

Social Capital and Networking for Sub-Saharan Migrant Women: towards the creation of Self-Help Structures

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Introduction

The European Lifelong Learning project “Learning for Female African Migrants’ Solidarity: Help Desks for Female African Migrants in the Eastern Mediterranean Region” (LeFamSol) has seen partners from five countries, namely Greece, Turkey, Italy, Switzerland and Cyprus¹ to work towards the objective of answering the following research question: “how to empower and elicit the Female African Migrants (FAMs) in each country of the project but also across the migration route?”. With the exception of Switzerland and Cyprus where empirical research was not foreseen, all the three other project’s partners carried out some fieldwork in their respective local contexts.

Greece, Italy and Turkey provide a fertile ground for comparative analysis since they show similarities and differences in their economic and social structures as well as in the way they have been facing contemporary migration. They all have a large informal economy and an emigration history. Whereas Turkey is currently a transit country, in the last few decades Italy and Greece have switched from being sending to receiving countries and they belong to the so-called Mediterranean migration model (e.g. King, 2001). In this context, the countries’ fragmented legal migration frame has been reshaped by the implementation of the EU legislation. In particular, the Schengen Agreement had a severe impact on the migration control dimension and the resulting reorganization of the Mediterranean sea routes which Sub-Saharan African migrants have been used for long to reach the South-European coasts after crossing the North-African region.

A preliminary categorization of community organizations in different geographical and transnational contexts is briefly considered herein along with pros and cons for FAMs mobilization. Forms of FAMs organization and spaces in the respective countries under investigation (Turkey, Greece and Italy) include, among others, the following concepts and areas of intervention: ethnic networks, migrant associations, places of gathering, access and rights to social and health services. Social and legislative constraints cover the FAMs irregular residence status, irregular work, work and sexual exploitation, ethnic traps, lack of competence in the local language. Possible bridging factors, instead, include transnational migration patterns and community, language competencies, family habits and confessional practices for cultural mediation.

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¹ The project’s partners are: University of the Peloponnese (coordinator) and the NGO ACT UP from Greece; Migration Research Center at Koç University (MiReKoc), Turkey; University of Florence, Italy; ECAP Research & Development, Switzerland and the Centre for the Advancement of Research and Development in Educational Technology (CARDET), Cyprus.

Several research themes are worth-addressing in this specific migratory context. They include the recognition that FAMs are not a homogeneous group and they are scattered in different social and regional contexts. In these contexts, local integration practices may differ significantly in view of the different migratory experiences of the involved women. Social protection remains a prerequisite for integration and related learning acquisition and practices, particularly for those FAMs facing different forms of exploitation.

Open research questions and sub-questions for this article include:

- Is FAMs collective or individual empowerment better for implementation?
 - Through ethnic lines and a gender perspective?
 - Across time and space?
- How to capture the potentialities of transnational networks for the benefits of the targeted women?

This article is based upon the deliverables, reports and materials prepared for the project in 2014-5². The resulting documents are further enriched by relevant literature plus notes from the discussion in the project's meetings in Istanbul and Lugano.

The following paragraphs will define, initially, the target group of the project, i.e. migrant women native to the Sub-Saharan region and then briefly analyze their size and national composition by partner's country. Secondly, the discussion will elucidate commonalities and peculiarities of a heterogeneous migrant group with particular reference to the interaction between women's expectations and migration policies. Thirdly, social networks and the networking dimension will be discussed per major stakeholders by country. The role of the social capital as a bridging factor for the FAMs will also be briefly elucidated. Finally, the proposed strategies to implement effective social support and change networks will conclude this article by focusing on transnational practices in gender perspective, the role of ethnic self-support structures in the lifelong learning context and the lesson plans prepared per countries.

1. *Migrant women native to the Sub-Saharan African region*

1.1. *Definition and dimension of the investigated population*

In the "LeFamSol" project's framework, the target group has been defined as follows: migrant women native to the Sub-Saharan African region. This target group includes two main groupings: the first consisting of Nigerian women, and the second of female migrants from the Horn of Africa, i.e. Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Such a rationale rests on the fact that the most significant portion of African migrants, especially women, residing in the countries covered by the

² The present article draws from the deliverable *Target Group and the Stakeholders: how to exploit ethnic and gender networking against FAM marginalization (D.2.8)*. Other consulted project's deliverables include: *Turkish, Italian and Greek National Focus Group Delineation Progress Reports (D.2.7)*; *A Focus Group Delineation Strategy for a Female African Migrants' Curriculum (D.2.2)*; *Reflection Paper (D.2.1)*; *Cultural Mediation as a Private-Public-3d sector synergy Strategy (D.2.4)*; the *Summary Report, Transversal Focus Groups Designs and National Focus Group Report (FG), Greece* (including *Debriefing of Sessions 1, 2, 3*) and *LeFamSol Turkey and Greece Lesson Plans*.

project, are Nigerians; on this basis, another community of Sub-Saharan migrant women coming from the Horn of Africa was chosen by each project's partner along with Nigerian women. By country, the composition of the target group is as follows: in Italy – Eritreans, Nigerians, and Somalis; in Turkey – Nigerians, Somalis; in Greece – Nigerians, Ethiopians. The latter are also among the most represented communities within the totality of African migrants in Italy, Turkey and Greece.

1.1.1. Turkey

In view of the Turkish migration regime and geographic limitation of the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Turkey only grants refugee status to asylum seekers from Europe, since applications from individuals from other nationalities are only considered for “temporary” stay and until resettlement to other countries. This strict migration regime generates in-country irregular migration.

African migration flows and stocks are relatively small in comparison either to other stocks of irregular migration to Turkey or African migration to other countries. Over the past decade, they however increased because of the shifting routes of African migration flows and the relatively flexible visa regime of Turkey towards selected African countries. There is also an incidence of African overstayers and failed asylum seekers who live invisibly in Istanbul with limited access to security and social services. For living they mainly rely on job opportunities that arise from African ethnic networks. Irregularity makes statistical estimations difficult: African arrivals to Turkey have doubled between 2001 and 2010 (i.e. from 187.508 in 2001 to 396.810 in 2010).

African migrants in Istanbul are located in Tarlabasi, Kumpaki and Aksaray neighbourhoods where they usually work in informal, low-skilled jobs across developing ethnic niches. These jobs are characterized by poor conditions, particularly in the textile, confection and service sectors but also internal call centres and restaurants.

For carrying out the fieldwork in Istanbul, the strategic partner of the LeFamSol project was the ASEM “Association d’Entraide et de Solidarité aux Migrants”, a non-governmental organization founded by Médecins du Monde. Situated in Aksaray where most of the African migrants live, this organization provides in office medical assistance to African migrants. A total of 19 interviews with FAMS were conducted in Istanbul in 2014 either in the ASEM office or on the street. Half of the interviewed African women were from Nigeria, the other from Ivory Coast, Uganda and Cameroon. All the interviewees were recent arrivals and first generation migrants. Meetings for interviews were held in English and all of the interviewees were able to read and write and they previously attended school. Half of them had actually attended high school or had a higher level of education.

Their reasons for migration vary from persecution to economic reasons and education. Most of the informants knew someone from their community who had come to Turkey before them or they got in touch with someone before arrival either a country fellow or a Turkish person. Those women fleeing from persecution stressed that they found somebody from their community upon arrival by asking on the street. Many did know so little about Turkey.

Housing is a serious concern for all of the interviewed women. According to ASEM, it is common for the African women to have children in Turkey since they live in crowded houses where they do have polygamous relations with people from their community. In view of the interviews' report, for all these women not only irregularity but also language barrier along with cultural differences and xenophobia was one of the main reasons for being unemployed or being employed in the irregular market. As such, irregularity breeds a very difficult environment and at the same time it nurtures the aspiration to develop independent sources of income through prostitution (see D.2.7 Turkey).

1.1.2. Italy

African migration to Italy is not a new phenomenon but something which dates back to the 1970/80s. Main African migrant groups originate from Senegal, Morocco, Egypt and the Horn of Africa. Though scattered through the whole Italian territory, the bulk of African migrants are settled in large urban centres, particularly in the Centre-North of the country.

Social mobilisation and community organizations have, to a certain extent, taken place from the beginning of the African migration experience to Italy. The resulting organizations are based on community, ethnic, national, interethnic grounds. They are composed of multinational (mixed-African), international (mixed with other migrant groups), and African groups mixed with Italian citizens. Originating from different experience and including several gender compositions, religious affiliation and commitment (i.e. socio-cultural promotion, voluntary work, struggle for peace and equality) they can be organized on informal grounds or can cover the whole national level of community networking with possible local branches.

African women including those from the Sub-Saharan region, tend to gather on gender basis in multi-ethnic associations with Italian members, aimed at supporting migrant women rights and developing specific skills in providing welfare services to the migrant population. These organisations often reproduce the specific migratory history of single African national groups (e.g. associations of women from Cape Verde and the Horn of Africa exist since the 1980s) and they reflect the degree of group cohesion and inner gender relationships (e.g. mixed-gender and/or exclusively female associations). Forms of community development and the extent of community action need to be considered as important indicators for the detection of community needs and the selection of organizations on the basis of different priorities.

The strategic partner of the LeFamSol project in Florence was Arcobaleno, a non-profit association of social promotion founded by a group of volunteers in 1985. The association provides different kinds of help (i.e. from reception to legal advice, from equal opportunities to school and vocational training) to disadvantaged persons by guiding them towards their socio-economic autonomy. A total of 11 meetings for open interviews, mainly held in Italian, were conducted in various locations in Florence with 7 Nigerians, 2 Eritreans and 2 Somalis women. Their age varies from 25 to 30, and rarely they were older than 40. They presented a miscellanea of life stories (i.e. some are married, other are single and some other have children in Italy) and they were all differently educated from basic education to university degree. Employment was a major

concern, particularly for the newly arrived migrants and FAMs as a result of the general economic crisis (D.2.7. Italy).

1.1.3. Greece

With respect to the overall significant migrant irregular stock in Greece, African migrants comprise 2/3 of the stock of illegally residents. One may notice an important difference between those who have arrived prior to the economic crisis that went through a regularisation programme, and the more recent arrivals that could not profit from this opportunity. After 2007 there were, in fact, no more immigrant regularisations.

The recent arrivals include male Guineans, Senegalese and Somali, mostly aged fewer than 25 and 60% of them are irregular. The older cohort made of Ethiopians, Nigerians, Ghanaians and Congolese arrived in Greece usually more than 25 years ago and it includes women. The majority of them were legally resident, with illegal residents ranging from 16% (3-10 years of stay) to 9% (10 or more years of residence). Additionally, even the older migrant cohort increasingly loses their legal status because of lack of employment, hence failure to service social insurance obligations and, therefore, failure to renew their permits.

African migrants are the most socially marginalized group for three reasons: first, because they rarely speak Greek; secondly, they are usually located in dense urban settlements (ghetto); third, because they consider Greece as a “transit country”. They can be found in particular areas of Athens, i.e. the districts of Kypseli and Plateia Amerikis, where they usually live in rented housings, as homeless, as squatters in abandoned buildings, or as residents in NGOs hostels. A vicious circle which include the lack of mastery of Greek, of employment and the resulting possibility to pay the social security contributions and therefore renew their residence permits, confines them to irregular work and to living in ghettos.

The pre-described urban dense settlement pattern reinforces reduced opportunity for employment, decreases the motivation for learning Greek, further decreasing future regularisation opportunities. The economic crisis and resulting rise of xenophobic movements as the Golden Dawn in the same urban areas where the African migrants are located, has further exacerbated this difficult situation.

NGOs and migrant based organizations include members of African descent, usually first generation migrants. They broadly fit three clusters: i. *expatriate organizations* of a particular nationality (Cameroon, Ethiopia, etc.) which are mostly limited to the original founding members and they are mainly focused on the country of origin in terms of political activity; ii. *gender-based organizations* like the “Nigerian Women Organizations” and the “African Women Organization” which although they are usually oriented towards organizing intercultural events and festivals, they also provide food, shelters and different kind of networking and help services under the guise of an exchange economy; iii. *self-proclaimed ‘forum’ or ‘network’* where membership or leadership remain static over decades, limited to successfully “iconic” members of a migrant community which usually act as “advocacy organizations”. The level of representativeness of

the latter community in political contexts has been actually questioned in the Greek report (D.2.7 Greece).

For community outreach, religious based organizations have been targeted, specifically the Christian Nigerian community, either Catholic or Pentecostal in Athens, whose services take place in temples but also in houses used as “informal temples”. Out of the outreach activities carried out by the Greek research group, language learning emerged as one of the most pressing problem for social or labour market integration, particularly for the first generation of female Nigerian migrants, who in spite of their presence in Greece for decades, have failed to learn Greek beyond a very basic level.

For the purpose of the LeFAMSol project, a good number of migrant NGOs in Athens, many of them with members of African descent, were identified. They are usually founded by first generation migrants who were engaged in the consultations for the project as individuals and not as representative of these organizations. Their activities are seasonal and represent a form of collective economic activity either formal or informal, rather than being driven by specific social and political objectives.

The strategic partner selected for the LeFamSol project is a youth organization called “Generation 2.0” whose members belong to Greek and migrant background. This NGO works as an advocacy organization promoting the right of children born in Greece to acquire the Greek citizenship. It is located in an area of the city described as “the ghetto” where over 90% of the population of Africans in Greece reside; therefore it was in a good position to facilitate contact with the target group of the project.

The sample of interviewed African women from the pre-focus group survey, in the age range from 21 to 56 years, includes individuals originating mostly from Nigeria but also Ghana, Kenya, Somaliland and Senegal residing in Greece for 2 to 25 years, most of them with children aged seven to 25. War and fear for one’s life, the desire to study and work were mentioned as push factors for migration. During the focus group, relevant topics were “opportunity” and “contacts” which show that Greece was as good a destination as any “in Europe”. Education has been mentioned repeatedly as a reason for migration since many women find that the opportunity to study is either not affordable in their country of origin or their circumstances like large families make this choice prohibitive (FG, Greece). None of them spoke fluently Greek and some did not speak Greek at all. Sometimes the absence of a nucleus family structure has been instead coupled with the creation of female extended family households. In this sense, the Greek fieldwork has showed that kinship titles such as “cousin” or “uncle” have been transposed from the realm of blood relatives to the realm of actual household structure arrangements between people who share dwellings that usually share origins like Yoruba, Igbo or broadly ethno-linguistic and gender identity (FG, Greece). The described households sometimes resemble polygamous structures, as in the Turkish case.

A declared “regular job” meant in fact a long standing activity in the black market. Irregularity and the resulting consequences is, in fact, one of the main concerns for the interviewed African women in Athens both as far the renewal of residence permits linked to social security contributions or for the purpose of

securing access to the labour market (D.2.7 Greece). Asked about how they deal with such extreme circumstances like starvation, the majority of women replied that they turn to friends or family, whilst only two mentioned resorting to religious institutions in Athens (FG, Greece). On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, some of these women sometimes don't have family networks to help and support them particularly in combining motherhood with work. They also acknowledge a gap in language competences between them and their children who have been attending school and speak Greek efficiently (FG, Greece, Session 2).

Downward mobility has been reported which is not necessarily associated with the absence of skills. According to the focus group's report, the interviewed women possess a higher than average level of educational attainment no matter the time of arrival or birth in Greece. The majority of women possess a high school diploma, although the quality of these titles or their accreditation in Greece is actually questioned by the report's authors (FG, Greece).

1.2. Commonalities and peculiarities of an heterogeneous migrant group

The commonalities of the LeFamSol target group as a whole include, firstly, that they are African migrant women where gender may affect differently their condition in the native country, community, as well as their migration project. Secondly, the African or Sub-Saharan African denominator offers some intersection points: the target group is coming from unstable countries, sharing certain historical and political circumstances. Especially in the last decades, many are fleeing from economic instability, socio-political insecurity and, in some cases, armed conflicts. Finally, their migratory pathways through the Mediterranean represent also a distinctive shared feature.

African migrants in the three investigated countries can belong to older or more recent flows. Common features are observed concerning their migration determinants. They are, however, a rather heterogeneous group presenting a variety of origins, life conditions in their native contexts, socio-cultural (social strata, religion, language skills, education, etc.) and professional background as well as migration patterns (see D. 2.2.).

Worth noticing is that the three selected countries show a different immigration profile which make a unifying methodological approach difficult for implementation. Their migrants' stocks are quite different among the project's countries: African and Sub-Saharan migrant groups including women display a higher demographic significance in Italy for a number of reasons, including Italy's colonial past in Somalia and Eritrea; on the other hand, African migration is a more recent phenomenon in Greece and Turkey, hence the available data is less exhaustive than in Italy. They are also variously distributed in the territories of their new settlement, mostly in large urban centres where they play a significant role either as gatekeepers or mediators for their fellows and other migrants. Their residence status goes usually hand in hand with the duration of stay.

African migrants as a whole have few employment opportunities in Italy, Greece and Turkey: many of them are employed in informal markets, and low-skilled or unskilled jobs, including the so-called occupational "ethnic niches" (e.g. the Senegalese in peddling). As for the FAMS target group, some women are

engaged in the domestic and care sector (e.g. Eritrean women working as maids and caregivers in Italian families); another important case is given by Nigerian women, a part of whom are victims of trafficking involved into the sex market and entertainment sector, often without legal status and meagre access to health services (in Italy and Greece); as for Turkey, Nigerians are usually working in the garment industry in some parts of the country. Other segments of African migrants can be found in services, industry, agriculture, trade, and other sectors (D.2.2).

Typologies of labour market integration of migrant women, and namely Sub-Saharan African women in the receiving countries of the LeFamSol project are interrelated with their (in)visibility which has been named as a “triple oppression” (Campani, 2007). This social, economic and cultural reality is mainly due to their general condition in emigration, their employment in private (domestic) sector, and absence from public places. FAMS were, simultaneously, defined in the project’s country report as the most visible and invisible group of migrant women, as well as a vulnerable group (see Turkey report, D.2.7).

One of the main shared characteristics of all the researched countries is the abundant stock of irregular migration as a consequence either of the attractive role of a wide informal economy or the role played by migration policy. The latter is often the cause of reproduction of forms of irregular stays and work. Vicious circles are observed in which dense urban settlements of African migrants reinforce irregular employment and residence status while making access to health and social services very difficult to achieve.

Ethnicity can therefore transform itself in “ethnic traps” and do perpetuate urban ghettos for those African migrants and women who live at the margins of big cities like Athens or Istanbul. The ongoing economic crisis further aggravates the Greek situation with the rise of xenophobic political movements which gather political consensus especially in the same deteriorated neighbourhoods where female African migrants live. The perception of racism in combination with the visibility of the target group is however quite pronounced in all of the partner countries, even if the Greek case presents additional challenges. Thereby, FAMS face diverse problems and difficulties (ranging from regularisation procedures to employment, housing, health service, racism/discrimination, etc.). Finally, their condition makes them susceptible to trafficking, exploitation, and abuse of any kind (D.2.2).

There are of course longstanding forms of mobilization and resistance to the institutional and political framework that are worth mentioning. Women tend to mobilize across ethnic lines in the different geographical contexts under examination, but the presence of mixed and interethnic migrant organizations are also a significant feature in the ongoing integration process. It is thus important to notice that different forms of community organising and the extent of community action are worth considering as important indicators for community needs and priorities in each country context.

2. Stakeholders and existing networks

2.1. Social networks: dimensions, nature and stakeholders in each country

Social networks are ties or connections between individuals that vary in strength, type and duration (e.g. Granovetter, 1973). In view of Bourdieu (1986) social networks in the guise of social capital represent potential resources (such as help in finding a job, financial or moral help) which need to be activated. Belonging to a group gives, in fact, access to a network, but the access to the resources depends therefore on the individual and his or her position in the network. Granovetter (1973) focused on the strength and weakness of social ties. Ties to relatives and close friends are strong in the sense that they are unquestionable but often they don't provide access to substantially new resources for the individual. Weak ties include ties to more distant persons like acquaintances, where the relationship requires more 'work' to become activated, but may provide access to substantially different resources (Granovetter, 1983). As a result, the weak ties could be more valuable than the strong ones for gaining access to socially important resources.

Networks are important resources for migration since they provide channels to enter a desired country or help in settling in a specific society. Three types of social networks usually shape the migration processes: labour, personal (family) and the so-called illegal migrant networks. All they provide benefits and costs for migrants (Boyd and Nowak, 2012). Additionally, one should notice that, although networks are important for employment and social opportunities particularly for the most vulnerable individuals, not all migrants depend on labour networks to find employment as well as not all of them rely on personal networks during the settlement process. Purpose of the LeFAMSol project is, however, to investigate the actual pre-conditions for networking or instilling change in ethnic networks by activating bridging social capital.

Support networking among African migrants show remarkable differences between the countries of the LeFamSol: despite specificities of single communities, a certain level of social mobilisation through associations, NGOs and parties is being observed in Italy, while Greece and Turkey present a rather different situation.

Since the beginning of African migration to *Italy* (especially in the 1970s), associations have formed a useful resource to provide solidarity and mutual support networks. Migrant women organisations tend to reproduce the specific migratory history of single national groups (e.g. associations of women native to Cape Verde and the Horn of Africa exist since the 1980s), and to reflect the degree of group cohesion and inner gender relationships (mixed-gender and/or exclusively female associations). Many migrant women are gathered on a gender basis in multi-ethnic associations, often including Italian members too, with the goal of supporting migrant women in achieving their rights and developing specific skills to provide welfare services to the migrant population.

In the other two project's countries under analysis, the situation proves to be far less developed. There are very few places where African migrants might seek assistance in *Turkey* (i.e. a limited number of Christian Churches, Refugee

support programmes, the UNHCR, human rights associations and solidarity networks). Besides, African migrants in Turkey lack in social networks: West Africans, such as Ghanaians and Nigerians, are the only ones who can rely on important social networks organised through churches. Networks and associations founded by African/Sub-Saharan migrants are also a recent phenomenon in *Greece*: more than a half have been founded since 2005 onwards, while more than 90% of their associations are based in Athens, basically in the city centre.

For many African migrants, racial discrimination, exploitation, extreme poverty, no health care, along with the lack of social support networks, is a present reality which makes their daily struggle harder, putting them in a particularly vulnerable position. Conjugated with the lack of legal long-term stay prospects, their condition pushes many African migrants to abandon Greece, Turkey, and even Italy, in order to move towards other EU destinations (see D.2.2).

2.2 Commonalities and particularities, strengths and weaknesses of the existent networks

Migrant mobilisation varies significantly in the national context under consideration being very much related to the different migration history of the LeFamSol project's countries as well as to the migration experience of the different African migrant communities. The same differences apply to the scope and extent of activities of the different organizations involved in supporting African migrant women. Whereas networking has been usually perceived positively, there are also some reservations originating from the fieldwork's contributions.

Migrant networks are, for example, a long-standing feature of the Italian experience. In line with the relevant theory of Bourdieu (1986), objection to ethnic/nation-based networks was, however, expressed by the interviewed women in Florence. Although this form of networking has been perceived as positive in bringing people together, it entails risks of reducing a person to "her/his" ethnic/national space and can be risky for certain individuals, women included who have escaped from hostile conditions in their countries, or have suffered particular migration experiences. In light of the difficulties in finding a long-term employment, those women involved in mediation and other types of social work expressed some doubts about the sustainability of mediation and guidance, i.e. "help-desk" activities (see D.2.7 Italy).

The need for a sustainable cooperation between all social actors in order to provide more effective services to the community of FAMS was also raised. Although solidarity networks, information points and receptions centres do not represent a novelty in the Italian context, the idea of creating a self-help desk based on the discretion and autonomy of its workers and specifically addressing FAMS with particular migration experience has been generally judged as a good practice (Campani and Lapov, 2015).

3. Exploiting gender and ethnic networking to cope with marginalization

3.1. Networking and elicitation as an action- research/learning activity

Within the general framework of the LeFamSol, the project's methodology considers the role of ethnic network and gender roles as social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). It aims at linking approaches based on adult education (i.e. lifelong learning), "bridging" social capital, feminist education, and intercultural competences (LeFamSol Summary Report, p. 23). While close community relationships promote the idea of "bonding" social capital, intercultural relationships foster the "bridging" of social capital. Bridging social capital allows individuals to network within heterogeneous groups, and to connect and cooperate with people from different background (Putnam, 2000). Bridging social capital is also positively correlated with education especially to lifelong learning focused on adults' transversal competences. On the one hand, education can, in fact, be a powerful tool in the development of diversified social capital since it increases tolerance and social trust. On the other hand, the informal and diversified components of social capital influences successful education (Helliwell and Putnam, 2007; Putnam, 2000). This kind of social capital generates weak ties as per Granovetter's (1983) definition, but ties that are more outgroup-oriented and more likely to foster social inclusion.

In the described FAMs context, ethnic mobilisation is however deemed a good pre-requisite for a bridging social capital approach. Ethnic mobilization can be presented in many forms and with different degrees of intensity in accordance with a number of factors that determine the level of fluctuations (Elliott and Fleras, 1992; Drury, 1994).

Such factors include:

- the levels of reciprocal adaptation among migrants and natives (if the process of adaptation is well achieved, ethnic mobilisation will be of reduced intensity);
- the political, religious, social and cultural differentiation between the country of origin and the host society;
- the historical and temporary dimension of the immigration, which determines the way in which the social insertion of the immigrant populations will proceed;
- the implementation and interpretation, on the part of the governments, political parties, churches, labour unions, interest groups and media, of the existing policies.

Ethnic mobilisation is then dependent upon the way in which these and other factors are executed including more and less favourable immigrant integration policies. Pro-active and open immigrant integration policies imply less necessary immigrant mobilisation, whereas more restrictive policies which may bring to exclusionary tendencies will cause a collective mobilisation to challenge the current situation. Ethnic mobilisation which take place at the associative level, constitutes a strategy that may bring with it significant amount of visibility. According to Sardinha (2009) its primary goals are the materialisation of two

fundamental objectives: the preservation of ethnic identity and the political representation of the migrating communities including membership's interests like the promotion of citizenship rights, civic participation, the advancement of equality of opportunities, and fight against discrimination.

The transnational immigrant dimension is relevant in this context since associations mobilise not only along ethnic lines in the host country, but they are also active across receiving-sending country contexts. In this sense, Faist's (2000) idea of "community without propinquity" which links migrant social and symbolic ties to positions in networks and organizations in different geographical locations covering two or more nation-states is deemed important. Time-space compression is what makes similar social configurations possible and thus these relationships between contexts provide also a fertile ground for ongoing negotiation of rights and identities (Mapril and Araújo, 2002).

The described mobilisation in a transnational social space as per Faist's (1998, 2000) definition represent also useful ground for the intersection of gender and rights in the FAMs context as well as a possible direction for selective mobilisation of the LeFamSol target group across different lines. Migrant organizations bring, in fact, transnational resources not only in the country of origin but also in the country of settlement (Clarke, 2013). Their role and impact on the lives of individual migrants rather than in one country or another does fit Faist's transnational perspective and provides ground for the LeFamSol endeavour and further research.

3.2. From theories to practice: the implementation of effective social support and change networks

FAMs in the different project's contexts respond to different needs according to their migration history, legal and social status but at the same time they also show commonalities as far the acquisition of language and intercultural communication (IC) competences are concerned. Basic needs like food and shelter, access to health services may be relevant for the more vulnerable migrant women in irregular situation, exploited and/or trafficked. They may also apply to those women who have been suffering from the deteriorating socio-economic conditions in the countries of the LeFamSol as a consequence of the ongoing economic crisis. Additional needs include instead access to a secure employment, social, political rights and education, including vocational training.

FAMs with a regular status may be more prone to be mobilised for similar paths towards the recognition of equal opportunities. All the target groups' women remain however in need of language and IC competences, particularly those who are selected as leaders for mobilisation. The teaching methodology for the training course needs therefore to be adapted to this variety of situations and social status in which the investigated FAMs find in their host countries. Different migrant categories need different teaching style and pedagogical models that must consider the local realities and specificities of the target groups and thus cannot be easily transferred from other contexts.

Transnational patterns of migration and community organization need also to be taken into account to mobilize the overall spectrum of network resources in multiple ways across the sending and receiving countries. Transnational migrant activities may provide additional resources to assist in combining ethnic

specificities with broader and multiple identities involving older and younger generations of African migrant women in an effort of collective empowerment. In this regard, the vulnerabilities of those women who have been in the country of migration for decades need to be taken in consideration. Language barriers and dispossession are among the problems they are facing, as expressed by one woman interviewed in Athens: “I’m a foreigner in my country and I am a foreigner in this country too” (FG, Greece, Session 3).

The intersection of transnationalism and gender in mobilizing self-help support strategies for migrant women may represent an interesting opportunity for additional research in migration studies. In this context, a gender-sensitive approach to the study of migrant networks proves useful in understanding how women make use of particular social networks over others and assessing the importance of migrants’ social and cultural labour (Salaff and Greve, 2004). Empirical research should therefore consider the social class composition of the community in which the networks are operating to capture the intersections between gender and class in ethnic enclaves, and particularly the gendered division of labour within receiving countries generated by the segmented labour demand (Boyd and Nowak, 2012). In this regard, the LeFamSol findings confirm previous research that informal workplaces cause vulnerability for the involved women to exploitation and different forms of abuse (e.g. Bolumar et. al, 2007).

The extent of disruption of social bonds as a result of the migration process has been largely documented. Focus groups in the LeFamSol project’s countries confirm similar research by showing FAMs’ responsibility and difficulty in building new care networks in their host societies because of greater time constraints originating from the need to care from their children (Purkayastha, 2005; Salaff and Greve, 2004). Transnational nurturing responsibilities add further to this picture, if migrant women have left family behind in their home countries (Parrenas, 2005; Landolt et al, 2008).

Furthermore, the mobilization of self-help structures through the intersection of transnationalism and gender, is also a possible direction for a practice oriented pedagogy directed both towards the most vulnerable groups of women or those already empowered either as community leaders or network facilitators among the same FAMs, other migrants and the native population as a whole.

For the purpose of social support and change networking in the LeFamSol context, three types of social change networks have been identified for implementation and migrant empowerment, as described in the website of the Interaction Institute for Social Change (2009). They include:

- the *connectivity (emerged) network* which connect people to allow easy flow of and access to information;
- the *alignment network* which aligns people to develop and spread an identity and a collective value proposition;
- the *production (action) network* which fosters joint actions for specific outcomes by aligned people.

The network building has to be adapted to the specific context of the partners’ countries, the different composition of the FAMs target groups, their

potentialities and specific needs per country and local contexts. Particular attention went to the identification and mapping activities for the focus groups in merging the FAMs community component with other larger contexts including social actors and relevant stakeholders operating in the field (FG Delineation Strategy).

4. Conclusions - LeFamSol training and lesson plans

Bridging social capital and intercultural competence in the suggested transnational migrant networks' perspective addressed to a group of peer learners and trainers, lies at the core of the didactical approach developed by the LeFamSol project. The adopted notion of intercultural competence builds on Onorati and Bednarz (2010) with reference to the culturally aware mobilisation of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enables people to manage unfamiliar situation and ever-changing problems (at work as in life), arising from the encounter with people socialised in different cultures, with a view to finding new and shared solutions. The practical application of this concept linked to a gender sensitive approach, allows either building networks or changing from ethnic based to larger social networks in transnational migrant spaces which connect the migrant sending and receiving country.

The core LeFamSol objective aims at providing training to a selected number of FAMs to acquire the necessary skills for identifying and approaching services important for their adaptation in the project's countries. To reach this final aim the general lesson plan designed for the project moves from an initial phase of socialization and enhancement of relationships among the female participants to the development of a training programme. This training aims at building founded knowledge of challenges and opportunities existing in the context of migration, in order to reinforce the FAMs' bridging social capital, through the interaction between women, stakeholders and instructors. Lessons are adapted to the specific problematic areas emerging from the focus groups of the partners' countries. A mix of informative training, particularly on legal and health issues, and other learning techniques are used to enlarge networks and transform the learning perspective (Mezirow, 2000) by embedding it in relational and physical contexts where people meet and interact.

The training is articulated in modules and units; the duration of activities in presence for each unit (4 hours) is thought to safeguard the sustainability of the path. Nevertheless, women are encouraged to work also at distance, using social media and web facilities in order to reinforce mutual learning and exchange.

Trainers, facilitators and learners are asked to activate Problem Based Learning techniques, founded on role playing and case studies, since migrant women will be invited to address self-cases or even mock cases as if they were real. This strategy, on the wake of Bertrand Schwartz, aims at ensuring a holistic approach, proximity and participation in training design, keeping arguments and learning outcomes close to FAMs concrete preoccupations. It implies the adoption of non-standardized critical incidents, and the development of the women methodological capacity to cope with constantly changing situations' setting and solving problems exploiting their relational networks.

Similar cases include a mix and match of the problems women themselves identified in the focus groups and discussions held by the project's teams with the service providers. Three thematic areas for problem-solving have been created which include, among others, legal issues, housing, food and children, health care, job, housing, and language needs. The stakeholders will stand by during the training or connect online in real time through different media and communication tools. At last, both the stakeholders and trainees will be asked to evaluate the whole learning process that will be reshaped according to the outcome of the training session.

The self-help structures for the FAMs may be developed moving from the described peer learning and networking experience, which is embedded in transformative processes of international migration, migrant transnationalism and the changing integration practices and learning needs (Ruspini, 2014).

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