors, insufficient medicines at the workplace, sexual harassment in most factories..."

In response to the serious problem of childcare, the association is seeking outside help to support its project to set up a crèche for the workers' children. "We would also like to buy some washing machines to set up a laundry, because the workers are left with no time for this task. We would also like to open our own premises, a place with a small children's library, a place where the women can relax and feel supported, in spite of their working and living conditions, which are so difficult. We have lots of good intentions but no budget."

Solidaridad sindical internacional para las zonas francas

Las zonas francas de exportación de Marruecos, al igual que en el resto del mundo, son hostiles a toda penetración sindical. Para reforzar la capacidad sindical en las zonas francas "los sindicatos necesitan disponer de más medios en el terreno, tanto humanos como financieros. Hay también una gran demanda de información y de intercambios de experiencias y técnicas de sindicalización. A comienzos de este año, el gobierno llevó a los patrones en un viaje comercial a las zonas francas de exportación de México, a fin de que se inspiren en el pretendido éxito económico mexicano. ¡Sería necesario que del lado sindical también se hicieran tales experiencias transfronterizas!", reclama Habiba Zahi (miembro de la oficina ejecutiva de la CDT).

Greater visibility for young people!



Although young people make up two thirds of the population, "Morocco's policies have not sufficiently integrated young people in the global development equation", explains Asma Elbassir (1), a public employee with the social service of Casablanca, and a member of the UMT women's committee and youth committee (14 men and 3 women). "The lack of prospects, the difficulties in fulfilling one's ambitions, unemployment, illegal immigration, poverty, drugs, graduate unemployment ... all these problems bear witness to the failure to make the most of the nation's human resources. These young people want to take part in a new culture of confidence and recognition. They want a greater voice, integration mechanisms and opportunities to participate and develop new relations with the State, society and the nation. The trade union movement must also work in this direction. Efforts must be made to mobilise young people and raise their awareness, as they feel a real need for greater visibility.

(1) Read the full interview of Asma Elbassir at <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article512&lang=en>

ILO pilot project: the unions are eager for results

"Improving competitiveness in the textile-clothing sector through decent work" is the title of the pilot project launched four years ago by the ILO in Morocco (1). In the framework of this project, the ILO carried out a study reflecting the working conditions in the sector, on the basis of which the work to draw up a strategy was commenced. The first great merit of this project is that all the social partners, the unions (CDT, UGTM and UMT), employers and public authorities have been brought together around the same table.

"Thanks to this programme, the government and the Moroccan social partners have clearly integrated a social dimension into their response to the new challenges presented by the liberalisation of global trade in textiles and the end of the quota system. They have broadened their strategy to bring the industry up to date with the new competitive environment," says Jean-Paul Salhau, a textile-clothing sector specialist from the Sectoral Activities Department of the ILO.

"With the funding recently received from Spain, work is about to commence on setting up a new body, a textile-clothing parity committee," rejoices Khadija Ramiri.

Mutual mistrust

"There isn't yet sufficient mutual trust between the workers and the employers, as dismissals continue to be made at the first sign of a union being formed, and the AMIDH (employers' association) does very little in such cases. And yet we are not claiming all our rights in one go; quite the contrary, we asking for "step-by-step" policy, but we have to fight tooth and nail to obtain even the slightest progress. The gaps are such that we spend more time trying to make up for the lack of work inspections, or fighting for the application of the labour code, than actually carrying out our real trade union mission of claiming additional rights.

Employers project such a negative image of the trade unions, diabolising us to such an extent, that simply managing to all sit together around the same table, thanks to the ILO project, is already a step forward. But we are eager to see some concrete results. We are in favour of improving competitiveness, but not at the expense of the workers! China shouldn't be used as a pretext for violating all their rights!" warned Khadija Ramiri.

(1) The project is part of a global ILO programme involving eight countries: Bangladesh, Bahrain, Denmark, Ghana, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Panama and the Philippines.

New Family Code: progress and limitations

The new Family Code, adopted by the Moroccan parliament in 2004, is presented as a "gentle" reform, a compromise between the desire to modernise society whilst avoiding head-on confrontation with traditionalist religious circles.

The "woman's obedience to her husband" rule has been removed and the family has now been placed under the joint responsibility of the two spouses. Women no longer need the permission of a male guardian to marry. The minimum age for marriage was raised from 15 to 18 years for women, bringing it into line with the age for men.

Polygamy is not forbidden, but the conditions laid down make it virtually impossible. A woman can condition her marriage to the husband's acceptance that he will not take other wives. The husband requires court authorisation before marrying another wife. Repudiation, previously the exclusive right of the husband, is subject to the prior authorisation of the court. Women are able to ask for a divorce more easily and are prioritised as regards the custody of the children.

"The problem now lies in the application of these new provisions," comments Amal El Amri. The proceedings are long and costly, with often little chance of being settled.

The UMT Women's Committee is working to ensure the proper application of the new provisions and insists on the need to make them more widely known and understood, to ensure that women are fully aware of their rights, and to

train female negotiators capable of defending these new rights.

"It is presented as a 'great qualitative leap', and it is true that it's a step in the right direction, demonstrating we were right to have fought for all these years," explains Khadija Rhamiri. "But nothing has changed in terms of substance, in terms of the principles, they are simply changes of form. The courts are overwhelmed with repudiation and divorce cases. The early marriage of a young underage girl can still be authorised by a judge, which is often the case in very remote rural areas. The patriarchal mentality remains very much present, and we have to keep up the fight to make progress."

According to a recent official survey (*), over a third of the Moroccan population are not aware that a new Family Code has been passed, a percentage that reaches 45% in rural areas. Only 23% approve of the abolishment of a marriage guardian for women. 24% were not in favour of women working. 77% considered that a woman's place is in the home. 18% thought that women's access to employment competes with that of men.

(*) Carried out by the HCP (Haut Commissariat au Plan) and published end September 2006.

“Women feel more at ease”



Naima Bouguerjouna (1), women's coordinator and staff union representative at a polyclinic in Marrakech, was the first woman to gain access, in 2003, to the post of general supervisor of the polyclinic, where the major concerns include ensuring respect for the right to breastfeed at work, ending sexual harassment, and women's access to positions of responsibility. “This post had been reserved for men only up until then, but thanks to the trade union fight, I was able to become the first woman to take on this role. Until recently, women could not hold positions of responsibility at the clinic, but that is changing now. Women have understood that joining a union provides them with more rights. Women workers have to live with the fear of sexual and moral harassment, but when there are women in positions of responsibility, they feel more at ease, they feel more confident, and work more efficiently.”

(1) Read the full interview of Naima Bouguerjouna at <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article504&lang=en>

• Naima Bouguerjouna

Call centres: a new target for trade unions

Axa and Orange, following on from BNP-Paribas, Tata, Renault, Cap Gemini, GFI Informatique, France Telecom, Accenture, Atos Origine and Unilog, have recently announced the relocation of jobs to Morocco. The French insurance company AXA, the world's number three insurer, has announced that 1500 jobs (call centre and administrative) are to be relocated to Morocco by 2012. According to the French trade union confederation, the CFDT, these relocations are motivated by the company's inability to impose increased job flexibility on its French employees. The mobile telephone operator “Orange” has, for its part, announce the relocation of over a thousand jobs from France to Morocco, probably Casablanca.

Casashore, Rabat Technopolis, Tangershore and Marrakechshore are among the many projects aimed at creating 100,000 direct and indirect jobs linked to the outsourcing of services by large international companies, attracted by fiscal incentives. “We are starting to target call centres, weaving an initial network of impact points,” explains Khadija Rhamiri.

The CDT is on the same track. “I work at Morocco Telecom where the basic salaries and bonuses are higher for the workers hired before 2003 than for those contracted after that date. The proliferation of call centres where salaries are lower than at Maroc Telecom is not unconnected with this downward trend, which is similarly reinforced by competition from the call centres in Tunisia,” says Habiba Zahi, a member of the CDT Executive Bureau and president of the Moroccan Association for Women's Rights. “We have embarked on an awareness raising campaign among the young call centre workers, who are trying to contact other young people in the same sector. Most of them have a good level of education but haven't been able to find work corresponding to their degree of qualification. They often work part time, which adds to the difficulty in organising them.”

The plight of the “little maids”

In Morocco, 600,000 children aged between 7 and 14 are working when they should be at school. An impressive figure, along with that of the 800,000 other children who do not work but, even so, do not attend school.

In December 2005, Human Rights Watch (HRW) denounced the plight of Morocco's child maids, who work up to 126 hours a week and are physically or sexually abused by their employers. In a report entitled “Inside the Home, Outside the Law”, HRW underlines that Morocco has one of the highest rates of child labour in North Africa and the Middle East. “Morocco's Labor Code excludes domestic workers, and labor inspectors lack the authority to enter private homes to investigate violations of the general prohibition on the employment of children under fifteen,” the report denounces.

Traditionally a very widespread phenomenon in Morocco, it has reached even greater proportions with women's access to employment, and largely involves girls from underprivileged rural environments.

“You will find a little maid in every Moroccan family. Some are not even 7 years old. Domestic chores can be very heavy tasks for children of that age. But this phenomenon doesn't prick the conscience of Moroccan families or the government. We're used to it, it's part of our culture; that's the worst thing,” denounces Majda Fahchouch, a teacher, presenter of a TV programme for children, and the national coordinator of a national trade union project to fight against child labour and deschoolisation (1).

“A hard battle has to be fought for a specific law to be drawn up, to counter the fact that they are excluded from the Labour Code. Prohibiting it outright will not solve the problem. It's going to take a lot of hard work, and compulsory schooling will have to be accompanied by concrete measures to fund education and help parents to compensate for the loss of earnings.”

(1) For more information on this project jointly implemented by the Dutch and Moroccan teachers' unions AOb and SNE, read the full interview of Majda Fahchouch on the subject (June 2006) at <http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?index=991224576&Language=EN>