

Belgian-Moroccan female entrepreneurs work hard but receive little help

From an original idea, an innovation even, to the delivery of a product or service, Moroccan female entrepreneurs are not lacking in brainpower or energy... And they need it, in order to overcome the prejudices of their families (a real job offers a woman more security) and society, and of course, to find money and investors "despite the handicaps of being a woman and a Belgian-Moroccan". Yet despite these many obstacles, many of them are keeping up the fight and surpassing themselves, achieving at least a degree of stability in their professional life, and at best, genuine recognition of their talent and/or the relevance of their business. Fouzia Oukacha, a former biochemistry researcher at ULiège specialising in antioxidants, is a great example of a successful career move into self-employment. Ten years ago, she founded her own company called Bio-NutriLab, which markets the Granaline brand, dedicated to producing organic juices and food supplements from a very Mediterranean fruit: the pomegranate.

Today, the company has seven permanent employees and a freelance network, distributing and exporting its brand to organic shops as well as supermarkets and pharmacies.

The first big shock when you start out, she says, is the difference in perception between Flanders and Wallonia: "In Limburg, where I grew up, the community isn't closed off, socially or economically. In Wallonia, on the other hand, they send you to a neighbourhood, a type of business or customer base, a ghetto, and it's very hard to get support, even from public sector schemes that exist to help people start businesses, but usually select projects and entrepreneurs who are less ethnically "marked" and more male-dominated."

Creativity, but also tenacity, persuasion, boldness and redoubling of efforts... **"When they show you out through the door, you have to get back in through the window.** And if they refuse to help you, despite your guarantees and positive results, well, you have to rely on yourself yet again! Fortunately we've learned to work hard." Fouzia now wants to build on the advantages of her basic product to move into pharmaceutical applications and cosmetics, and some prestigious clients are already watching with interest. "Investment funds are not very welcoming, so I'm drawing on my own funds and developing this new project by myself alongside Granaline. And I will succeed! "