

#16

UNION VIEW

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Mauritania-Senegal Defending the rights of migrants

Mauritania and Senegal, both transit countries to Europe and host countries for migrants from the whole west Africa region, are very vulnerable to migration flows.

What can be done to help them, inform them, organise them?

Within the framework of a bilateral partnership supported by the ITUC, the trade unions have become key actors in managing migration.

Read our reports and interviews.

Mauritania, magnet for migrants

Mauritania is more than familiar with migration, as a transit point for migrants heading to the European Union. It is also a host country for migrants from western Africa, drawn by agriculture, fishing, mining and the emerging oil sector.



Stronger controls along the borders of North Africa have shifted the emigration routes to Europe towards the Saharan and sub-Saharan regions. → Reuters

Migrant women estimated at 60 percent

“Migration into Mauritania is primarily female: the proportion of migrant women workers is estimated at around 60 percent. These women work long days and have to abandon their children, who suffer high levels of abuse. They have no protection if they become pregnant. They are the target of endless harassment by the administrative authorities and the police.”

Mamadou Niang, CGTM.

Nouakchott is like a great building site, where immigrant workers of both genders are found everywhere. They work in the construction industry, in garages, sheet-metal works and carpentry, small trades, restaurants and also in road transport and domestic services. During the week, trucks run up and down the boulevard outside the French Embassy in the centre of town picking up illegal workers for construction sites, as well as individuals looking for a “boy” or driver. On Sundays, the nearby church and the surrounding streets are packed with these West African migrants, who have left in search of a better life.

In the north of the country, the economic capital Nouadhibou is also home to sizeable foreign communities, of which most are Senegalese. On the quayside at the port, hundreds of workers wander in all different directions, looking for day labour. Some have already attempted to make the illegal crossing to Spain but have been turned back by the Spanish or Moroccan navies. Others have been conned by so-called passeurs or people smugglers who have taken their money.

Diverting the emigration routes

For a long time, however, Mauritania was unaware of immigration as an issue: for many years its effects went practically unnoticed in a country that consists of a large

desert region with highly permeable borders and a 700km long Atlantic coast. The rare waves of visible migration were made up of incoming and outgoing Malians and Senegalese who had come from these two neighbouring countries to work in Mauritania. “During the four decades that followed independence, it was not an area of concern, and legislation remained unchanged apart from a number of bilateral agreements reached with the neighbouring countries concerned. In recent years, however, increased border controls in North Africa have meant that previous immigration routes, which used to go from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya to Europe through Spain and Italy, have been diverted,” explains Mamadou Niang. This new situation has resulted in migration shifting to the Saharan and sub-Saharan regions. The interception and questioning of migrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in northern Mauritania on the edge of the western Sahara has revealed the existence of significant levels of migration that had not been suspected until now. The new reality of the transit zone from Mauritania to southern Europe has been accentuated by the new road between Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, linking North Africa to West Africa, and the existence of the “route of hope” between Néma (on the border with Mali) and Nouakchott, which crosses the country from east to west.

The Mauritanian Diaspora

The Mauritanian Diaspora abroad represents 10 percent of the total population, or an estimated 250,000 people. The main destinations are Ivory Coast (50,000), the Gulf states (24,000), Mali (20,000), Gambia (20,000), France (20,000) and Senegal (10,000).

Natural movement with Senegal

Besides the increase in the number of migrants transiting through Mauritania to Europe, Mauritania is also a country in which more and more migrants have come to settle. "There is a natural movement of people back and forth between our two countries, which also act as host countries for migrants from numerous other nations, most of whom are employed in the informal sector. A significant minority of immigrants cross the border between Senegal and Mauritania on foot. These are generally agricultural workers, domestic servants recruited by intermediaries and adventurers looking for employment who swim along the river or travel in dugout canoes. The Marabout brotherhoods also contribute to the movement of workers by encouraging illegal border crossings during pilgrimages or religious processions. In the fishing sector, it is fishermen from Saint Louis in Senegal who make up the largest group in Mauritania," explains Mamadou Niang.

Mauritania is attracting more migrant workers because of its economic development, which is primarily based on exploiting the country's mining, fishing and more recently oil resources. The estimated 300,000 workers who live there come from other African countries but also from Asia, primarily because of the rise in Chinese investment.

The causes of migration are violence, war, hazardous climatic conditions and the attraction of a blinkered view of the magnificence of the Mauritanian economy, but above all systemic poverty. The proliferation of recruitment agencies is another factor that drives the influx of migrant workers of both genders. In addition, access to employment in Mauritania is relatively easy for migrants, because the authorities (employment agencies and the labour inspectorate) do not have the resources to ensure any real level of control.

Out-of-date legislation

"Now based on out-of-date concepts, the decree of 1964-65 was based on the concerns of the newly independent public authorities to assert internal sovereignty, but that is now out of step with Mauritania's international commitments, given that the country ratified the international UN convention (1990) on the rights of migrant workers and their families," laments Mamadou Niang. Its repressive approach to illegal migrants and its silence on its protective duty towards migrants contrast with the actual practices of the public authorities, which acknowledge that migrants have a number of fundamental rights in accordance with the Constitution. The Employment Code (2004) ensures that immigrant workers with a valid work permit are protected by the principle of non-discrimination: this means they have the same rights as Mauritanian workers, particularly in terms of social security. Illegal employment of migrant workers is covered by the 2003 law on the suppression of people trafficking.

"We are raising awareness amongst the authorities so that they do not only focus on security measures but also take migrants' rights into account by ratifying Conventions 97 and 143 of the ILO and making changes to national legislation. Given the current lack of synergy between the various bodies involved (primarily the three ministries concerned), we are asking for a tripartite organisation to be set up to manage migration in the form of a national monitoring and research centre," adds Mamadou Niang.

As far as trade union rights are concerned, all foreign workers are free to join or form a trade association. To take on a management role in a union, however, they must have worked in Mauritania for at least five consecutive years in the profession represented by the union.

Many Senegalese work in Mauritania's fishing industry. Owing to their professional seagoing experience, they also control illegal immigration routes to Spain's Canary Islands. → D.D.

Domestic work: a calling for female migrants... and traffickers

"The demand for domestic workers amongst the upper and middle classes in Mauritania attracts female migrants and the traffickers who take advantage of them. In general terms, the nature of the job makes it easy for domestic workers to be exploited: they are isolated, poorly paid and at the mercy of their employers." Mamadou Niang, CGTM. (see article p. 14)



"Most women here have husbands or sons in Spain"

The exodus of the fishermen of Saint Louis, Senegal. Women do what they can to survive.



Aissatou (right), fish processor, with Yéné Diop (left) and Fatimata Sow (centre) of the CNTS. → N.D.

Sending girls to school

"They send boys to school rather than girls because girls are better at helping their mothers work. Boys are lazier and would rather go swimming. There is also a mentality that boys will become the head of the family, so parents send them to school more readily. We would like to set up a classroom for young girls on these premises next to the workplace, but we don't have the teachers available. We would like to discuss this with the town authorities to find a solution."

Yéné Diop, gender secretary of the regional union in St Louis (CNTS).

Fishing is the principal activity on the Langue de Barbarie peninsula, and emigration affects every family. "There are 3,000 women and some 200 girls under the age of eighteen here. Most of these women have husbands or sons in Spain, and every family has been affected by immigration," explains Fatimata Sow, migration expert at the CNTS office in Saint Louis.

Among the briny fermentation vats, the stench of fish laid out to dry, the piles of rotting scales and the constant pestering by flies, working conditions for the fish processors on Sinn beach are extremely tough. There is no drinking water point, no drains, no roof for when it rains. Most are heads of their families. "Many women are widows. They work seven days a week from 7am to 8pm, with no rest, for an average daily wage of just 2,500 CFA (less than €5)," laments Yéné Diop, gender secretary at the regional union in St Louis (CNTS).

"I started working here at Sinn with my mother, and I took her place when she died," says Aissatou, who has eight children and over forty years' work under her belt. Almost all of her family have emigrated to Spain. "All the men have left: my sons, my nephews, and also my nieces. They left in dugout canoes, mostly from Mauritania, and from Nouadhibou

in particular. It's easy for Senegalese fishermen to sail up the Mauritanian coastline in their dugout canoes." Fishermen with boats pay nothing. Those without pay between 200,000 and 500,000 CFA.

The first groups that left for Spain returned with sums of money that did not go unnoticed. They bought nice cars and built houses, so others followed suit. "Many work in Spain as hawkers on the beaches in the tourist season, as fruit-pickers, and in many other small trades. But the big problem is having no identity documents in Spain. A boy in my family was stopped in Morocco and was turned back into the desert. It was only the help of a fellow countryman in Nouadhibou that got him back here," continues Aissatou, vice president of the Sinn economic interest group (IEG) for women fish processors.

With the recession in Spain, some have returned without finding work. "I know one man who has been back for a month now. He is totally depressed; he couldn't cope with the extremely tough conditions in Spain. One of my husband's sons, whose mother is no longer alive, left Nouadhibou for Spain. Because he has no identity documents, he is having serious difficulties. His fiancée is tired of waiting and has decided to break off the engagement."

The first groups that left were unaware that they were risking their lives by doing so. “Most women who have left have died during the crossing. The fishermen have seagoing experience, but the women don’t have a clue until they leave. That’s a lot of lives lost,” says Aissatou regretfully.

Today, those considering illegal emigration are more aware of the risks involved in the sea crossing, and the difficulties that await them in Spain. The number of people leaving has fallen, but some still try their luck. “If they succeed, they can earn in three years what a Senegalese person on a low wage will never make in twenty years. Often they leave without their mother’s blessing. They travel up to Mauritania, no-one hears from them for a couple of months, then they call when they get to Spain.”

Health insurance and training

The women of Sinn who are left behind have many demands relating to basic needs. “The women have set up a tontine association into which they pay each month to facilitate small-scale investment and assist with the often phenomenal cost of weddings and baptisms,” explains Binta, president of the Sinn economic interest group (IEG) for women fish processors. “Fish is in increasingly short supply and we need professional training for young people in hairdressing, sewing and computing so they can find work in St Louis in these as yet unsaturated industries. We would also like a roof (an open warehouse) to work under with a hard floor and drainage channels for waste water because we have to stop work in the rainy season.” According to Yéné Diop

(CNTS), who has established close relationships with these women, who have no health cover: “they have a very great need for health insurance”.



Attasarr (14) cleans fish with her bare hands all day long on the beach at Sinn in Saint Louis, Senegal. She started coming to the beach when she was four with her mother, who could not afford to put her into full-time education, save for a few brief stints at the Koranic school. Attasarr’s dream is to go to Spain, with papers and a trustworthy woman known to her mother to look out for her. → N.D.

Blaise Dieng, retired fisherman, relies on his immigrant son in Barcelona to support his family of eight

“My 25-year-old son Papebrahim has been in Barcelona for 3 years. When I was a fisherman we ate our fill, but life was tough and when our son left we hoped that things would improve. He travelled up to Nouadhibou on a fishing trip with me. After seven months in Mauritania, he sailed for Spain. As a fisherman and a fisherman’s son, he paid nothing. He was skipper, but the boat was not his. The crossing went without a hitch. He spent 45 days in a Red Cross centre in the Canary Islands, then travelled up to Barcelona. He lives there with other Senegalese people.

He does all sorts of jobs, in construction, and in the fields too. He makes a living so we can eat, pay the water bill and all our other outgoings, especially drugs for his grandmother, who is ill. He sorts out all our affairs because I am retired. His major concern is not having identity documents.

We are a family of eight and everyone depends on my son in Spain. In the district, the work our sons do in Spain is very important. As for accidents at sea, I don’t think that stops young people from leaving. But fewer people are leaving because there are many informers and the authorities are cracking down and putting the organisers in prison.”



Early results encouraging for trade union partnership to defend migrant rights

Supplying information, raising awareness, gathering statistical data and providing services: work by trade unions in the field lends credibility to their demands.

The terrible images and stories of young men and women who have died at sea have raised awareness of the phenomenon and the necessity of getting involved to provide information on illegal emigration by young people, who are often blinded by a so-called European Eldorado. Mamadou Niang (CGTM-Mauritania), coordinator of the joint Senegalese and Mauritanian project to build capacity amongst the trade unions to help defend the rights of migrant workers (1), contemplates the philosophy behind the project. "The many attempts to manage migration almost all rely on a security-based or administrative approach. As trade union members, we want an approach based on migrants' rights and which hinges on the fundamental right to freedom of choice about where you want to work, and the struggle for decent jobs."

As part of the Special Action Programme on defending the rights of immigrant workers and strengthening trade union solidarity in the southern hemisphere, the ITUC has launched three partnership agreements between affiliated organisations in different regions. With the support of LO/TCO-Sweden, these three pilot projects are being run in Indonesia (SPSI) and Malaysia (MTUC), Nicaragua (CST, CUS, CUSA) and Costa Rica (CTRN) as well as Mauritania (CGTM) and Senegal (CNTS). Migrants' information and support centres have been opened in Malaysia by the TUC, in Costa Rica by the CTRN and in Mauritania by the CGTM.

"Given the age-old links that unite our two peoples and the ongoing displacement of the populations within our two States – which are countries of departure and transit, as well as host countries –, it was necessary to set up a common trade-union policy to enable the concerns of migrant workers to be dealt with appropriately," adds N'Diougua Wade, president of the Senegalese liaison committee of the bilateral project (2).

Since January 2007, when the project began, a number of concrete actions have been taken. Information and awareness-raising sessions have been organised in Mauritania and Senegal, with the distribution of a pamphlet on migrants' rights. A welcome, information and guidance centre for migrants of both genders has been opened in Nouakchott (see article p. 8). Two local focal points have been set up, one in Nouadhibou, a port city in northern Mau-



In September this year, a workshop was held on the protection of the rights of the migrant workforce in St Louis, capital of Senegal's northern region, as part of the Mauritania-Senegal joint trade union project. In the presence of the media, Mamadou Niang (left), project coordinator, and Mody Guiro (right), CNTS secretary-general, emphasised the urgent need to "go beyond a security-based and administrative approach to migration to develop an approach based on male and female migrants' rights". → N.D.

ritania, where many illegal migrants leave the country, and the other in Dakar, the capital of Senegal and crossroads for the sub-region. This scheme to raise local awareness was aimed at areas that are zones of transit and departure for the migrants. In Senegal, regional liaison offices have been set up in Kaolack, M'Bour and Saint Louis. It was in Saint Louis, capital of Senegal's northern region and a transit point on the emigration trail to Mauritania and Europe, that a joint workshop was held in September this year on the protection of the rights of the migrant workforce.

With reliable data cruelly lacking, work was undertaken to gather statistical data on migration. "Many migrants are resistant to the idea of being 'put on file' so it's a matter of building confidence. Migrant workers are primarily employed in the informal sector, so they can be reluctant to get involved with the unions, particularly if their papers are not in order and they are living in fear. The direct contacts made through the welcome centre in Nouakchott are invaluable for gathering statistical data," says Mamadou Niang.

"It is important to point out that the embassies and consulates of the countries concerned came to the opening of the centre for migrants and understood what we were trying to achieve. One example was the sad case of a migrant who died in a mine in Akjouj. The CGTM alerted the Senegalese consulate, which didn't even know who he was. Thanks to the union network we were able to provide the consulate with the relevant information about this individual so that they could take care of repatriating his body. Now, the consulates themselves send us workers who are in difficulty,

Support for the ratification of ILO Conventions 97 and 143

Mauritanian and Senegalese trade unions are engaged in a campaign of advocating ratification of ILO Conventions 97 and 143 relating to the protection of migrant workers' rights.



Trade unions have a key monitoring role in exposing gaps in migrant protection,” Geertrui Lanneau (IOM-Dakar)



Money transfers and development

With migrants sending an average of 13 percent of their earnings back to their country, the question of migrant money transfers is of significant economic importance to matters of development in countries of origin. Last August in Lomé, ITUC-Africa, in collaboration with the ILO/ACTRAV (the ILO’s Bureau for Workers’ Activities), brought together trade unions from a dozen French-speaking countries in West Africa, Central Africa and North Africa, to discuss tools for protecting the rights of migrant workers and analysing the economic impact of their money transfers. For Insa Ben Saïd Dia, trade union training officer for the Africa region (ILO-ACTRAV), “Trade unions have an important role to play prior to migrants’ departure and after their return to their country of origin, and in improving their situation in the destination country.”

proving that we have asserted ourselves as a union,” he continues.

Thanks to work undertaken in the field and fruitful contacts with institutional actors such as the ILO and the IOM, the unions will be recognized from now on in both countries as key actors in the management of labour migrations.

“It is our work in close proximity with the most relevant workers – those in the field – that gives us our legitimacy. In 2008, we organized a large seminar in Dakar, attended by representatives of CGTM-Mauritania, the five Senegalese government departments responsible for migration matters, other Senegalese trade-union group members of the ITUC (CSA (Confederation of autonomous unions), CNTS/FC (Forces of Change), UNSAS (Senegalese national union of autonomous trade unions) and UDTs (Senegalese democratic union of workers)), the ILO, the IOM, and migrants’ associations,” explains N’Diouga Wade. “In 2008, the ILO officially handed the CNTS the responsibility for training migrants destined for Spain, particularly in risk prevention in the workplace. In particular, we provided group training for

young people bound for the Spanish hospitality and elderly care sectors. For its part, the IOM actively involved us in several training workshops,” continues N’Diouga Wade.

On the basis of the early and encouraging success of this project, the ITUC will continue to support the project over the next two years. We want to carry on building on the initial results we have achieved, continue gathering data and increase the visibility of our actions at national borders, because it is here that too many migrants are left to their fate and find themselves at the mercy of networks that take advantage of their vulnerability. At a strategic level, we want to strengthen the coordination mechanisms that have already been put in place between activities related to awareness-raising and defending migrants overall, protecting and organising the informal sector, which covers settled migrants, and finally defending domestic workers, as a specific sector linked to the problems of people trafficking and forced labour,” concludes Mamadou Niang.

(1) See full interview with Mamadou Niang (CGTM) at: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spotlight-interview-with-mamadou.html>

(2) See full interview with N’Diouga Wade (CNTS) at: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spotlight-interview-with-n-diouga.html>

Trade union activity encouraged by the ILO and IOM

In June 2009, the ILO and IOM organised a training workshop on migrant workforce policy and management, in which trade unions were actively involved. “Trade unions have a very important role to play in the management of labour migrations. Crucially, they work closely with the workers themselves who are prime candidates for emigration. They are very important vehicles for information and basic awareness-raising, and also for training,” considers Geertrui Lanneau, regional labour migration expert at the IOM regional office in Dakar, which covers a dozen countries in the region.

Providing alternatives

The ILO and IOM have published joint information pamphlets. “Campaigns to raise awareness of the risks of illegal immigration are good but it isn’t enough. We need to give young people an alternative,” adds Geertrui Lanneau, citing the example of a work promotion programme in the environment sector (waste recycling and recovery, organic farming) involving 80 young people. For its part and in the framework of its policy to function as coordinator between migration and development, the ILO sub-regional office for the Sahel organised a training seminar in Dakar in October 2009 to support the social and occupational reintegration of returning migrants in their countries (Mali, Mauritania and Senegal).

In the context of a regional EU-funded programme to promote legal migration, the IOM is implementing a research and capacity-building programme. “As far as building the capacities of civil society stakeholders is concerned, trade unions are invited to all our training sessions,” adds Geertrui Lanneau. “It is highly appropriate for the trade union



“There is another way... illegal immigration is causing thousands of deaths. You can be a winner in Senegal”. Slogan of the demonstration against illegal immigration, with free hip hop concerts, Dakar, August 2008.

movement to be devoting more time to southern hemisphere migration, which represents the majority of migratory movement.”

The ILO is working to eliminate child labour in the region, in particular child domestic work, under its IPEC programme. The IOM is engaged in a project in Senegal and other countries in the region to fight human trafficking and provide direct assistance to victims. “As far as domestic workers are concerned, there are many victims of different types of abuse who do not fit the strict definition of trafficking directly, hence the need to develop wider assistance,” clarifies Geertrui Lanneau, who intends to involve trade unions in the region in this work to protect migrant domestic workers of both genders.

Nouakchott's trade union centre for migrants

Objective: giving migrants the tools they need to defend their rights.

"Supported by the Spanish trade union UGT (ISCOD) and by the Spanish International Cooperation agency, the centre aims to provide information to migrants so that they can take the right decisions and understand what good practices are; this is also the case with similar centres set up on the same basis in Morocco (with the FDT) and in Senegal (with the CNTS)," explains Mamadou Niang.

In its awareness-raising initiatives the CGTM targets certain areas of activity in particular, such as transport and the construction sector, which employ significant numbers of immigrant workers. The Centre has published an information leaflet on migrants' rights and how to look for work.

Access to housing loans

Many migrants, most from Saint Louis in Senegal, are victims of the money they send to their relatives to fund their building projects being embezzled. "Along with the CNTS, we would like to help these migrants access home savings accounts that the Banque de l'Habitat du Sénégal (BHS) grants to Senegalese people living abroad," explains Mamadou Niang.

-See the full interview of Mamadou Niang at: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spotlight-interview-with-mamadou.html>



Job market information

"We have also been involved in numerous activities providing information on the European job markets, to explain who is eligible to work in Europe and what formalities have to be completed, because they often arrive relying on inaccurate information and false promises made by the traffickers." The CGTM has carried out this awareness-raising work in conjunction with other civil society organisations specialising in migration, which has earned it a significant amount of media coverage.

To mitigate the lack of reliable statistical data, the centre has set up a database on the rights, working conditions and employment of migrant workers. The database is useful at the centre for identifying migrants' needs as accurately as possible and obviously to ensure they have access to more information about their rights. "We provide them with information, and then it's down to them to get organised and fight to ensure their rights are respected. Our philosophy as a union is based on capacity building, i.e. giving people the



Nouakchott's centre for migrants. "It is important to emphasise the significant role played by women and young people within the CGTM as part of our awareness-raising campaign on migrants." Mamadou Niang. → D.D.

tools to defend their rights themselves. We can't fight on their behalf: they have to make things happen for themselves."

Dispute resolution office

The centre has opened a dispute resolution office for migrant workers. "Any migrant who has a problem at work can have their case taken to the labour inspectorate and we will go to the employment court if necessary," explains Mamadou Niang. The main problems are related to obtaining work permits, employment contracts and unfair dismissal. "We have intervened, for example, in the cases of domestic servants who have not been paid by their employers."

Work with migrant associations

The CGTM has developed relationships with all the migrants' associations for different nationalities that exist in Mauritania (people from Senegal, Mali, Gambia, Guinea and Burkina Faso). Last June, for example, the 23 Malian associations in Mauritania held their annual general meeting at the CGTM centre, in the presence of the Malian consul. "It's important for us that migrants should feel at home in our centre. We also run an outreach programme and hold mini-meetings at the places where different communities meet. Increasing our level of involvement with migrants' associations in both Nouakchott and Nouadhibou through our local liaison committee is a priority. We also work with the churches, which play an important role in assisting migrant workers."

Fighting human trafficking

"It's important to include areas such as human trafficking, people smuggling and forced labour in our work on migra-



tion, particularly as far as female domestic servants are concerned. Many women migrants arrive through networks that pick them up as soon as they arrive and to whom they are forced to pay money for months of work. The influence of the networks hinders the visibility of the migrants. We encourage migrants to participate in our marches precisely to increase their visibility," adds Mamadou Niang.

The next step for the CGTM in the short term will be to set up a Mauritanian network for managing the rights of migrant workers with the human rights associations and other national NGOs. The Centre has also broadened the scope of its activities at a sub-regional level by taking part in the session on migration at the Maghreb Social Forum.



Most of Mauritania's settled migrants are working in the informal sector. "Our campaign to unionise the informal sector is also very important in helping these migrants to defend their rights." Mamadou Niang. → D.D.

Social security: an obstacle to return

For trade unions, guaranteeing the portability of social contributions is important.

From a development perspective, the return of migrants is an essential factor. "Those who return invest in economic activities, often in commerce," confirms Mody Guiro, secretary-general of the CNTS. "But many Senegalese who want to return are unable to do so because of the problem of retrieving their social security contributions," he laments, "particularly those who are too old to continue to carry out heavy labour, especially in the construction industry; they find themselves trapped."

A stalled process

"There is an agreement with France. But in the Netherlands the lack of a bilateral agreement means those who come back lose 50 percent of their retirement pension. With regards to Italy, on the basis of the cooperation established with the trade-union group CISL, a letter of intent was signed in 2008 with the Italian CISL and the Senegalese ministry of the exterior, aimed at signing a convention on social security. This is mainly a matter of ensuring that the Senegalese in Italy benefit from family allowances and

invalidity pensions both in Italy and Senegal, and can receive their retirement pensions once back in their country of origin, and that families of deceased migrants should benefit from pension reversion. However, this process has stalled with Italy and Spain, and in Senegal there are no fewer than five government departments that also cover the Senegalese abroad, which delays the process."

At the training workshop organised by the ILO and IOM on migrant workforce policy and management in June 2009 in Dakar, participants recommended "encouraging Spain and Italy and other European and African destination countries to sign social security agreements with Senegal, in particular to promote the opportunity for returning migrants to purchase missing insurance contributions due to their expatriation and make ongoing voluntary insurance contributions." A general convention on social security for the ECOWAS area (Economic Community of West African States) would also be of great assistance in protecting migrants of both genders in the region.

Security: the great priority

From Nouadhibou to Thiaroye-sur-mer, there is collective anger over the fact that resources allocated to repression rather than development.

With a fleet of speedboats, surveillance aircraft, helicopters and police vessels with personnel trained by the Spanish... Frontex, the European Union agency responsible for EU border security, pulls out all the stops when it comes to resources for combating illegal migration.

In fact, on the beaches around Nouadhibou, the colourful dugout canoes are taking to the sea less often. In the town, however, thousands of migrants are still crammed into the poor districts, making ends meet through casual work and striking deals with the passeurs, or people smugglers, who are much more careful these days... patiently yet doggedly waiting to board their canoe to reach Spanish shores.

Further south, the Dakar suburb of Thiaroye-sur-mer, with 50,000 inhabitants, has also been overrun by people smugglers and is now one of the main Senegalese departure points for all of West Africa. Here too, the memory of dozens of bodies washed up on the beach is still fresh, there are tighter controls, and night sailings to attempt the 1,500km crossing to the Canary Islands are now less frequent. In spite of this, the queues of women outside the Western

Union offices who have come to collect the money sent by their sons or husbands speaks volumes about the main "business" carried out here. Resentment is also brewing over the billions spent on security by the Senegalese and European authorities. "Why is this money not invested in development projects that would help us live better here?" wonders Ousmane angrily, who was returned to his point of departure after being stopped at sea and turned back.

The Mauritanian "Guantanamo"

Under a readmittance agreement signed between Spain and Mauritania in 2006, any person suspected of having crossed Mauritanian soil to reach the Spanish Canary Islands is returned to Mauritania. In agreement with the Mauritanian government, the Spanish authorities set up a detention centre for illegal immigrants at Nouadhibou, which was soon nicknamed "Guantanamo".

But the arbitrary nature of collective expulsions and the conditions at "Guantanamo" have quickly come under fire; from Amnesty International in particular.

"The human dramas involved in illegal emigration to Europe are harrowing; so many people have lost their lives during their attempts to make the crossing. We must make young people understand that Europe is not the Eldorado they imagine it is, and that people smugglers are criminals."

N'Diougua Wade, (CNTS)

-See the full interview of N'Diougua Wade at: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spotlight-interview-with-n-diougua.html>

"If we provide young fishermen with an opportunity to stay, there will be no more illegal departures"

The CNTS works with a coalition of over 25 organisations working in the fight against young people's illegal immigration.

I had been working for five years as a fisherman in the port of Dakar. But the whole management of the port had been turned upside down and fish stocks were getting low. In one month at sea I was earning between 50,000 and 60,000 CFA, which is not enough. In 2006, I travelled up to St Louis to cross the ocean. One month after I arrived in the Canary Islands, I was thrown out and repatriated by chartered plane. It was terrible because some young people resisted. We didn't get the assistance promised by the Spanish, or assistance from our government; it was a complete swindle," says Papa Guéy.é.

Following the mass departure of open wooden boats (or pirogues) in 2006, many young people were, like him, repatriated from Spain. What are these young people doing today? "Nothing at all, there's no work at all," laments Papa Guéy.é, now president of the national association of repatriated people, survivors and affected families (ANRAF), which has 5,887 members, including young people – mostly fishermen – but women and mothers of victims, too. "Our aim is to assist in the rehabilitation of young people and assist the families who have lost their husbands or children, for example by helping their children through school. We organise events, canoe races and wrestling tournaments to generate a little income." Without state support, the association finds it hard to survive. "We would like the assistance of the European Union in buying canoes so we can fish. We would also like a multi-disciplinary vocational training centre for getting a job that is useful here and which also meets the needs of the European market should the demand



Malick Sy, CNTS trainer (left), with Cheik N'Diaye, Mamé Thierno N'Diaye and Papa Guéy.é from the ANRAF association for repatriated people. → N.D.

arise again. If we enable young fishermen to work in their country of origin, it is obvious that they will stay there. We are well aware that in Spain life is very tough. And if we provide young fishermen with an opportunity to stay, we will no longer see canoes sailing for Spain because it is these fishermen who organise the sailings," assesses Papa Guéy.é.

In the framework of its migrant project, the CNTS is keen to strengthen trade union cooperation with migrants' associations in the field. "We work with a coalition of over 25 organisations working to fight against the illegal immigration of young people, which includes in particular the collective of those who have been repatriated from Spain (CORAES)," explains Malick Sy, CNTS trainer. "Malick includes us in many meetings. Thanks to him, we have met with Spanish CCOO union officials, for example," enthuses Papa Guéy.é.





With the economic crisis in Spain, migrants are extremely vulnerable.

Mohammed Haidour CCOO (Spain)



Northern/Southern hemisphere union cooperation

A role for trade unions in the bilateral agreements between Spain and Senegal.

We work mainly with our partners in Spain, France and Italy. With the French democratic confederation of labour (CFDT-France), we have concluded an agreement on the support and care of migrants on French soil. With Spain (CCOO (workers' commission) and UGT (general workers' union)), the cooperation is particularly dynamic. Initially, the Senegalese government did not involve us at all in the bilateral agreements between Spain and Senegal, geared mainly towards the security approach, mostly via the European border-security programme, FRONTEX. It was the Spanish unions that allowed us to take part in the process," explains N'Diougua Wade (CNTS).

A space for trade unions

"We have lobbied the Spanish government to in turn pressure partner governments of migrant transit and departure countries for the involvement of trade unions in the process. Today, trade unions have gained ground that enables them to promote the protection of migrants," says Mohammed Haidour (CCOO-Spain). The idea is to work together, at departure and arrival, for the protection, education and organization of migrants facing very difficult conditions in the destination countries. "Spanish union officials came to explain in person the explosion of unemployment in Spain following the credit crunch, and we were able to create an awareness programme in every region," continues N'Diougua Wade. Trade unions demand more transparency and democracy in the selection of male and female candidates for emigration. The major problems from the start are the

mismatch between experience and the employment offered, ignorance of the language – which poses problems with social and professional integration –, and lack of information on working conditions, salaries, accommodation, medical cover, and administrative hassles, which arouse intense frustrations on arrival. "We also raise the question of the policy of assisting with reintegration on returning for those migrants who only have temporary contracts within the framework of circular migration," adds N'Diougua Wade. In practical terms, from the time they arrive at the Spanish airport, the Senegalese women workers who come to carry out temporary contracts are taken care of by union officials. With the support of CCOO-Andalucia, CNTS union officials have carried out site visits to farms in Spain to check the living and working conditions of migrants of both genders in the fields.

The recession makes migrants more vulnerable

"Spain's financial crisis has hit the most vulnerable segments of society – such as migrants – head-on. With the UGT (general workers' union), CCOO has called out to the government. But the protection instruments are weak, and migrants who lose their jobs find themselves with no social welfare protection, and sometimes crippled by loan agreements they have entered into. To return voluntarily, as encouraged by the authorities, is to fail. The demand from businesses still exists but is reduced. The situation is very delicate and requires international trade union action," concludes Mohammed Haidour.

"Linking migrant protection and the organisation of the informal sector"

Caring for migrants living in Senegal through the organisation of the informal sector.

In Dakar, when you take the motorway to go to work in the morning, you see rows of young Guineans selling fruit at the roadside. You come back to the same place at 8 o'clock at night and they are still there! These are marginalized people; nobody cares about them," reveals N'Diougua Wade (CNTS). Within the framework of assuring the continued backing of the ITUC for its project on migrants, the CNTS, like the CGTM, is keen to place emphasis on the care of migrants who have settled in its country.

Outreach programmes to organise the informal sector

"Everyone talks about the informal sector, but launching a long-term unionisation strategy, that's a tough challenge. Often, there are problems with establishing loyalty and with the lack of human resources for supervising these particularly vulnerable male and female casual workers," adds N'Diougua Wade. Within the scope of union cooperation with various European partners, the CNTS has started by centring its approach on awareness raising and training sessions. With the support of the CGSLB – the Belgian affiliate of the ITUC – bicycle taxi drivers in the town of Kaolack are now well organised.

Mutual savings and credit societies

"We want to go further, by offering services that are useful to them. With the backing of CCOO (Spain), mutual savings and credit societies are going to be set up in all the regions in Senegal – this is a union first. Covering the whole country, this network will amount to creating a new national bank. It isn't only a matter of putting structures into place; we are also going to provide the training to make these structures work," continues N'Diougua Wade.

Young people and women on the front line

The CNTS women's committee is very active regarding the informal sector. Fish scalers and those working for wholesale fish merchants, domestic servants, street sellers, bus-station operatives, dyers, laundry maids... 11,000 women from the informal sector have already joined.

"Unionisation of the informal sector is a key factor in the protection of the rights of migrants who have settled in Senegal. The women's and young people's committees are at the sharp end of this campaign to unionise the informal sector. This is essential for the future of the union movement."

Senegal: Breaking the silence on domestic worker exploitation

In the face of difficulties with salaries, housing, health and a lack of respect, female domestic workers launch their trade union in Dakar.

At the World Day for Decent Work on 7 October this year, female domestic workers took a centre-stage role in the proceedings in Dakar. "At four o'clock, after we had finished work, we took the floor ourselves to talk about our lives and our working conditions," explains N'Diok, president of the female domestic workers' trade union, part of the female domestic workers and household workers' union.

After an initial survey on the ground to assess the situation and find ways to help raise awareness and educate domestic workers, the CNTS [National Confederation of Senegalese Workers] truly began to organize them in 2008, in the framework of its campaign to organize informal sector female workers. "The women raised the issue of the overly high cost of the social security contribution. We reduced the amount from 6,000 to 2,400 CFA francs per year, in order to show them that we want to help them to get a trade union card, of which they are extremely proud. Membership increased from 3,000 to 11,000 once the fish scalers and domestic workers joined. It's an enormous undertaking but we are making progress, step by step," explains Fatou Bintou Yaffa, president of the women's committee and deputy secretary-general of the CNTS. "Some young, female domestic workers have completed secondary school, they need to be integrated and their skills nurtured. At each training seminar, we make sure that there are representatives of the informal sector and at least one or two domestic workers, to train them up little by little. It is also necessary to fit in with their constraints. For example, I meet them on Sundays, as it is impossible for them to be free on any other day as they risk losing their jobs," she continues.

With migrants from abroad in the minority, female domestic workers come in droves from the poorest rural areas, in particular to the Dakar, Thiès and M'Bour zones. "We approached the household workers' trade union affiliated to the CNTS, which covers all household occupations such as drivers or gardeners, who have no social security. There is also the 'Fatou' trade union, which includes about a hundred female domestic workers who work for expatriates and which is part of the French armed forces trade union. They have social security, but they have a big problem in terms of the precariousness of their employment, given the fact that expatriates move frequently," explains Fatou Bintou Yaffa. In all, just 2 percent of female domestic workers are social security registered. "We insist on there being a specific trade union for female domestic workers because here in Senegal only women do domestic work, the men do other jobs that are much better paid (gardening, security, etc.).

Their income is so low that, with the very expensive rents and the necessity of sending money back to the family in the village, they only manage to survive with great difficulty. It is often the hardest on arrival. When they are given a place to



Female domestic workers and household workers' union in Dakar → N.D.

sleep in the house, it is so that they can be exploited even more, and sexual abuse is common. There are rapes and women may be forced to run away pregnant." Salaries vary between 5,000 CFA/month (less than €10) for the youngest workers, who look after the children, and 40,000 CFA/month for those who are more experienced and take care of everything: cooking, housework and children. "Salaries are far too low and are decided on the basis of the maid's looks and the mood of the boss. Legal notice for a maid is eight days. You can spend five years working as a maid and end up with 12,000 CFA pay in lieu of notice!" bemoans Ousmane Biouf, general secretary of the household workers' trade union.

The fight for legislative change

"If we alert the labour inspectorate that a child is working as a domestic worker, they don't do anything; there are no suitable legal provisions. We need to make our voice heard loud and clear so the government listens to us and obtain an agreement on female domestic workers and household workers, and set a salary scale," insists Aliou Thindoum, deputy secretary-general of the household workers' trade union. The absence of paper evidence presents a problem when cases come to court. "The boss's lawyer says that the boss does not know the maid; it is left to the maid to prove otherwise. This demands an inquiry, which may last up to two years. Often the woman becomes discouraged and is already elsewhere, and the case comes to nothing. I once handled the case of a minister who had had a problem with a maid and a security guard. The case was dismissed by the court without explanation. With the embassies, the process for obtaining severance pay is very long and complicated. I make my point loud and clear because my mother was a maid and my wife and sister are maids too, and there is no respect for maids in Senegal, nothing changes at all," stresses Ousmane Biouf.

Changing attitudes... in trade unions, too

"Attitudes are beginning to change. Within the trade unions, after having marched alongside female domestic workers, women from the formal sector say that they have understood the issues and will change their attitudes. On the way home from the march, one woman said to me, "My maid will no longer sleep on the floor in the kitchen, I will give her a mattress in the living room." Men also say to their wives, "That's enough of treating the maid like that!" There is genuine awareness that they should be respected more."

Fatou Bintou Yaffa (CNTS-Senegal)

- See the full interview with Fatou Bintou Yaffa (CNTS-Senegal), "Training is a priority objective for improving the situation of domestic workers", at: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spotlight-interview-with-fatou.html>



Trafficking and forced labour: hidden behind customs

"People don't dare to say so, because of customs and mindsets. There are women who would never admit that they were supposedly sent "on holiday" by the family but that they really found themselves doing domestic work. It may not be called by its name, but it is trafficking nonetheless. Working in exchange for a meal and a little bit of money to send back to the family in the village. In the cities, it is common to hear women say that they are going to the village to look for new girls, who are often no more than 14 to 18 years old. Because once they are mature, they accept

the situation less readily; they prefer, for example, to work as laundry women in order to have a bit more freedom, even though that is also a very difficult job," explains Fatou Bintou Yaffa.

Against this background, many dream of emigrating. "I know women who have left for Morocco, Lebanon and France. They are much better paid than us and some come back for two months each year," confirms N'Diouk. But for the many Senegalese domestic workers who leave to find work abroad, the risk of falling into the hands of human traffickers is very high (see Mauritania article p. 14).

"We have no choice. If we don't work, our elderly relatives will starve"



N'Diouk: I came from the Fatick region to work in Dakar when I was 25 years old. I found a job with a Lebanese man through my cousin. After three years, the boss said "I'm fed up with seeing the same faces, leave!" She even threatened to call the police. I went to the union, they helped me bring the case to court and I received

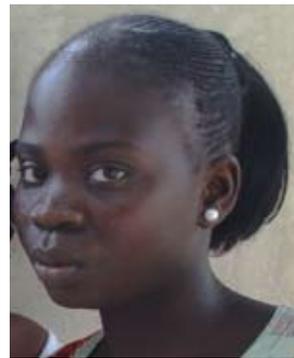
300,000 in severance pay. Thanks to the union, I know my rights, or she would have turned me out without grounds, without giving me a cent...

Beatings are frequent. We are called every name under the sun. My boss doesn't even say hello to me. There are five of us in my room, but some girls share a room with nine others. Sometimes they sleep over at their employer's house when they are working and take it in turns to use the room on days off.

You can be five to six months without work. Many girls have not been through school and are obliged to do this work. We have no choice. If your relatives are old, country-dwellers with nothing to their name, they are obliged to send the children of the family out to work, or they will starve. As for myself, if other nieces want to come, I will certainly put them up in my room because coming to Dakar alone is very tough...

When my niece is ill, my sister – who is also a domestic worker – and I pull together to look after her. We need access to health insurance. And what if you get pregnant? There is no maternity leave because most women have no contract. If you get pregnant, you stop working. Either you find a young girl who can look after your baby for 10,000 CFA, or you return to the village and, after two years, if you are not married, you leave your children with your mother or sister in the village and you come back to work in the town...

Some arrive at 14 or 15 years. At the start, they tell you that it's just doing babysitting and holding the baby, and then bit by bit you have to learn all the rest... This is why we want a training centre, especially for the youngest girls. Once they are trained, we can hope for improved salaries. I dream of learning sewing, or hospitality. We need help for this centre!



Diouf: I came to Dakar on my own from my village in the Thiès region to look for work; it was very tough. In my first job I earned just 13,000 CFA per month. With rent of 6,000 CFA and the money I had to send to my

relatives back in the village, I had almost nothing left for myself. My boss was not at all kind and I worked a seven-day week. After nine months, I left to work for a Lebanese family, who paid me 30,000 CFA with Sundays and public holidays off. I had to do everything, housework and laundry, from 7am to 6pm or 7pm. But I was fired after 4 years because the boss thought that her husband "liked me too much", even though he had never caused me any problems. After that I worked at the home of a Tunisian woman. She is kind but returned to Tunisia to have her baby. So I have been without work for three months. I am doing what I can to survive while I await her return so I can work with her again.

A friend brought me to the union when I had been fired by the Lebanese family. They helped me take the case to court and I received 300,000 CFA severance pay. I take part in meetings and I pay 500 per month into the union fund...

And what do we want? Firstly respect, increased salaries, and days off on Sundays and public holidays. I would also like to have training to learn how to sew.

Planned training centre: a call for support

CNTS' projected training centre for female domestic workers would also contribute to combating human smuggling and trafficking.

"Training is the key cornerstone of any sustainable action. We plan to launch two training centres in 2010, one in Dakar and one on the way out of Dakar, in a crossroads area. Sometimes women need to learn the very basics of the job. Some employers complain that young girls arrive from the country without knowing anything, that it takes time to train them and that then they make demands. Some women are extremely frightened that asking for an increase in salary might lead to their boss firing them. The aim is to help domestic workers to improve their qualifications (for example, in cooking, child care, caring for the elderly, housework, etc.). They will more easily be able to demand increased respect and improved salaries. They are acutely aware that they need training. Sometimes in order to learn such basic

details as closing doors, simply because the houses in the villages have no doors!" explains Fatou Bintou Yaffa. The centre would also organize additional activities open to the public (catering, dyeing, sewing, etc.) in order to generate income. Help with access to microcredit would make it possible to develop additional activities to bring in funds.

"UNESCO has pledged to help fit out the building and a Dutch NGO might help with construction. But we still need help, in particular in finding a plot of land. We would also like to be in contact with similar centres in other countries, to exchange experiences and link our actions with the issues of migration and combating forced labour and trafficking. Senegalese women work all over the world as domestic workers, in Mauritania, Mali, Morocco, Spain, France, Lebanon... This centre will allow us to inform them about their rights and to train them before their departure," hopes Fatou Bintou Yaffa.

Nouakchott's centre for migrants welcomes domestic workers in distress

Awareness-raising, training, social welfare and legal assistance: the CGTM fights against the exploitation and organized trafficking of migrant domestic workers in Mauritania.

In Guinea, it was a friend who offered her the chance to come and work in Mauritania, in order to help her sick father. But once she arrived in Mauritania without any papers, this close friend abandoned her to a Cameroonian trafficker who inflicted all kinds of abuse on her. The dramatic story of 25-year-old Guinean Binta Barry was shared at the trade union seminar on forced labour and human trafficking within the context of the migration of female domestic workers, organized by the CGTM in September 2009 in the premises of the Nouakchott centre for migrants.

Twenty-five women from eight different countries participated actively in this seminar, alongside several migrants' associations and the CGTM women's movement. "It was with a great deal of emotion that we heard testimonies from several young girls who had been gravely exploited. Many migrant women find themselves at the mercy of the networks who looked after them on their arrival and to whom they must then repay large sums of money," explains Moukheiry Sidiel Moustapha, vice-president of the women's committee and president of the General Confederation of Mauritanian Workers' (CGTM) migration surveillance committee. "This committee is tasked with establishing a work plan and a partnership with the other civil society participants who are active in the issues of trafficking and forced labour with regard to female domestic workers."

A stopover on the way to Europe?

They come from countries such as Senegal, Mali, Guinea Conakry, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Niger and Togo. They support their families in the country by sending them money they earn in Mauritania



Moukheiry Sidiel Moustapha, vice-president of the women's committee and president of the General Confederation of Mauritanian Workers' (CGTM) migration surveillance committee. → N.D.

when they can. They leave their country of origin under difficult conditions. Most of them arrive by road, often having suffered severe harassment and sometimes having crossed several borders, via intermediaries who promise that they'll 'get rich quick' in Mauritania, in order to fund their journeys further towards Europe. But very soon they run into problems with their employers.

Extremely low or non-payment of wages, poor treatment, confinement, withholding of food and medical care, excessively long working hours, harassment and rape by their bosses... there are very many problems. "They are completely invisible, on the one hand because they are foreigners and on the other, because their workplace is hidden from view, with no legal recognition and most of the time, without

ILO: an international convention for domestic workers

The international trade union movement is fighting for the adoption by the ILO of a new Convention protecting male and female domestic workers. CGTM-Mauritania and CNTS-Senegal have both emphasized the urgent need for this convention to provide domestic workers with the recognition and the protection that are cruelly lacking.

Eradicating forced labour and human trafficking

At least 12.3 million people work in forced labour, as defined by the International Labour Organisation's Convention 29. The victims are subjected to various forms of psychological and/or physical coercion and more than 2.4 million of them are also victims of human trafficking. Because of the vulnerability of their situation, migrants are especially targeted by these extreme forms of exploitation.

See the trade union action guide published by the ITUC:

http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/guide_forced_labour_EN.pdf



status or contract. Increasingly often, they are obliged to sleep at their place of work. This may save them the cost of renting a room, but they don't have a proper place to sleep, they often have to make do with a corner in the kitchen and are required to be available around the clock. They are even woken up in the middle of the night," Moulkheiry Sidiel Moustapha speaks out.

Behind the embassy gates

The CGTM has received reports of beatings by some Mauritanian families when domestic workers dare to demand payment of their late salaries or refuse to carry out excessive quantities of tasks that were not mentioned in a verbal contract. "In the embassies, we have been told of some truly unacceptable situations. In particular, two cases of women working double shifts for an extremely low salary. The contract is signed between the intermediary and the embassy, without the Senegalese woman being involved in the contract. She is ignorant of the actual salary mentioned in the contract, which the intermediary receives, but she cannot leave the job as she has to support her children, who have remained back home."

The priority for the CGTM is to make contact and talk with these women. Right in the centre of town, Nouakchott's migration centre is open 24/7 and welcomes men and women who come here first and foremost to ask for assistance in finding what little employment they can to feed themselves. "Some are immediately open, others take more time. The psychological dimension is extremely significant, some live under intense fear of their employers, they need to be helped to overcome this fear in order to demand their rights, by taking their cases to the labour inspectorate," adds Moulkheiry Sidiel Moustapha.

Contact with migrant associations

In recent months, the CGTM has begun to raise awareness

among the communities from Guinea, Senegal, Mali, Ivory Coast, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso and Togo, via links with associations set up in Mauritania by the nationals of these countries. "We have given them leaflets presenting simple information about rights, contact persons and so on. We also organize meetings in the places where the various communities come together in everyday life. We have created a steering committee with the women representing these eight communities. They are our points of contact with the rest of the groups. For the moment, we are targeting Nouakchott and Nouadhibou but we would also like to reach Rosso, on the border with Senegal."

In addition to providing information and raising awareness about legislation and their rights, the CGTM centre for migrants would also like to open an office that records employers and employees, in order to break the silence and combat impunity. "The main obstacle is silence, the authorities seem unaware of the issue. First of all we need to successfully gather the information, then we can present the problem to the labour inspectorate and if necessary, to the labour court. Expatriates who exploit domestic workers are extremely sensitive about their image; they don't by any means like being dragged before the courts."

Legal vacuum

A vital link in the economic chain of the country, the work of female domestic workers, which includes women and girls who are sometimes very young, is not recognized by the law, which opens the door to all manner of abuse. Coupled with an absence of statistics and a lack of political will, this legal vacuum complicates the issue of protecting the rights of these workers, who are also disadvantaged due to a lack of training. "Working conditions must be regulated and monitored, with civil and penal sanctions on hand," concludes Moulkheiry Sidiel Moustapha.

- See the full interview with Moulkheiry Sidiel Moustapha (CGTM-Mauritania), "Combating silence and impunity in order to help migrant domestic workers", at: http://www.ituc-csi.org/spotlight-interview-with_4763.html

The CGTM has carried out several awareness-raising campaigns among fishermen, wholesale fish merchants and women fish traders, all from Senegal. The CGTM's activities to organise workers in the informal economy are also an important channel for warning them of the dangers of human trafficking and the exploitation of migrants in unprotected sectors, particularly domestic work. → N.D.



Protecting migrants by demanding their fundamental rights

Countering the impact of the crisis and putting decent employment at the heart of strategies linking migration and development.

At the third Global Forum on Migration and Development, held in Athens in November 2009, the international trade union movement stressed the urgent need to approach migration from the angle of migrant workers' rights. "With over 200 million migrants in the world, nearly half of whom are women, migrations are a major and growing factor in the labour world. But all too often migrants experience nothing but exploitation and discrimination in return for the key role they play in the world economy," denounced Guy Ryder, general secretary of the ITUC. "At this time of massive job losses, migrant workers, usually confined to the most precarious and least protected sectors, are the first to suffer from the world economic crisis," he continued. In Spain, for example, the unemployment rate among immigrants has nearly doubled since the end of 2007. Some countries have introduced policies aimed at encouraging unemployed migrants to return home. But such programmes usually have little impact, because the economic situation in their home country is so poor that they prefer to stay where they are. Those who lose their jobs usually lose their right to stay in the country as well, making them even more vulnerable.

International trade union strategy

In the view of the international trade union movement, the positive contribution that migrant workers make to the economies of their country of origin and destination must be recognised, and this recognition must be demonstrated by fairer treatment. Within the framework of the global trade union fight for more equitable globalisation with a human face, linking migration and sustainable development is a fundamental priority in promoting decent work for all workers, migrants included. The implementation of the ILO Decent Work Agenda in the employment policies of the migrants' countries of origin, transit and destination is the cornerstone of this fight.

Trade union rights and equality

Migrants must be able to exercise fully the rights they are so often denied, namely the right to freedom of association and trade union organising, within the framework of the UN's international instruments to protect these rights, notably those of the ILO. They must also be given adequate social protection, and benefit from more ethical recruitment procedures.

The ITUC'S founding Congress, in Vienna 2006, identified combating discrimination as one of its priorities for action, with particular emphasis on the gender dimension. Women migrant workers represent a large and growing section of the migrant workforce that is particularly discriminated against. They also account for the great majority of victims of all forms of trafficking.

In December 2006, the ITUC set up an "action plan" to organise migrants more effectively within the trade union movement, defend and promote their rights and improve

their working conditions, notably by means of collective bargaining but also in partnership with NGOs and other relevant actors in civil society.

Bilateral partnership agreements

As part of its work to strengthen south/south solidarity, the ITUC launched three partnership agreements between affiliates of different regions. With the support of LO-TCO Sweden, these three pilot projects involve Indonesia (SPSI) and Malaysia (MTUC), Senegal (CNTS) and Mauritania (CGTM), and Nicaragua (CST, CUS, CUSa) and Costa Rica (CNTR). Information and support centres for migrant workers have been set up in Malaysia by the MTUC, in Mauritania by the CGTM and in Costa Rica by the CTRN. Other affiliates are taking similar initiatives, such as the CGT in Colombia. International trade union federations such as the International Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) and Public Services International (PSI) have similar partnership agreements. Many trade unions, particularly in Europe and North America have long-established projects and mobilisation campaigns aimed at the full integration of migrant workers and their families.

An ILO Convention for Domestic Workers

The protection of migrant workers will be one of the key themes of the next ITUC Congress to be held in Vancouver (Canada) from 21 to 25 June 2010. Between now and then, the international trade union movement, together with many national affiliates across all regions of the world, will campaign hard for the adoption by the ILO of a new international convention specifically covering the rights of domestic workers.

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-Read the interview with G. Rajasekaran (MTUC) for more information on the ITUC-supported trade union project to help migrants in Malaysia

<http://www.ituc-csi.org/spot-light-interview-with-g.html>



For more information on the project to help migrant workers in Costa Rica, supported by the ITUC, see the Union View on "Costa Rica : Helping Migrants Organise" : http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/V5_Costa_Rica_EN.pdf