

Concrete action by diaspora associations

Very early on in immigration history, community associations played a role between the two countries, both formally and informally. Initially, many Moroccan women, with no social or linguistic reference points in Belgium, sought to break their isolation and rebuild bridges with their families back home, but also gradually to use Belgian laws to improve their status (in matters of divorce or repudiation, inheritance, freedom, etc.). It comes as no surprise that these diaspora associations have played a very influential role in Morocco, starting in 1999, then in 2004 and again today, in reforming the *Moudawana* family code. They still lobby on sensitive issues like economic independence, forced marriages of minors and gender equality, and can now use the tools of international law and Belgian women’s rights laws.

Fatiha Saïdi, who is very active in these associations, emphasises the fact that **dual nationality, as citizens of Morocco and a European country, gives the women representing these associations considerable influence.** They are often supported by public institutions, the municipalities first and foremost, but also by legal specialists who help them start businesses in the fields of education and health. Another very concrete reason for respecting the “voices of the MRE” (Marocains résidant à l’étranger – Moroccans resident abroad) and women of the diaspora is due to the fact that many individuals, associations and municipalities support community projects and provide significant financial and logistical assistance for them. For several decades now, a number of municipalities have been forging real partnerships with localities and communities to carry out structured projects ranging from installing wells and waste management services, training social workers for people with disabilities and orphans, and support structures for women starting their own businesses.

This is a great example of long-term solidarity between women and Belgian-Moroccan families and communities (associations and villages) who need support to develop. And this collaboration becomes even more visible when the Belgian-Moroccan community takes action in response to disasters, like the recent earthquake in Al Haouz, in the Atlas Mountains, in September 2023.

