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Opening participatory routes:
Mentoring and building capacity for
active citizenship from a gender perspective



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Qualitative research to identify barriers to participation

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GERMANY

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ITALY

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SPAIN

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Introduction

The main objective of this qualitative research was to identify participation processes of migrant men and women in three participation fields i.e. the (local) political field, the labour relations field (trade unions) and the field of the representation of parents within the education system (parents councils). Our central assumption was that in order to enhance the participation of TCNs we should focus on the agency of the persons involved. The analysis of participation processes has been therefore focused on: a) barriers for participation on the legal, the organisational, the social and the cultural level, and b) the needs, resources, experiences and strategies of the migrants in their effort to participate.

The report is a synthesis of the four national reports, which document and analyze the findings of the fieldwork conducted in four countries Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain. These reports were all drafted on the basis of a common structure, which reflected the methodology and the main research questions. The report includes the following sections: The sampling strategy, General types/patterns of participation, Gender aspects, Needs – resources – experiences and strategies, Alternative participatory routes and policy recommendations.

The section which refers to the processes and types/patterns of participation is composed of three subsections referring to the three focal institutions that were targeted by the fieldwork: 1. Trade unions, 2. Parent's councils and 3. Local politics. Moreover, each section refers to biographical resources and practices that enable participation as well as obstacles to participation i.e. possible procedures and mechanisms that block further development of participatory routes. The fourth section refers more explicitly to gender aspects of participation in all three sectors, although the question of gender relations is addressed throughout the analysis. The fifth section identifies more specific needs that migrants expressed, while the sixth section identifies alternative paths of participation that may act as paradigms for enhancing migrant, especially migrant women's participation. In the final seventh and eighth section concluding remarks and policy recommendations are presented.

2. The sampling strategy

The fieldwork **in all national cases** consisted of biographical narrative interviews with at least 15 migrant women and men and a focus group discussion, in which

actors from all three sectors participated. The sampling strategy was based on the grounded theory with the selection of cases of maximum and minimum comparison ranging from cases of successful integration into the three sectors of labour unions, school councils and local politics to cases of less successful and completely inactive migrants.

In the Greek sample, migrants participating in labour unions were mostly represented in certain most feminized sectors, such as domestic work, cleaning and tourism. Migrants participating in local politics either as candidates in local elections (three interviews) or as members of the migrant councils of different municipalities (three interviews) tended to be easier to contact and organize interviews with, while migrants participating in parent school councils were extremely difficult to find and interview. Although representatives of all three sectors were invited to the focus group discussion, only representatives of migrant groups from the municipal council of Athens attended the meeting. It is interesting to note that in the case of Greece, only a handful of cases of multiple field affiliations were recorded, such as for example migrant groups that have formed informal Philippine and Pakistani labour unions and at the same time participate in the Athens Migrant Council. The lack of extensive multiple field participation in the sample can be attributed to the fact that labour unions and school/parent councils are not members of the Municipal Councils.

After mapping the local research field in the province of Florence and more generally the Tuscany region, the Italian research team contacted migrants from all three fields under investigation. The team selected migrant interviewees from trade unions in sectors with a strong migrant presence, for example in agriculture, construction, and domestic work. "With regard to the education sector, it was found that, unfortunately, very few immigrant parents, at the regional level, are actively included in school boards or otherwise participate in the life and decision-making at schools and now almost all the schools in the area use, at some level, the professional role of the linguistic-cultural mediators for issues related to the reception of foreign students. Alongside immigrant parents, interviews were also conducted with brokers who are confronted daily with the schools". Finally, having previous research experience in the fields of migrant rights and gender equality made it possible to contact migrants who have influential positions in migrant organizations, who acted as gate openers for the research in local politics.

In the Spanish sample, 18 biographical interviews were conducted with migrants, while in the focus group a number of nationals were included, too. Interviewees with an important participatory experience and leadership positions coincided in some cases with stakeholders of the focus group. Still, the focus of the group discussion differed because it focused mainly on political opinion on migrant participation, while in the biographical interviews the emphasis was on personal narrations and stories. The greatest difficulties in the search of interviewees and focus group participants were in the labour union sector, which seems to remain still closed to migrants. In the case of Spain most interviewees were characterized by multiple field affiliations and identities since they tended to participate in more than one of the fields under investigation mainly because the Municipal Council of Barcelona is quite open to include migrant organizations, labour unions and NGOs at local governance level.

In all four case studies the samples tended to be determined by the **gender** composition and gendered hierarchies characterizing the fields under investigation. For example in all case studies, the trade unions as well as the school and parents' councils are gender-biased: in the trade unions, there are more male members particularly in high positions, while in the parents' councils there are more female participants. In order to address this problem in the labour unions, different partners followed different sampling strategies. For example, in the German case, the research focused on interviewing mainly male labour unionists, while in the Greek case an effort was made to identify also labour union representatives from "feminized" sectors, such as those of domestic work, cleaning, and tourism. The Italian and the Spanish cases had a more balanced representation of male and female trade unionists. The sample of the parents and school councils consisted mostly of females, as the sector is female dominated, while the sample in the field of local political participation was more gender-balanced in all case studies.

The Spanish team broadened the scope of gender research by including in the sample some interviewees from the migrant LGTBI¹ movement. For example, one of the interviewees was selected because of his wide experience of participation but also because of his role as a leading figure in the LGTBI migrants' association and

¹ LGTBI is the acronym of the Lesbian, Gay, trans-sexual, bi-sexual identity Movement

another one was a migrant trans-sexual woman who was a member of the same LGBTBI association.

With regard to the **ethnic origin** of the migrants in the sample, the case studies reflected migration patterns in each country. For example, in the case of Spain the majority of interviewees originated from Latin America and there were also migrants from Morocco and Pakistan. In the German case too, there was a high representation of migrants of Turkish origin, although there were also several other ethnicities in the sample. In the case of Greece and Italy, there was a wider variety of origins, including Albania, Egypt, Lebanon, Pakistan, Russia, Ukrainia, the Philippines, Tunisia and others.

In some cases, the sample included interviewees identifying themselves as **migrants from EU member states**, such as Bulgarian domestic workers and labour unionists in Greece or Croatian migrants in Italy. This choice was made because in terms of social status, public representations, labour conditions and rights, these European citizens are still identified and treated as migrants by older EU member states. Similarly, the sample included several first generation migrants that have acquired the **citizenship** of the host state, i.e. Greek or Spanish citizens of Moroccan origin, because they continued to be treated as migrants in the society in which they resided irrespectively of their legal status. Broadening the sample to include such cases gave the researchers the opportunity to study the significance of legal status in shaping degrees of participation and integration, while at the same time it gave the opportunity to address processes of ethnic stereotyping and migrant self-identification.

On interviewing

There were differences in the interviewing conditions in different research partners' fieldwork. While in some cases, such as for example in Germany and Greece, interviews were mostly conducted in the research institutions, there were also some interviews that took place in the houses of the interviewees, in migrant organizations or in public spaces in Greece, Italy and Spain. The first approach had the advantage of giving a more calm and "controlled" atmosphere, which enabled the interviewees to focus more and narrate their story without interruptions. In the second case, however, it was possible for interviewers to get a picture and understand some of

the socio-cultural, economic and political context within which migrants are able to participate or are prevented from participating in local politics.

In all national cases biographical interviewing proved to be a much more effective method of gathering narratives on the participation of migrants in labour unions, parents' and school councils and local politics than focus group discussions. One of the problems that researchers encountered in the German case was that participants, especially male migrants from the labour union sector, spoke in the formal language of their institutions and were unwilling to engage into discussions about organizational barriers. Contrary to this experience, in the focus group conducted in Greece, there was a strong emphasis on organizational barriers and lack of institutional support as the main factor that prevented them from pursuing more active participation routes especially in labour unions and local politics. However, in the focus group discussions, we noticed a gender division between, on the one hand, male migrants who presented a more impersonal and distanced account of migrant participation and were more reluctant to relate their arguments to personal experiences, work-life balance and migrant trajectories and, on the other hand, female migrants who spoke more about their own histories and problems and brought to the forefront issues of personal attitudes, trajectories and work-life balance. In general, as the Italian report noted, in the focus group it was immediately evident to identify who were the migrants who held leading positions in migrant politics because they were more outspoken and who were those who had a less prominent role because they remained more silent.

3.Processes and Types/patterns of participation

3.1 General types/patterns of participation

Multiple field activation as a means of overcoming barriers to participation

Multiple field activation and alliances are important in all four case studies in enabling migrant participation. In several cases, migrants were able to escape organizational barriers through acquiring a leading position in the ethnic communities that have a strong presence in specific economic sectors. For example in Germany, "Ali Z, Yilmaz K. and Mamud G. climbed the hierarchies in an impressive manner because they

were multiply active and engaged in several organisational fields and political parties. Mamud G. and Yilmaz K. have been active in establishing ethnic associations in order to foster the interests of their co ethnics. Thus, they become leaders in their ethnic group and function as agents promoting "integration". Being a leader in the local ethnic community seems to be of paramount importance for securing support in the elections for the workers' council" (German report). On the contrary, migrants who don't belong to groups that have a strong migrant presence, have a disadvantage and are in most cases unable to secure the strong support of other migrant workers from different ethnic backgrounds. In that sense, ethnic affiliations can be either an obstacle or a supportive tool, depending on the specific sector.

In Greece, many of the migrants who participated in the research on local politics had no previous political experience in the country of origin. Their formative experiences in politics were mostly in migrant organizations, associations and groups, which are diverse and do not always have an explicit political or ideological character. Gradually, however, through these experiences they managed to move to new sectors, i.e. labour unions and school and parents' councils. As a result, in the lives of many migrants in Greece, different forms of political participation seem to be interrelated. Ioannis, for example, is an interesting case because he is the president of an informal ethnic labour union organization, a participant in the intercultural school council activities, a member of the municipal migrant council (SEM), and a candidate in the 2010 local elections. He was asked to participate in the local elections in the municipality of Athens by several political parties because he was very active in migrant community politics since the 1990s. As President of an ethnic workers' community and active participant in the Athens SEM, he had a long history of civic involvement and thus he became visible and highly recognizable by the local political elites. When it was announced that migrants will be able to vote in the 2010 local elections, he had many proposals because they "wanted to have migrant candidates in order to capture the migrant vote". (interview with Ioannis)

In Italy, there were also several cases of cross-cutting participation. Several migrants –both male and female- in the sample participated in both local politics and trade unions, but in some cases there were also participants in school and parents councils that were active in local politics.

In the Spanish case too, "multiple field affiliations tended to be very important since most migrants interviewed had significant presence in more than one field. As a result, the interviews conducted were not specifically focused on one field of participation i.e. labour unions, school and parents' councils, local politics, but involved broader considerations regarding the linkages between biographies and migrant participation in social, economic and political life." (Spanish report).

Therefore one of the principal findings of the research is that participation in one field of political life, especially migrant politics, local politics, and labour unions, tends to open up new routes for participation in other fields as well. The same migrants who are active in one field are very often active in other fields as well.

"Biographical resources"

The German report introduced the term "biographical resources" to refer to immaterial resources that are set up during the life course i.e. "some specificity characterizing biographies of migrants with a successful participation" in organisations, (German report). These can be identified in most narratives of successful inclusion into labour unions and local politics, as well as some interviewees of successful integration into school councils.

Several migrant interviewees refer to immaterial resources when emphasizing personal characteristics, such as courage, insistence, or strength of belief and character as factors that have influenced their successful participation in different participation fields. Some migrant women interviewed during the fieldwork in Greece, for example, described political and labour union participation mostly as an outcome of their own personal strengths and abilities. In their narratives, they argued that strength of character enabled them to overcome conventional gender roles and engage into activities that are not usually perceived as feminine, such as elections, labour strikes, negotiations and disputes with employers. Their exceptional personal strengths are often used to encourage other women to also take part in these processes. For example, Aisha, a Muslim woman from Morocco, who ran the recent municipal elections in Greece with one of the left wing parties, attributed her successful integration into her own personal qualities and her ability to speak out, to fight for her rights and to be courageous even towards racists. In her narrative, she explained, that although it was natural to her to be strong-minded, she acquired

these characteristics gradually as she travelled away from her country. Migration as a process made her stronger and able to demand her rights.

Biographical experiences tend to convert into resources and to shape patterns of political participation. The biographical narrative interviews have proven to be a most effective method to bring to the forefront experiences that are normally marginalized in official political discourse. In the German case, "most migrants who had an active participation in local politics referred to their biographical experiences of inequality and discrimination in their childhood and youth as sensitizing them to political questions and the rights of minorities". Also, socialization in families with active political participation, tends to be considered as a factor that positively influences participation in local politics. Often, socialization that took place in ethnic and religious minority groups in countries of origin is also considered as important in shaping migrant trajectories in local politics. Many interviewees were also political active in their schools and as students prior to migration; they mostly organized in left wing student organizations or in intercultural associations during their student time, in the country of origin and in Germany.

Overall the enthusiasm and aspirations for political participation and active political activism are evaluated biographically as "natural since most of the interviewees were already political active in their home countries before they migrated to Germany and continued to be active in a different context after migration. The decision to participate in politics were evaluated in the biographical reconstructions by the idea "to change the world", "to be active and do something against the conditions", "not only to interfere but also be part of the society" "to overcome discrimination in the German society" and "to undertake a specific mission" (German report).

In general, migrant narratives indicate that biographical resources are important in determining migrant participation in trade unions, school and parents' councils and local politics, and in developing affiliations and activities that cut across these fields.

Education

Education can also be considered as an important "biographical resource" that promotes migrant participation in different fields, especially labour unions and local politics. For example, in the German case study, Turkish and Moroccan migrants who arrived in the country to study as well as second generation migrants born and educated in Germany are groups that tend to be successfully integrated into the

labour unions. Moreover educated second generation migrants tend to act as intermediaries between on the one hand, the first generation, newly arriving migrants of the same ethnic groups, who seem to lack language and organizational skills to integrate and, on the other hand, the natives. Being educated in the local system and language tends to open new avenues for participation. As the German team notes:

“Even if they entered the school in Germany in the middle of the educational life course, they are better equipped with cognitive and language competencies for sustaining within the work sphere and the trade union organisation than first generation migrants. Also these persons, prior to their entering the trade union, have been functioning as “natural helpers” and became mediators between the group of the co-ethnics - who lack language competencies and knowledge about the social environment - and the organization. The knowledge on the social organization of the country of migration, which first generation migrants had to learn with a lot of effort, is very important for being accepted within the trade union organization”. (German report)

Educational background should be more generally considered as a resource that may influence participation in local politics. As the Italian case shows, many migrants who are politically active were educated in the country of origin, in other European countries or in Italy and migrated in order to find better professional and social opportunities. The aspirations of those people have been mostly to achieve a better socioeconomic status and were not satisfied with low skill and low paid professional prospects that are mostly available for immigrants in Europe.

“We have here then a migration of people who are -or have the intention to become- highly professionalized and intend to assert their qualifications, although in some cases their qualifications are not recognized by the Italian State. These people then have precise ambitions, they want their experience and their skills to be recognized, they try to use their expertise, and want to become an integral part of the country that hosts them”. (Italian report)

These findings show that education and language learning is an important factor that should be considered when analyzing migrants’ political participation.

Migrants who are well educated are able to claim a different position than many other migrant men and women in Greece. Professional trajectories indicate that because of educational skills, many migrants are able to move from professions that are stereotypically considered as migrant dominated and feminized (such as care and domestic work) to professions that are not stereotyped -at least not to such an extent. An example of this trajectory is Margarita, who was able to move from domestic work and child care into the tourist industry and language instruction.

At the same time, Greek language skills seem to contribute to the integration into the Greek society and increase migrants' ability to be active in local politics. Overall migrants with a good command of Greek are able to claim their ethnic identity than those who are still using English as the main language of communication. As Margarita stresses in her narrative, language learning becomes a political and cultural project. For her, teaching Albanian children "their language" is important because "it keeps the country big". "Otherwise Albania will remain small". Through the publication of books, the poetry contests and the Albanian language classes she performs a political act, which is important not only for her but also for the whole community. Margarita also participates in an international network of Albanian language teachers and this experience of intercultural interactions through language. (Interview with Margarita 1/04/2014)

Participation in migrant organizations

In all four national cases, participation in migrant organizations, associations and federations is a determining factor influencing the life course of migrants with active participation in the three fields under consideration. The activities of migrant organizations vary widely: from cultural events and folklore celebrations to political mobilizations over migrant rights, anti-racism and border control issues. Some ethnic groups focus more on cultural activities, while others have developed intense political activities in collaboration with local political groups and parties. Examples of highly politicized migrant communities include the Turkish and Kurdish ones in Germany and the Pakistani one in Greece, which may be composed of opposing political fractions, but are very active in minority politics, anti-racist protest and labour union activism. On the other end of the spectrum, there are associations and migrant groups that are mostly based on cultural activities. An example is the Albanian federation in Greece, which is composed of several smaller associations and groups that have mainly cultural orientations, with a strong emphasis on the preservation of

the Albanian language, art, literature and customs. In between, these extremes there are several migrant organizations that organize both political, labour related and cultural activities, such as for example the Philipino's association KASAPI.

In Italy, participation in ethnic communities and migrant groups is considered as a factor that improves participation in the organizations of the host society. However during the focus group discussion, participants argued that only economic immigrants are expected to have organized "communities", whereas other foreigners such as for example, American, Japanese, or Swiss people-usually the wealthiest ones- living in Italy don't. This made them reflect how the fact that affluent people - or people from specific ethnic origins- are perceived as a resource to the host country, while other foreigners are identified as migrants -"often many people are judged on what they have in their pocket" and they aren't considered as victims of discriminatory and racist attitudes (Italian focus group).

Nevertheless, patterns of activities and characteristics of ethnic and migrant groups and associations tend also to influence individual patterns of participation. Thus, as the Spanish report argues, there is an overall tendency towards segregation of participatory work according to migrant origin (Spanish report). These patterns do not prevent individual migrants and multi-ethnic migrant groups and alliances to cross over to sectors.

3.2 Labour Unions

3.2.1 Factors enhancing participation in labour unions

Labour union participation in different sectors

Different employment sectors seem to play an important role when considering patterns of migrant participation. In general, in migrant dominated sectors, such as garbage collection in Germany, delivery services in Greece, domestic work in Greece, it tends to be easier for migrants to enter the labour unions, participate in their activities and rise in their hierarchies. In sectors where migrants and natives are equally represented, there are in general higher levels of participation, but less migrants in leadership positions. On the contrary, in the larger labour unions and in sectors where migrants are under-represented, it tends to be extremely difficult for

migrants to enter the unions and rise in prominent positions in their hierarchies. In Italy, it was also noted that larger unions tend to consider only companies with many employees, while smaller firms (or, in domestic sector, the families) are always a bit "on the edge".

There are also differences amongst the four countries: in Germany for instance migrant dominated sectors, such as cleaning and domestic work, are characterized by low levels of migrant labour organization, where as in Greece and Italy, the domestic and cleaning sector are sectors characterized by the active involvement of migrant women, who have been integrated and created their own migrant labour organizations (i.e. PEKOP and DIWATA).

In both Italy and Greece work in feminized sectors, such as cleaning and domestic work, is so intensive and time consuming that it prevent most women from engaging in different unionizing activities. As the Italian report observes: "when questioned about, the interviewees and focus group participants talk about the work in domestic sector as caregiver in terms of "slavery", "imprisonment", "appalling situation" and in view of this we can understand how those who work in this sector, have no time (or even energy) to participate in trade unions or other social activities. The fact that these workers have few tools and little time to think about how to create a future in Italy, determines their uncertainty, insecurity, which may even lead to full-blown depression". (Italian report).

Past personal and family engagement with left-wing politics

At the same time, however, prior own and/or family experiences of political, labour and migrant activism were mentioned by both male and female interviewees as factors that facilitate participation in labour unions in the host country. Migrants who had prior political experience entered more easily labour union structures or organized labour struggles in solidarity with native workers. Most of those who managed to integrate had participated in the past in the countries of origin, both in formal and informal spaces of political activism, i.e. student unions, political parties, uprisings and demonstrations.

For example, within the German case, many migrants of Turkish and Moroccan origin who were successfully integrated into labour unions had a background of left wing political activism. "Socialization in left-wing groups supplied these migrants with social and communicative competencies and skills relevant for sustaining within

organizations, among others the trade unions. With these skills, and the ability to learn the language, they could soon act as “natural helpers” or “natural social workers” for their co-ethnics taking responsibility for others struggling to resolve issues of functioning in the new social environment. They practice ethnic solidarity drawing on intuition, life experience and knowledge about the social environment that co-ethnics have not acquired yet. Functioning as a “natural helper” turns to be also a functioning as mediator between the ethnic group and the trade union organization. They could gain political influence and informal or formal leadership positions within the ethnic group and within ethnic associations, and, because of this support from the side of their ethnic group, they could enter successfully the workers’ councils where the trade unions are most powerful” (German report).

However, participation in ethnic organisations is often invisible, undervalued and underappreciated by the host country labour institutions. As a female interviewee in the Spanish case study argued:

“Here we have not found anything on what many people from other cultures and other countries really bring with them.”

Informal individual mentoring offered by older and/or more experienced members of the community, collectivity or trade union as gate opening process

In many narratives, the experience of mentoring was proven to be important. In the Greek case, for example, “migrants and especially women admit that it was meeting a significant other -usually a migrant of the same sex- that influenced their decision to join a trade union or a collectivity. Whereas they experienced frustration at a certain point in their biographical course with their working life, another migrant - usually of their own ethnic community- or an inspired member or staff of a labour union acted as a mentor who informed and convinced them to contact the union”.

Working class and migrant consciousness and solidarity

Working class consciousness and solidarity were identified as motivating factors enhancing participation in labour unions. Working class solidarity in particular was described in many narratives –especially those of male migrants- as a factor that opens up new routes for local participation and boosts the ability to exercise active citizenship enacting not only labour rights, but also political and social rights. Moreover, in most biographical interviews, life experiences and trajectories have

been identified as playing an important role in producing and cultivating working class consciousness and solidarity. This is apparent in the narrative of Lazar, a migrant who is active in the second base delivery services union in Greece. In his narrative, he emphasized that solidarity doesn't have to pre-exist but develops gradually through participation in the labour union. Although migrants usually join the union because they face specific problems with employers, by becoming part of the union they come to interact with other workers and to realize that others who may have even greater problems than they do are there to support and assist them. This sense of comradeship, in turn, gives them the strength and the motive to take action to help others. Through these processes of mutual learning they begin to understand how to share and support other workers is important. Thus for Lazar, building up solidarity is a process. (interview with Lazar Greece).

Ethnic and migrant solidarity

In a similar way, many second generation migrants in the German case were motivated to become active in trade unions by "the awareness that their co-ethnics are excluded and disadvantaged within the work sphere and that there is a bias in favour of the German workers on the side of both the employers and organisers of work, as well as trade union members". (interview with Masud G.). When realizing that other ethnic migrant workers were unable to defend themselves, they began to act as "natural helpers" or "natural social workers" helping their co-ethnics who didn't have the skills to defend themselves against employers. Some of them were recruited by "natural mentors" according to the requirements and needs of the labour organization. Through these processes of ethnic solidarity, labour union identities and affiliations were constructed and sustained.

Similar cases can be found in Italy, where educated migrants have tried to assist their co-ethnics and other migrants to overcome specific problems. In many cases, immigrants go to unions only when they are faced with a specific problem, but otherwise do not support the unions. There are also many cases, especially among immigrants from Latin America and Africa, where immigrants join the union "beyond any personal need, it is real "militancy ", real "activism". Another example is Pablo who takes care of all the procedures necessary for immigrants to work, to have the residency permit and everything they need in the help desk that he has created. His approach is welcoming, regardless subscription to the trade union or not. The help desk also spread information useful for migrants, so that they know their rights and

duties, and they learn to take care of themselves. This is useful because often migrants do not have the necessary information to defend their rights in action (Italian report).

3.2.2 Barriers to participation in labour unions

Migrant participation marginalized in mainstream labour unions

In the case of Greek labour unions, “the low participation of migrant workers in trade unions, is related to the difficulties in convincing union leaders about the importance of migrants’ participation, an issue not in a high position in their agenda and relevant priorities. This is differentiated though depending on the sector and also on the political group which has the majority in the trade unions. In general, left-wing dominated labour unions are more sensitive to migrants’ issues, although it seems that overall the ‘gastarbeiter’ paradigm is dominant and shared among both natives and migrants” (Greek report). This means that, as one participant noted during the focus group discussion, migrants are seen as temporary guests who are employed in the national economy to cover for shortages of labour and they are not considered as long term residents and workers, who should have relatively balanced representation in trade unions (Focus group discussion Greece).

This differentiates Greece from Germany, where the more permanent and long-term presence of migrants is acknowledged by the trade unions. In German trade unions, however, especially in the sectors where there is mixed German and migrant representation, migrants are encouraged to join the trade unions but experience barriers when they try to climb the ladder to positions of greater responsibility. An example of these barriers is the systematic exclusion of migrants from training courses in order to prevent them from acquiring new positions. “The Turkish interviewee Osman T. works in a firm with balanced presence of migrant and native workers. He is organised in the trade union and is elected as a ‘trust member’; with this, he is not a plain member, however, his position is in the lower level of the hierarchy. Osman came to Germany as a student and he completed his university studies in social sciences; however, subsequently, he could not find employment in his field of qualification and had to continue working as an unskilled worker in the firm where he used to work during the university time. In his interview, he clearly describes experiences of barriers for climbing up the trade union hierarchy. Most

important is the experience of exclusion from the training courses that are offered by the trade unions and that are the precondition for climbing up the levels of hierarchy within the organisation. After long time of efforts and through the mediation of a friend, he got finally the chance to participate in one training course. He vividly describes the strategies of the gatekeepers to keep him out of this training course, even by talking to him in the local dialect, apparently hoping that he would not feel self-confident enough with this variation of the German language and he would sustain from attending the course. His experiences show that the (German) members in the trade union hierarchy are making efforts to keep access to resources and attractive positions in the organisation only for natives, instrumentalising for this the issue of language competencies as precondition for effectively representing the workers' interests through the trade unions". (German report).

In Italy, similar barriers are described in migrants narratives especially when they describe attempts to be elected in higher and more representative positions in labour unions. Although migrant membership tends to be high in some sectors, such as construction, many migrants are prevented from participating because of the high membership costs. This issue was discussed during the focus groups, where "another participant expressed the opinion that the costs of the transactions was a choice due to the union because the legislation has organized several procedures to carry them out in such a way that it takes special authorization which only some external firms may have. Therefore, the union was forced to outsource certain services. This does not mean, according to all the other participants, that the costs are high but for many interviewees the sum has been declared "unsustainable", even if it is 30/40 € for operation" (Italian report).

Economic crisis, migration and labour

There is also a differentiation between countries, like Greece, Italy and Spain, that have experienced economic, social and political crisis more intensely and countries like Germany, where employment hasn't been affected as much by the economic crisis. In the countries of the European South, institutions like trade unions are undergoing changes caused by their inability to face the economic, political and social challenges that they face.

In the case of Greece, it was proven that the economic crisis and social criticism "has led many workers (both natives and migrants) to take a distance from mainstream

labour unions as they believe that they do not radically and substantially fight for their members' rights. Hence working peoples' trust for unionization had been lost leading in many cases to collective efforts to create better conditions for collective action and the pursuit of their interests outside these organizations" (Greek report).

In Spain, research participants underlined that "trade union attitudes toward migrants have changed in the last years: there was a perception that migrant participation became less and less visible and that it was no longer at the centre of their political agenda". The economic crisis seems to have diminished interest on migrant issues per se or submerged them into the broader labour struggles that include both locals and migrants, without recognizing the particular problems that migrants face, for example residence permits, deportation, or racist discrimination. In Spain the marginalization of migration in labour struggles has led to a more individualistic approach, where individual migrants are left on their own to pursue their demands in existing labour unions structures, mainly entrepreneurs' labour unions (Spanish Report).

The threat of unemployment

The economic crisis has led in Greece and Spain - and to a lesser extent in Italy too - into a sharp rise in unemployment that has radically altered both labour and ethnic relations. In Greece, "some migrants, despite being Union members, believe that companies and employers are very strong and enjoy the protection of the economic system and the political elites, while migrant workers are constrained by the threat of unemployment. This belief forces them to subject to labour rights violations, to take the position that active participation and involvement in collective affairs should be left to others, or to try to solve their problems through personal relationships and connections. As Greek workers' rights are violated, it is rather not to expect that the rights of migrants will be respected, given the fact that they, as non-citizens, become more vulnerable. The threat of unemployment forces the acceptance or internalization of an inferior labour status. They think of themselves as migrants and not as workers" (Greek report).

The case of Vanita, a migrant cleaner in Greece, is paradigmatic of the problem of collective action under the shadow of unemployment. When she made a public complaint about violations of labour rights at her sector, she was fired from her post. PEKOP, the cleaners' Union helped her, but this resulted into losing her job. Although

she didn't initially become a member of the PEKOP, she lost her job and remains unemployed ever since.

"The trade union unfortunately cannot help. Women have to speak up and if they do, each one for herself, they will be sacked. That's what it's like in private cleaning companies. So if you speak up, you leave. If you say nothing, you won't lose your job, even when you laze about instead of work. Do you understand what I mean? They suck up to the boss not to lose their job. I can't do that...That's why I have no job..." (Interview with Vanita - Greek report).

The threat of unemployment signifies also for many migrants who have temporary or no residence permits the threat of deportation. The fear of losing one's job is being reinforced by the fear of being left without papers, illegal and constantly under the threat of deportation. Most migrants who did not participate in labour union politics were afraid even to associate with members of the Unions. This fear tends to be even stronger amongst women in feminized sectors who seem to be the main providers of their families as unemployment in male dominated sectors, i.e. construction, has increased.

One important finding of the Italian case is linked to the importance of work for the acquisition of residence permits. As most participants in the fieldwork noted, the "majority of immigrants are in Italy to work -and **have to** work to renew their residence permit. In this context people consider the legislation on residence permits as "scandalous", especially in periods of economical crisis, where migrant employment is particularly hit.

3.3. School and Parents' Councils

3.3.1 Factors enhancing participation in school and parents' councils

Participation in the school and parents' councils driven by biographical experiences and the wish of parents to care for their children

In all conducted interviews in the German case, "it was possible to see a strong link between personal biographical experiences and the later parental engagement in school councils. Volunteering in a school council was considered as a possibility to influence and follow up the schooling of own children as well as a possibility to help

other migrants in Germany. Thus, the engagement in the field of education made it possible not just to articulate own interests, but the issues and problems of other migrant parents, too". (German report).

In Greece, research found that migrant parents become members of the parents' councils motivated by their will to take care and provide for the children at school. Through the parents' councils, they participate in the organization of a number of cultural and educational activities, events and celebrations, which promote children's well being and their own role as carers of the family. Migrant parents often feel that their adult presence in school life may balance the growing needs of their children and compensate for the inadequacies of the educational system. For example, Froso, a migrant mother, who is a member of the board of the parents' association, conceives her participation and the role of the parents' association as a "safety net" for children, ensuring an eye over their daily school life and control of any unexpected threats for the children, although they were only latently referred and not named. The parents' council gives migrant parents a feeling that they are closer to their children and becomes a migrant strategy for their protection in times of great insecurity. Although the female members of parents' councils are much more than the male ones, both migrant mothers and fathers who actually participate in the school councils seem to perform such caring roles. Tryfon, for example, also comprehends his role in the school council as an offer to all children's well-being.

The narratives of migrant members in parents' councils in Greece, however, tended to be de-politicized and individualistic referring to personal experiences and interests/needs rather than collective ethnic and migrant goals. In the Greek case, there was a constant emphasis on caring, but very few comments on inequalities and structural constraints that migrant children face. However, some of the interviewees reproduced a children's rights approach, which focused on caring as ensuring social consensus and legalization of anti-exclusionary and anti-racist practices, discourses and attitudes. This approach, even though it does seem to be related in an explicit manner with the comprehension and vision of the school council as a participative institution facilitating migrants' greater integration, still it may create a safety net against open racist and/or xenophobic behaviours.

In Spain, in general the numbers of migrants participating in school councils were extremely low, but they were even lower in boards and decision-making positions.

However, it should also be taken into account that participation of parents to school associations and elections is also generally low in the whole of the population in Catalonia. In this context, some participants, made the assessment that migrant participation has increased in recent years.

Participation as an outcome of the gate opening practices adopted by the school directors

One of the findings of the Greek fieldwork was that participation in the council is the outcome of a long process established by the initiatives taken by a specific director who has struggled to overcome xenophobia and even racism against migrants in the area of the school with a great migrant population. Efforts to open routes for active engagement and cultural interaction between migrant and native parents and pupils, to build solidarity attitudes and to facilitate reception of migrants seem to raise participation. For instance, initiative to circulate all information papers in all national languages of the migrant parents, lessons of Greek language being offered voluntarily in the premises of the school, are considered as good practices.

Froso speaks with admiration and gratitude for the school director in whom she believes very much and she was the one to have encouraged her participation.

“ ...me personally I am **very much content** with the grava school and with the teacher I am very much, there is no case to change it with nothing, nor the teacher who is now [...] I don't change it with nothing! She advices for everything, is a woman who advices for everything. There you live, some way she will help you with something” (interview with Froso-Greek report).

Participation as parents resistance to public shortages and cuts - school needs are counterbalanced by parents' initiatives

Migrant parents in Greece often mention the lack of state funding to provide for the school infrastructures and needs. For example in the interviews migrant parents mentioned that councils paid for the restoration of the WC's, which were ruined for years, employed a school cleaner or collected money to help children who are in severe need. This is a manifestation of parents' efforts to undertake and share the costs instead of waiting for the state to provide funding and to take responsibility for improvements. Moreover, it shows that parents, especially in the South of Europe, are willing to take joint action to protect their children's needs. In the context of the

economic crisis, the realization that the state and the local authorities are unable to respond to citizens' needs and their own institutional obligations tends to reinforce collective action of this kind.

However, some migrant parents tend to adopt a very different narrative than the one that we encountered in the case of labour unions or local politics. In the context of schools and parents' councils, biographical elements tend to be used to emphasize an individualistic approach. Trifon for example, an Albanian migrant who lives in Greece, is exemplary of this approach that stresses the importance personal achievement in adverse conditions rather than a collective ideological or political perspective or project. On the one hand, his experiences of escaping a formerly communist country coupled with a strong belief in individual efforts to make one's own life better (the most paramount paradigm being himself). On the other hand, his neo-liberal understanding of the current crisis in Greece as the result of "the many mistakes Greeks have made in the last years" (i.e. corruption, lack of transparency etc.) contribute to a neo-liberal conception of participation that ignores migrant ethnic community and social and political attachments.

Activation contributes to the building of self-confidence and gaining of caring roles – becoming an "informal mentor" for other parents

Participation in school councils may give parents, especially mothers, the ability to socialize with native parents and parents of other nationalities, to develop public speech skills and enhance one's public life. From Froso's narration, it becomes clear that participation in the parents' association empowers her and builds her self-confidence as she is a person who fights against life difficulties and has always a positive point of view for life. In the beginning she was embarrassed and she did not feel confident to speak in public but progressively she feels that she has overcome hesitation and now she has no problem at all to express her opinion. She even handled her husband's reservation of whether she would be in the position to correspond in her new obligations; but she is confident and willing to do it. In addition, being a member of the council offers her occasions for socialization and the built of friendships with other parents migrants and natives. Participation mainly satisfies her motives to be supportive and in solidarity with other people's needs and in particular of the children. She gives information to other migrants – especially African migrant parents – who face difficulties to communicate and handle with information and other formalities about school life.

"There are people who do not understand, they say to me, can you explain what is this? And I help! "I say this means that, this is that etc". I say to someone who does not understand though! We know what means in one language with the other, we will help...I will say "come here to me"

This excerpt directly leads to the conclusion that participation creates multiple occasions for intercultural interaction, giving migrant women and men a public role and opportunities for inclusion into public affairs at the neighborhood level. In other words she is acting as an "informal mentor" and disposes resources to do this (Greek report).

3.3.2 Barriers to participation in school and parents' councils

Low levels of migrant participation in school and parents' councils.

In all cases studies, we noticed extremely low levels of participation in school councils, which made the search for interview partners rather complicated and difficult. In the German case, it was possible to identify some migrant members of the school councils who were also active in the political field. In the Greek case, the emphasis was also paid on interviewing paradigmatic cases of non involvement and non participation in order to identify the factors that prevent this type of activity amongst different female and male migrants.

One of the findings of the Spanish case, however, can be said to apply to all four national cases. Migrant interviewees observed that the level of involvement in parents associations is different according to the type of activity: parents usually contact the association when they have an individual problem, rather than searching for contributing to the general well-being of the school community. Similarly, participation is sometimes limited to solving specific problems in schools, whereas daily issues do not attract involvement; or participation is restricted to specific recreational activities, such as festivities (Spanish report).

Poor language skills dictate most migrant parents' distance from the parent's councils and from school life in general - a vicious circle

In Germany, language skills were mentioned as one of the main factors preventing migrant participation. "Almost all interviewees underlined the knowledge of German

language as affecting their level of participation. The interviewees, however, discussed the use of German language in public institutions, like that of school councils, in a much more profound way as this has been done until now in current integration debates in Germany. While these debates put the emphasis on the language acquisition, the interviewees indicated that the use of German language is highly imbued with hierarchical differences and power relations between migrants and native speakers. A lack of fluency in German language and foreign accent seemed to lead to embarrassing for the migrant parents situations with the native speakers, during which the knowledge and capacities of the migrants were reduced to their incomplete German language skills. Migrants felt that they were not taken seriously because of grammatical mistakes and their foreign accent (German report).

In Greece, the low level of migrant parents participation in the parents' councils even in areas with high percentages of migrant families and children attending schools is the result of a number of obstacles. Language constitutes a particular problem that prohibits participation, especially for migrants from African countries. This has multiple effects: it keeps them away from the school processes, deprives them of their right to be informed and follow up their children's progress and reduces their ability to take part in intercultural interaction both with locals and other ethnic migrants.

Moreover, the language issue is quite complicated since it includes both learning Greek (by adult migrants who may have no time to do so, no access to information about the existing courses by NGOs and volunteers, options on a local level, etc) and also teaching young and second generation migrants their native language (in the case of migrants from the African continent this is almost impossible since there is no single formal or widely spoken language in most African countries). When this is not the case (e.g. in the case of Albanians and Pakistani migrants) it is a lot easier to organise volunteer and free courses or even schools for the young to attend (which both Albanian and Pakistani associations do). (Greek report)

Lack of information

In many cases, migrants lacked information on the ways in which they can participate in school and parents' councils, but also on the influencing powers on school issues that these councils have. In addition the regional Union of parents councils have never been taken any initiative to this direction. Lack of information

regarding the role parents councils may play in terms of school life and more general educational issues seems to be shared by natives as well. It is rather a very small number of local participants the ones who "monopolise" the parental movement and acquire the "know how" of its potential role in influencing, apart from everyday school life matters, the decisions taken at higher level such as Regional Education Directives and the Ministry of Education. Provision and diffusion of information specifically targeted to migrant parents relies upon individual initiatives mainly from the part of local school directors. (Greek report).

Experiences of exoticization and racism

In the German case, interviewees mentioned discriminatory experiences of exoticization bordering with racism. "Experiences of discrimination and racialisation form a central part of othering processes that the interviewees have encountered in Germany. These varied from subtle notions to direct racism. Interviewees suffered from being exoticised and reduced to the bearers of "their" culture. Especially, women were considered as being able only to cook traditional ethnic food and being ready to serve this to the others" (German report).

Unemployment, underemployment and the consequent loss of residence permit create exclusionary processes and severe sense of helplessness

As mentioned above, many migrants in Greece have faced unemployment or underemployment after the economic crisis erupted. This has undermined also their legal status, since residence permits are attached to legal employment. Unemployment, underemployment or illegal employment (to which many migrants are forced to resort) signifies also the loss of legal residence in Greece not only for the adults but also for the children. This applies also to children who have been born and raised in Greece but have been deprived of the right to claim citizenship since the relevant law has been suspended indefinitely.

An example of the severe consequences of the crisis on migrant families is the case of Maria, a migrant from Lebanon whose monthly income does not exceed the 100 Euros she gets for a 4 hour daily baby-sitting of a Greek child. Maria's husband, who was the main provider of the family, has lost his job and his residence permit, although he lived in Greece since the 1980s. After a year of receiving unemployment benefit, he lost his residence permit and is left without income. The family survives

on the 100E per month and the contributions of friends from the neighborhood. Although this has completely altered her family plan, Elena continues to wish to stay in Greece and only considers moving to another European country for the sake of her daughter. Although her daughter is experiencing isolation and bullying at school, she as a mother has never participated in the parent's council, considering it to be irrelevant to hers and her daughter's problems. She has lost control over her biographical course and her life planning, she has limited social resources to rely upon and a weak sense of self-efficacy. Children of migrant families without residence permits are entitled to go to school but may have no support by school communities, which may be interpreted as an implicit and indirect form of racism. Although limited contacts with other parents and in general the school life may account for the non participation of such parents from school life, withdrawal of expectations for economic help may act as a factor that increases the distance and even the dislike of the parent's councils. Elena mentions the fact that a Greek woman member of the parents' council in the primary school promised her to discuss the family's need to pay for the electricity bills. When the council decided not to help them has greatly disappointed her leading her to mistrust the other parents even more. Sense of helplessness prevails in her narration which leads to the conclusion that participation cannot be realized if a migrant parent is in so many ways threatened by social exclusion.(Greek report).

3.4. Local politics

3.4.1. Factors enhancing participation in local politics

The focus of the fieldwork was on two types of institutions: migration councils, political parties and local elections. These depend on institutional as well as practical everyday factors for their effective functioning and differ significantly according to the national and local context.

In Germany, the statutes of the political parties regulate participation of Third Country Nationals in political parties. Only far right wing political parties do not allow foreigners' participation. Thus, the participation of foreigners in the right, centrist and left wing parties is advanced, and some few migrants having the German nationality are already in high positions of some of the left wing political parties, but also have been brought in high political positions by the ruling parties.

There are, however, a lot of barriers for an upward mobility within the political parties. The main barrier is the defense of the domination of the non-migrants in the organizations, especially in the higher positions of the organizations and the marginalization of migrant issues. The instrumentalization of language skills in order to keep migrants out of the higher positions in the organization has been also referred to in the interviews. As has been already mentioned in the subsection for the participation in the Trade Unions, it is the political socialization in the country of origin or in the family of origin that is the main biographical resource for the struggle to access positions of power in the political parties.

Local Migration Councils

The effectiveness of migration local or municipal migration councils vary significantly from country to country, but also from municipality to municipality.

In Greece, the Municipal Migration Councils' (SEMs) activities are rather limited and include the dissemination of information to migrant communities by the Municipal Authorities, discussions and recommendations on the acquisition of the residence permits, cultural activities and European funded projects. The general fieldwork findings indicate that the SEMs have not been established in all municipalities and if they do they aren't equally active. Even in those areas where the SEMs are active, they only have a minor consultative role. For example in Athens, the SEM members were able to invite the director of the Athens unit for residence permits and expose their problems, including long delays and the negative behavior of the administrative staff. Mostly SEM activities focus on the organization of cultural events, such as festivals, the participation in European programs and exchanges with other European migrant councils. These exchanges constitute experiences that enable migrants who participate in the SEMs to understand how advanced other countries are with regard to migrant integration.

The SEMs have a consultative role and have had some impact, especially in the Athens municipality, for instance on pressing and presenting proposals referring to problems faced with municipal bureaucracy and procedures for the issuance of residence permits for migrants. As Athens is a very large municipality, there were long delays for the issuing of migrant residence permits. Migrants who participate in the SEMs are usually selected because they represent migrant ethnic communities or migrant groups. The most successful and active SEM is that of Athens where most

migrant ethnic communities and groups are located. Moreover participation in the SEMs often makes the migrants in question more known to the local political elites and more recognizable in public debates. As a result of the increased visibility brought about by civic participation, many electoral candidates especially in Athens were previously also members of the SEMs. Several participants in the focus group and interviewees mentioned the need for better structures (such as one stop shops) for the dissemination of information to migrant communities, but also more effective decision making mechanisms and more institutionalized forms of migrant participation in local politics (for example migrants act as permanent advisors to the Mayors).

The Athens SEM has mainly focused on making recommendations on improving the procedures and making municipal bureaus more effective and fast in processing claims for the issuing of residence permits. We should also stress, however, that the municipalities did not play an important role in the procedure as they were only receiving the documents – decisions were taken at the ministry level. As Ioannis argued, it was like a “post office” that received the papers but did not make any decisions. Overall, the SEMs do not seem to fulfill the consultative role that they were designed for.

Most migrants that were interviewed in the Greek case expressed dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the SEMs and mistrust for their activities and those who participate in them. The degree of disappointment and mistrust varied from municipality to municipality. In the Athens municipality, some positive activities were mentioned, such as the participation in European projects that involved trips to other migrant municipal councils in Europe. The members of the SEM that travelled to these trips developed new ideas and perspectives on how migrants can influence local decision making and how they can be better informed about their rights and possibilities for trans-european activities. At the same time, however, in the focus group discussions several participants expressed concerns over the effectiveness of the SEMs. Rather than dealing with the everyday problems of migrants faced in local contexts, the SEMs were mostly used to disseminate information about migration law and migrant rights.

For Margarita, a migrant from Albania, however, the SEMs processes were not democratic. The SEM enabled migrants to receive information on local policies and

disseminate it to their respective organizations. This included information on residence permits, on migrant domestic and care workers' social security, residence permits renewal and procedures, as well as changes in migration law and the ways in which these may affect migrants. This is, however, a one-way process and doesn't involve the dissemination of information by migrants to the municipal authorities and the central national government. Migrant perspectives tend to be marginalized and considered as secondary. Other migrants develop an even more critical view of the SEMs. Katarina and her husband, from Russia and Palestine, for example, expressed the opinion that their migrant council (located in a region near Piraeus) was simply a "façade" with no real substance. They expressed the opinion that it consisted of 5-6 migrant communities, of which only the Albanian and the Pakistani one seemed to have been formed before the establishment of the council and in reality its members met and discussed issues only three times in three years. Katarina concluded that the SEM in this municipality was "invisible", "a ghost", "non-existent" (Greek report).

In Spain, the fieldwork results were different. In the Barcelona Municipal Immigration Council, which was the main focus of the study, participants provide a complex picture of its functioning and incidence as an institutional space that promotes participation. "Immigration Municipal Council is a space to claim, to have a direct contact with institutions and organizations, and there they are also working in different areas: field of health, conflict, sport, neighbours, and also parents associations, libraries ..." (Spanish report).

Amongst the characteristics of the Barcelona Municipal Immigration Council, participants stress: (a) the continuity of work and main activities, (b) the technical management by the city council officers that facilitates the coordination and its good functioning, (c) the cross-cutting topics that are dealt with by the council, (d) the possibility to get to know other realities and have contacts with other organizations and to establish relationships between the administration and civil society associations, (e) the basic requirements needed to become a member, (f) the fact that women are overrepresented.

Contrary to the Greek SEMs, most participants considered that it is worth participating in this type of institutional space. As one participant noted: "I think it is worthwhile to take part in those (consultative spaces). I think it's very important to have different voices, different ways of doing things, different thoughts and it is the

only way to make things right. Because everyone has his/her own reality, we know just one space" (Woman, complementary interview to focus group). On the other hand, also some negative and conflictive aspects were identified, such as its consultative role and its low impact on policy and decision making or the difficulty to influence the established agenda and to really have a voice in the final political decisions. As an interviewee in the Spanish case study noted:

"The possibility of having a decisive role, i.e. being influencing something, is very very-very limited (...) Because they manage (consultative spaces) from the institution, this implies some limits that can't be overcome. You express your opinion, "it is nice that you express an opinion", but we are the ones who decide (...), that is, the day when we will have a different opinion, they will tell us "that is", despite the fact that people that are managing (these spaces) is the world's most beautiful people." (Woman, interview-Spanish report).

Local elections

The local political field is also determined by the legislation participation of migrants in the local elections. In Greece, Law 3838/2010 gave the right for the first time to non-Greek citizens to take part in the local elections as voters and as candidates provided that they exhibited sufficient knowledge of the Greek language and culture. In order to do so, migrants had to fulfil one of the following criteria: to be recognized as repatriates, to hold a long-term residence permit, to hold a permanent residence permit as members of a family (including parents) of a Greek or European-Union citizen, to be recognized as stateless persons or political refugees or to be under protection for humanitarian reasons. Migrants fulfilling these criteria were able to vote and participate as candidates in the local elections only once. In 2014, the law was suspended abolishing the right of migrants to participate in municipal elections following an amendment decided by the Public Administration Committee of the Parliament on 17 February 2014.

In Italy, foreigners could only participate in political life as "observers" since immigrants do not have right to vote. Recently, some members of the main political parties have declared that Italian legislation should be changed in this regard, but during the electoral campaign nobody referred to any of these declarations. An immigrant is "unable to perceive even the desire" to interact with political institutions: the perception is that the institutions do not even "think of immigrants".

According to some interviewees and focus group participants in Italy, very often there is not even the possibility of a real dialogue between migrants and the Italian institutions: sometimes, it happens that local governments undertake courses of participatory citizenship, without even thinking of involving immigrants. Immigrants, in any case, are involved in politics almost exclusively when their involvement is related to migrant issues, and never to the general governance, or issues related to the population as a whole.

In the Italian case, there were some important exceptions: The forum Citizens Together was born under strong pressure of the town councilor and migrant groups and has always been involved in social activities among citizens (both Italians and foreigners). At a time when the members of the forum had realized that in some cases their activities could be exploited for the sole purpose of the public image of the Municipality, they decided to "somehow protect themselves" and decided to form an independent association. Consequently, the association became part of a much more complex bureaucratic system, where there is no support when an "external attack" occurs (Italian focus group). Fortunately, the City of San Casciano continues to support the efforts of the forum and also it helps to provide the organization with the tools to continue the path started (small financial contributions, the availability of rooms/places/spaces etc.).

The right to vote and ran as a candidate in local elections

Legal restrictions on the right to vote and participate in local elections had an impact on migrant voting in 2010 in Greece. Since many migrants weren't able to acquire long-term or permanent residence permits, they were excluded from the beginning from the electoral procedures not only as candidates but also as voters. This, in turn, restricted the electorate power of migrant municipal candidates. The abolition of the right of migrants to participate in municipal elections following an amendment decided by the Public Administration Committee of the Parliament on 17 February 2014 meant that migrants with long term residence permits and permanent residence permits as well as refugees and stateless persons were no longer allowed to vote or take part in the elections as candidates

Simultaneously, however, we observe that even those foreigners who continue to have the legal right to participate in the elections were deterred because of complicated procedures for registering in the electoral catalogues and the lack of

effective information campaigns. These two factors further restricted migrant participation in the local elections. Most migrants both men and women, as well as many European citizens ignored their rights and were uninformed about the procedures they needed to follow in order to vote. For example Konstantina, a Bulgarian citizen and former candidate in the municipality of Nea Smyrni, thought that she didn't have the right to vote in the 2014 elections because as a migrant she was excluded from the procedure.

3.4.2. Barriers to participation in local politics

Citizenship

Nonetheless, the widening of the electorate to migrants in Greece pushed most political parties (mainly those of the centre and the left) towards the inclusion of migrant municipal candidates into their electoral lists in order to capture the votes of this new group. Our research showed, however, that although local political parties were able in 2010 to include in their electoral lists, migrant candidates who fulfilled the criteria to run for municipal representatives, they mostly opted for those candidates that were of migrant origin, but had acquired the Greek nationality. This practice meant that even before the abolition of the right of migrants to participate in municipal elections, migrants with long term residence permits and permanent residence permits as well as refugees and stateless persons had de facto only limited access to the formal political procedures and structures since they were rarely –if ever- asked to run as candidates in the local elections.

All of our interviewees and focus group participants who were municipal candidates at the local elections of 2010 had citizenship status. This indicates that in practice and despite formal legal requirements, migrant participation in local politics was predicated upon factors, such as religion, ethnicity and gender that constrain migrants' access to Greek citizenship.

Many migrants who ran as municipal candidates in the 2010 local elections felt deeply disappointed by the process. Aisha, for example, told us during the biographical interview that she felt that there were no tangible and real results deriving from her local political activity because as a foreigner living in Greece she would never have the same prospects and opportunities to be elected as Greek candidates do. In her case, the low percentages of the communist party in the area

also contributed to her disappointment. "It is like watering the sand", she said (Interview with Aisha 27/1/2014). The electoral results of the 2010 local elections showed that Aisha's disappointment was legitimate. The percentage of migrants that voted in the local elections was very small and the subsequent suspension of the right to vote made the 2010 experiment seem rather fruitless. However, he also explained that he could now see that this was just a "smoke-screen" because the dominant mentality in Greece does not allow non-Greek candidates to get elected. In Ioannis' opinion, the political parties that invited him knew that this was just a way to attract potential migrant voters, but they wanted to present a nice image to the electorate. He concluded that his feeling was that migrant candidates "were used".

However, although it seems that there was significant electoral support for migrant candidates by Greek voters especially from the left and some centre-left municipal parties. This Greek vote for migrants encouraged the inclusion of migrant candidates in the lists mainly of the Athenian left-wing and centre-left candidates that run in the 2014 election. The migrant candidates were mostly male leading figures of major migrant organizations that had an active involvement in the migrant council of the Athens municipality and Greek citizenship status, such as Joe Valencia with the left-wing Syriza combination and Nikodimos Akinaoua with the centre-left combination.

Political culture

While in the German case, there is a continuity in migrant narratives, in the Greek case both male and female migrants expressed the belief that they "we went against the tide" is dominant. As Ioannis explained, in Greece cultural conventions and circumstances exclude foreigners from democratically elected institutions. "In Greek political culture, people do not understand that migrants are also citizens, pay taxes, and should be able to vote. Greek voters are prejudiced and do not vote for candidates with foreign names. It is difficult for a Greek to choose a foreigner to govern him. They always want foreigners to be beneath them". This tendency was also confirmed by Margarita who described her participation in the SEM as a process that mainly makes it possible for migrants to approach and see how local policy makers act and behave, but doesn't leave room for migrants to influence significantly politicians and political elites. 'SEM is, if I could say so, a window through which we glance at politics and in my opinion it should also become a window for the state to look at migrants". So the SEMs open up possibilities for interaction which seem, according to Margarita to be one sided and to lack reciprocity (Greek report).

In both the Italian and the Spanish case, one of the main problems identified by migrants was the ethical crisis of politics that has pushed away not only migrants but also natives. For example, Pablo in Italy, who considered himself well integrated, argued that his political participation was “a thing of the past”, since at the time of the interview his job and family took precedence. He explained this attitude towards politics as a result of the deterioration of ethics in Italian politics. He had lost his hope in being able to make a difference in Italian political life. Moreover he argued that for him, it wasn't a matter of left or right, but a matter of ethics and solidarity – values that are missing from Italian politics. Instead he argued that these values were substituted by egoism and prejudice. While immigrants themselves lack solidarity, the natives too are unable to develop it (Italian report).

Some migrants in Spain too took the same position that there is not a very big difference between natives and foreigners. “Participatory routes are described as something strange, unusual, even dangerous...” (Italian report).

In the Spanish case, interviewees underlined the same point.

“And that was also the complaint. “Why do not come (migrant people in participation spaces)?” And I said “what about local people?” There are 70 or 80% local people (in those spaces). And how many people are there? Four, and are always the same.” (Spanish report).

Racism

All migrant interviewees expressed strong concern about the rise of racism and xenophobia in Greece, in particular the rise of the extreme right-wing party Golden Dawn, which has a strong presence and support in several areas. For many migrants the centre of Athens, but also other neighborhoods, have become a dangerous place to live and work since racist violent attacks are reported on a daily basis.² In the local 2014 elections, for example, a candidate of African origin who run with the centre-left candidate that won the municipality reported that he was being encircled

² Greek NGOs have established the Racist Violence Recording Network, which documents cases of racist violence.

<http://www.unhcr.gr/1againstracism/category/%CE%B4%CE%AF%CE%BA%CF%84%CF%85%CE%BF-%CE%BA%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%B3%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%86%CE%AE%CF%82-%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%84%CF%83%CE%B9%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE%CF%82-%CE%B2%CE%AF%CE%B1%CF%82/>

and threatened by a group of Golden Dawn supporters when he tried to address voters in a central Athenian square.

Similar statements were made by migrants in Italy. According to one interviewee, Pablo, Italy is not very open to immigrants. He notices that racism often goes along with ignorance, misinformation, low critique capacity, twisted beliefs, based on the fact that money get you anything, making rich people superior. Pablo tells how he was very active in politics in Peru because he trusted politics more (Italian report).

However in several narratives in the Greek case study, there were also references to racism amongst migrants. Racism was based mostly on race but also on legal status and different stages and degrees of integration. Especially those with children stressed the racist incidents between "white" and "colored" children and the creation of racist tensions and antagonisms amongst students.

Lack of support for migrant organizations

Although migrant communities offer a path that leads to participating in local politics, most migrants considered the lack of state recognition as a negative factor inhibiting their ability to have a substantial impact on local political structures. According to Ioannis, the Greek state's response is very superficial towards migrant organizations because in reality "there is no substantial support and encouragement for migrants to organize and influence decisions on migration policies". In his opinion, Greece has managed to "*destroy migrant organization*" (Ioannis interview). Several members of the Athens SEM noted that in the other states that they visited as part of the projects that they implemented, migrant communities are supported by the municipality and the state provides for them financially and administratively. As a result, they are provided with recognition, information and space to develop their activities. In Greece, all representatives of migrant organizations agreed that there is no support of any kind (formal or informal) at the national or local level. Instead the representatives of migrant communities and associations are often treated with suspicion by public servants and are excluded from policy making procedures.

In Italy, on the contrary, findings from the field research show that some respondents argued that there is no difficulty in finding support or even sponsoring for many initiatives of immigrant organizations but, in general, only if they are initiatives related to "cultures", in the sense of art, literature, music, cooking, events

for children. They, at the contrary, have found seldom support or promotion for action aiming to political integration. Some respondents argue and / or share the idea that immigrants are involved only when these activities are about "couscous and Tambu " but that integration actually doesn't come from this folkloric approach, and if some immigrant "rebels" against this logic, he/she just finds the door is "no more open" (Italian report).

In Germany, the support granted by the state to the ethnic organizations is growing as it becomes clear that they are influential concerning the integration process. However, this support is still low and cannot cover the needs arising.

Political party and policy makers' recognition

In Greece, although institutional recognition and support for migrant organizations at the state level is weak, several leading figures of migrant organizations have developed closer relationships with certain political parties and policy makers that enabled them to promote agendas and influence decisions. Ioannis for example, explained the linkages he had developed with policy makers from the socialist PASOK government involved in the drafting of the citizenship law, which was later suspended by the New Democracy right-wing government. Although he received proposals from all political parties to run for the elections, he decided to run with the candidate for the Athens municipality who was supported by PASOK.

The lack of institutional recognition of migrant organizations in the policy making procedures undermines the continuities of migration policies. Whereas some migrant representatives may mobilize personal acquaintances and the sensitivities of some policy makers for specific issues, they do not have an established position and their consultative role is rarely granted the recognition it deserves. Despite personal linkages, however, most migrant activists develop strategies that cut across political divisions of left, centre and right and aim mainly at promoting migrant issues and rights. Although their connections to policy makers and government officials, representatives of migrant organizations don't consider themselves to be politically "coloured" - meaning that they don't tend to identify with specific political parties. According to Ioannis: "As migrants we could collaborate with anyone, even with the Golden Dawn if they supported us and recognized our rights" (interview with Ioannis). Collaborations with political parties are considered as occasional and

contingent and they are often characterized by strategies of tactical alliances based on the promotion of specific agendas and positions (Greek report).

In Italy, some respondents argued that the Ministry for Integration, as it was structured, "made no sense" because they have had full perception that the same group that promoted it, has not enough power in Government and it is not supported even by the other members of the same political party. Moreover, very common among the participants is the perception of a manipulation on the part political parties of the few foreigners (immigrants) that they have co-opted and enrolled. They use the image of immigrants in order not to promote their rights, but only to show how the party is "open", not racist, multicultural...without any real engagement on human rights topic or in constructing a very inclusive Italian society. On the other hand, others argue that the same immigrants, once entered into a party, fall to political negotiations for their own advantage and that they only finish to think about their own promotion (Italian report).

Women's networks and support

In the Greek case the participation of women in the SEMs was facilitated by membership in women's networks and groups or by participation in networks focusing on activities associated with women. For example, in the Athens SEM there were two participants who belonged to migrant women's associations (Nigerian Women's Association and Organization of African Women). Membership in these migrant women's groups paved the way for these migrant women to become active in the local SEMs, but also to voice their gender specific demands in the local context. For example, women from both of these organizations raised issues with regard to women's employment, lack of funding opportunities for women's entrepreneurship and problems related to children's citizenship rights. On the contrary, women like Margarita who entered the SEMs through ethnic migrant associations were less active in promoting gender issues. Her perspective was mostly that of Albanian nationalism that considers women as mothers of the nation and educators of the people.(interview with Margarita)

Moreover, while most of the municipal candidates in the 2010 elections were male, there were also female ones who managed to attract votes precisely because they were female. Aisha, for example, mentioned in her interview that the most positive factor that contributed to her participation in political affairs was her identity as a

strong woman that always struggles for her rights. Her belief was that it was not the communist party that made her what she was, but her strong feminine character “I always talk, I always shout”, she exclaimed (Interview with Aisha 27/1/2014). Although Aisha was disappointed by the overall electoral results, she remained enthusiastic about the support she got from the women of the KKE and believed that most of the votes that she received were from those women.

4. Gender aspects

Women’s networks

One of the factors that tend to enhance female migrant participation is the involvement in women’s movement networks and participation in their activities. This type of engagement, whether it is at an ethnic level or at an interethnic level, proves to be an important element in many successful biographic narratives as it encourages, empowers and increases a sense of autonomy and activation amongst women. On the contrary, male migrants tend to derive empowerment mostly from ethnic and ideologically based networks and groups.

Gender stereotypes and prejudices

Gender stereotypes confine migrant women to traditional roles and activities. The female trade unionist is considered in most case studies – especially in the Southern European cases - as the most “difficult” role to adopt since unionism is associated historically and symbolically with masculinities.

“Participation in the trade union bears a strong symbolic and gender dimension since unionism isn’t conceptualized as part of a woman’s public identity and/or stereotypical role”. (Spanish report)

Women who enter and become active in labour unions are few and mostly isolated in specific feminized sectors of the economy, where women are overrepresented –such as cleaning, care and domestic work. Even in those sectors, however, women and especially migrant women tend to constitute isolated cases, who have fought hard to gain acceptance and recognition against the dominant stereotypes and the prevailing prejudices. In the larger unions, women in general and migrant women in particular are either completely absent or completely marginalized.

The only field in which migrant participation is feminized is that of school and parents' councils. This is mainly because this type of social activity is associated and stereotypically anchored to femininity and motherhood. Thus the Spanish researchers concluded that participation in parents associations is often mentioned – during the interviews – as one of the first space of participation for women in public space that have just arrived in the country, despite the fact that often this kind of participative space do not exist in the country of origin (Spanish report).

"The first day of school –the day of the first school meeting- the president of parents association came and explained what a parents association was. And I thought it was beautiful, because they do not exist in Morocco. There are parents associations, but it's only name, nothing is done. Then, from that moment, I began to be with them, to go to some meetings... the day it is needed, for example, someone who can sewing for carnival ... Although I did not speak very well, but at least these kind of things, like sewing and cooking tortillas..." (Woman, interview)

In this context, it is possible to argue that gender stereotypes might determine types and degrees of participation.

Reconciliation of activism with care responsibilities

Moreover, in the case of female workers (both migrant and native women) time is limited due to prevailing gender roles and duties distribution. Women are in general considered to be responsible for care within families, including child or elderly care and domestic work. These private responsibilities overburden women and deprive them of the time they could have spent on labour struggles. In addition to the lack of public care caused by public expenditure cuts due to the austerity policies, especially in South Europe, migrant women also experience the absence of extended family networks that often cover for the care needs of families.

The lack of time is described by most women who don't participate in labour unions, parents' councils and local politics as a major obstacle to the widening of female migrant participation. In all four case studies, labour unions, parent's councils and local political institutions seem to have no specific mechanisms in place to deal with these problems. For example, in the German case, Bülent M. suggested that more women will participate in trade unions "if the meetings of the workers' councils were put within the working hours" and if "the training courses for the trade union

members with a duration of one week weren't away from the cities, where the participants live and work". (German report)

The case of Eva from the Greek case study is also characteristic. Having to work day and afternoon and sometimes on Sundays in care and cleaning jobs, Eva who has two children participates in the school events and celebrations but claims that she has no time left to participate in anything else as she is tired and with no energy. Difficulties of reconciliation, with a traditional distribution of roles (i.e. she is a professional domestic worker but also undertakes all household and children care in the family) leaves no vital space to become engaged in anything else than work. Although she mentions with enthusiasm all school initiatives and in particular of those of the kindergarten, she seems to have no any intention and it is actually out of her vision to actively participate in the parents' council. She also comments on the fact that the kindergarten offers crèche to facilitate participation of working mothers in afternoon courses on psychological support of parents to handle their children's development issues, but she never had time to attend. This leads to the conclusion that deprivation of time, prioritization of earning money and securing the basic family needs under extreme pressure and stress conditions caused by the economic crisis and job shortages limits many migrant parents, especially women's lives to a struggle for survival and the perseverance of their economic well-being. (Greek report).

Feminized forms of employment

Work is an important factor that determines the ability to participate in local politics for all migrants. In general, those migrants both male and female that were employed outside the typically migrant dominated sectors (domestic, construction, agricultural work etc.), were more able to spend time on civil participation. Both Ioannis and Margarita who worked as teachers were examples of this since they were able to spend time on their ethnic organizations, migrant politics and local politics (both SEM and elections). Especially after the economic crisis started in 2008, however, migrant dominated sectors were hardly hit and most migrants found themselves unemployed or forced to work more hours for less. This situation affected their ability to participate in local politics since it forced them to prioritize survival strategies over migrant activism and local politics. While many like Ioannis, decided to migrate to other European destinations and seek employment there, the threat of unemployment forced others who stayed in Greece, especially women, to

accept jobs that were very demanding in terms of labour conditions and time constraints.

The example of Konstantina illustrates this point. The family that Konstantina worked for in Nea Smyrni offered her time off and encouraged her to run for the elections. Their encouragement and active support in the working space helped her a lot and gave her a sense of empowerment. On the contrary, the demands of her current employers have forced her to become completely inactive in local politics. For many migrants, including Konstantina at the present stage of her life, there is no time to spend on civil participation because work occupies most of her everyday life. Prior research has shown that this is a long-term problem, in the everyday lives of migrant domestic workers –especially live-ins, there is a continuum between paid and unpaid work, which restricts their social life and ability to spend time for activities other than domestic and care duties at home and at work (Greek report).

5. Needs - resources - experiences and strategies of migrants in their effort to participate

Increase funding and support for migrant organizations

As we analyzed above, migrant organizations play a central role in promoting migrant participation. In all case studies, but especially in the Greek the Italian and the Spanish ones, migrants expressed dissatisfaction with the support, especially financial support, given migrant organizations, which was either minimal or conditioned upon cultural and a-political activities. Fieldwork showed that there is a need to increase the participation of migrant organizations in funded projects for migrant participation and integration. These needs are undermined by the lack of positive measures enhancing migrant participation in EU and national funding.

Increase participation of individual migrants in administration and consulting

Especially highly skilled migrants with activist experience are key persons to the successful implementation of projects and policies promoting and enhancing migrant participation in economic, social and political life since they are able to identify problematic areas and the real needs of migrants. An example is the case of an

Italian project during which many immigrants were asked how often they would go to their family doctor, overlooking the fact that most immigrants don't even have one.

Take into account biographical resources when designing and implementing policies and projects for migrant participation

In all cases, interviewees reported difficulties in integrating in the local labour market and the local society that in many cases included isolation, a sense of dislocation and bewilderment with regards to migrant trajectories. However, in most cases, they managed to overcome these problems through individual strategies and ethnic community support. "Informal mentoring" practices have proven to be very beneficial, whilst at the same time formative experiences of deprivation have given motivation for activism and work that would benefit the whole community and/or ethnic group. The need to help other, especially newly arriving migrants, was expressed in several narratives. However, this need was hardly encouraged by existing support mechanisms and policies aimed at encouraging migrant integration. From this perspective, we can identify the need to include a biographical perspective, emphasizing mentoring practices, in existing policy making on migration.

As the Spanish report emphasizes, most of participants had a previous participation experiences in their home countries. What was underlined during the interviews was the need to get visible these trajectories of participation, valuing them and exchanging experiences.

From a gender perspective, there is a need to make visible the informal ways of women's participation, and to value different ways of participation others than those existing in the country of destination (Spanish report).

"My way of seeing participation go through what I have lived since I was very young and what my family has given me, right? And it is this form of informal participation. I had never known an association until I moved to Barcelona, but what is explained in a more formal way here, I've somehow already experienced at an informal level. And I always say that there are other ways, other mechanisms, which must be considered too: the informal participation." (Woman, interview).

Addressing multiple alliances and multiple fields of participation

For most of the active migrants who participated in the fieldwork, participation in one of the designated fields also led to participation in other fields. For example in Germany and Spain, it was shown that migrant women often start their involvement in social and political activities in schools and day care centres. Although they enter the participatory routes by engaging into stereotypically female activities, they often end up being involved in other sectors, such as trade unions or local politics. An example is Margarita, a migrant from Albania in Greece who started as a mother and teacher of the native language and ended up as President of an ethnic organization Federation and member of the Athens SEM. The need to encourage such trajectories and use such individuals as mentors is strongly emphasized by several interviewees.

Addressing gender issues in migrant participation

Gender neutral policies and practices tend to undermine women's ability to participate in social and political life. The double burden of work and care is undoubtedly a factor that prevents migrant participation in all of the national case studies. The need to address women's lack of time is a pressing need not only for institutions, such as trade unions, municipal migrant councils or political parties, but also migrant and ethnic groups, associations and federations.

6. Alternative participatory routes

New forms of unionization

The fieldwork has shown that in sectors with strong migrant participation, migrants are able to engage more actively with union activities and solve through union participation every-day problems linked to migrant status and needs. Moreover, in feminized migrant sectors, such as domestic work and care, new forms of unionization have emerged that may be considered as models that should be taken into account by more mainstream and larger unions.

For example, in Greece, there has been a shift among working class migrants towards taking initiatives for self-organization and for participation in primary level - even informal- unions, ensuring direct democratic procedures and practices. This trend has given a new push to unionization, in which migrants seem to be much more included". New forms of unionization include migrant or ethnically based unions, such as DIWATA in Greece. "Being faced with diminished- at best - access to

and limited or even zero participation in trade unions, Filipino women have taken a different course turning to the community in order to self-organize, deal with and find solutions to their pressing problems (e.g. maltreatment from employers, unemployment, child care, skills to manage resources, support their families here and back home, limited cash flow etc). The ethnic migrant community has offered them an umbrella under which to plan and implement a number of labour rights actions and so far they have succeeded in turning solidarity into something tangible with a positive effect on the lives of both women and men". Although DIWATA has so far no formal legal role and has an all Filipino membership, it has been an organization that has managed to help its members overcome some of the main labour issues that they face in the largely informal sector of domestic work in Greece. The enactment of migrant women's rights, labour rights, social and political rights, is in sharp contrast to its absence from formal labour procedures, negotiations and consulting and its lack of recognition by the established labour unions. As Tessa, a member of the network, explained, the DIWATA may have reached a point where acquiring a legal status and becoming more independent may define its future (Greek report).

"We need to open up. But we need support and more knowledge to do this. We are working on this, but it will take time, as other needs are more pressing." (Interview with Tessa).

New forms of participation that emerge in school and parents' councils as formative experience

Participation in school and parents' councils constitutes for many migrant women a formative experience that often, but not always, may lead to further involvement with migrant politics and local politics. In the German and the Spanish case studies, there are biographical examples of such pathways and the ways in which they may open new routes for participation for even more migrant women and men.

As the Spanish report notes, "Parents associations seem to be a crucial social space for building networks, a space which has a privileged connection with women and men of very different profiles. Promoting networking from a gender perspective could also be a strategy that opens up new pathways. The relationship between the women's movement and associations of migrants and between the women's

movement and parents' associations were pointed out as a very strategic route of participation." (Spanish report).

"I think the parents association...I receive more than what I give. Maybe I give time, but I get friends, I receive information (...) For example, you need, someday, you need anything and someday you solve many things...it is a matter of being in contact with significant people" (Woman, interview).

The development of these social spaces and their treatment as political spaces will further reinforce migrant participation in all fields of political activity.

New forms of local political participation

Local political participation depends on legal and institutional conditions as well as on cultural factors. As the research has shown, legal rules on municipal migrant councils and migrants' rights to vote in local elections opens up new pathways to political participation. However, unless these legal rules acquire political substance and are supported by local political culture they run the risk of becoming meaningless. Many migrant narratives, especially in Greece and Italy demonstrate how promising changes at the policy level become useless and ineffective tools when political support is lacking and institutional racism prevails. Contrary to the failure of municipal migration councils in Greece, one could identify the Barcelona migrant council as a pathway to political participation for many migrants who are active in one or several of the fields studied.

Intercultural interactions

Different forms of intercultural interaction acquire a political meaning in migrant narratives. Through participation in a variety of activities, migrants are able to participate in local politics in ways that may not be immediately visible from the perspective of formal institutions and procedures. In Margarita's narrative, for example, most of the experiences of social and political participation were mediated through language learning. Language constitutes a vehicle not only of linguistic but also of cultural understanding. Because of her ability to work with different languages (English, Albanian and Greek) she was also able to cross ethnic cultural boundaries and enter new areas of intercultural interaction. Language becomes a political issue that determines questions of solidarity and migrant alliances across ethnic, cultural and gendered divisions. The first acts of solidarity that she described

concern a free Greek language class that she participated in. She described how solidarity developed amongst migrants of different nationalities taking part in this group and how gradually each one of them was able to bring something of their own culture to the class (Greek report). Experience of mutual learning and cultural/linguistic translation become very important in migrant political activism and participation: Margarita as a teacher was able to learn from other teachers and students not only Greek but also the customs and traditions of other migrants. Through this experience she was able to share with others her knowledge and love of language, but also to enhance her ability to work with people from different cultural backgrounds. What was built in this class was important for her since it made her realize the significance of intercultural interaction, which served later as a "guide" for her participation in the migrant municipal council.

7. Concluding remarks

The results of the qualitative fieldwork demonstrated the convergences in the participation of migrants between European societies, but also showed divergences, which are especially linked to the ways in which the economic crisis has affected Southern European societies and Germany. In general, the factors that enhance and prevent migrant participation are multiple and complex ranging from personal resources and gender to legislation and political culture. Moreover, there are differences in the three sectors studied.

In all case studies, migrant legal status and employment conditions determine access to social, political and economic life. In countries, like Greece and Spain, that have been most severely hit by the economic crisis, the threat of unemployment and the consequent loss of legal status severely undermine the prospects of participation, while it may also cut short successful participatory trajectories. This threat, however, although less felt in Germany and Italy still constitutes a determining factor that prevents further engagement especially with local politics and trade unions.

The gender factor is very important in understanding migrant participation, but also in identifying forms and norms of active citizenship. While women obviously suffer a double burden and gender stereotyping that contributes to their exclusion from dominant structures, they also develop through their networks and individual

trajectories significant alternative routes for participation, such as domestic workers unions, parents' councils and political alliances at the local level.

Finally, it is important to stress that from the narratives collected during the fieldwork, we can discern that in migrant lives patterns of passivity or activity often are interchangeable. Migrants who once appeared to be very active politically turn into passive political subjects and the reverse depending on the changing circumstances and life phases. In other words, most migrant lives are not characterized by stable and unchanging features, stable patterns or even linear progressions but rather by the different conditions that prevail at different stages of migrant trajectories. This is mostly a feature occurring in unstable legal and employment context and in particular of the South European countries. Also, this is especially the case for migrant women. Both Aisha and Konstantina in the Greek case study had spent certain periods of their lives during which they were very active in local politics, becoming candidates and participating in local elections, but were later forced to step back into inactivity because of increasing care responsibilities. While for Aisha this meant that motherhood had deprived her of the time she was spending on political activity, for Konstantina it signified a complete abandonment of political activity, which was necessary in order for her to work as a live-in domestic carer of an elderly lady in a remote area.

8. Policy recommendations

Labour Unions

- Improve representation of migrants in higher levels of hierarchy in labour unions through quotas
- Recognize migrant, especially migrant women's, labour unions, activities and initiatives
- Promote labour demands that help to stabilize migrants' legal residence status
- Develop gender mainstreaming strategies targeting migrant women in labour unions.

School and Parents' Councils

- Encourage the dissemination of information amongst migrants on school and parents councils
- Promote intercultural interactions in schools through parent-teacher activities organized by councils

-Improve the agenda of parent's councils to include issues linked to migrant families and parents

Local politics

- Legally recognize the right of migrants to participate in the local elections
- Institutionalize the consultative role of migrant organizations not only in the migrant councils but also in the Municipal councils.
- Provide political as well as financial support for their political and cultural activities
- Develop gender mainstreaming strategies in migrant councils
- Disseminate information on the significance of migrants', especially female migrants' involvement in local politics (training, advocacy, information campaigns)
- Promote successful cases of migrants who have succeeded in becoming influential in migrant politics.

Migration policies

- Move the policy and public Agendas on migration at the European, national and local level to include more discussions and actions on the positive aspects of migrant participation
- Promote positive participation of migrants, especially women, in all areas and levels of local political decision making: not only to have access to participatory spaces, but also to ensure equal opportunities within the areas and promote their leadership
- Promote and implement mentoring schemes for participation in labour market and in political fields

Gender policies

- Challenge gender and ethnic stereotypes in trade union and local politics through information campaigns and workshops
- Promote positive policies for the equal representation of female and male migrants in local elections
- Encourage the negotiation of time and schedules with all stakeholders from a gender perspective

Diversity policies

-Design specific diversity plans to welcome new migrant members into associations and provide them with support (e.g. in parents' associations) is considered as a possible strategy. Providing training to implement those plans.

-Develop the introduction of gender issues, intersectionality and participation into diversity policies fighting migration stereotypes.