

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



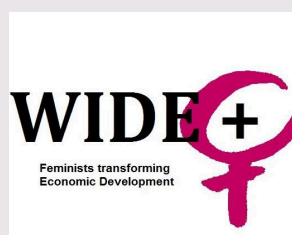
GENDER
AND DEVELOPMENT
IN PRACTICE

Report

WOMEN'S VOICES 2

Immigrant Women's Political Participation

April 20th, 2023
Viktoriahuset i Göteborg



Organisers: GADIP (Gender and Development in Practice) in cooperation with Wide+ (Women in Development) and ABF (Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund). Funded by the WE-EMPOWER project and co-funded by the European Union Erasmus+ project.

This report was written by Nancy Contreras, Allis Millegård and Sara Erlandsson.
Translated from Swedish by Allis Millegård and Sara Erlandsson.
Graphic Design by Nancy Contreras.

GADIP 2024
www.gadip.se
info@gadip.se
Göteborg, Sverige

We-Empower Partner Organisations



Alianza por la
Solidaridad

act:onaid



In cooperation with



List of contents

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. List of Abbreviations and Organisations..... | 3 |
| 2. Introduction..... | 4 |
| 2.1 About GADIP..... | 4 |
| 2.2 Women's Voices: Immigrant Women's Political Participation..... | 5 |
| 3. Folkbildning (Popular Adult Education) and Study circles in Sweden..... | 6 |
| 4. Study Circles - a Collaborative Strategy for Inclusive and Equitable Popular Education..... | 6 |
| 4.1 GADIP and ABFs Study circles..... | 6 |
| 4.2 Aims of the Project..... | 7 |
| 4.3 Study Circles with Immigrant Women in Practice..... | 7 |
| 4.4 Together with Baby Project..... | 9 |
| 4.5 Results of the Study Circles..... | 10 |
| 4.6 Good Practice for Study Circles..... | 10 |
| 5. Experiences from Addressing Language and Socio-economic Barriers..... | 13 |
| 5.1 Language and Integration Challenges..... | 13 |
| 5.2 GADIP's Strategies for Addressing the Challenges..... | 13 |
| 5.3 Building Community and Empowerment Through Associations..... | 14 |
| 6. Red de Mujeres Latinoamericanas in Spain: Political Schools..... | 15 |
| 6.1 About Red de Mujeres Latinoamericanas..... | 15 |
| 6.2 Political Schools as a Method..... | 15 |
| 6.3 Challenges and Lessons learned from the Project..... | 17 |
| 6.4 Advantages of Political Schools as a Method..... | 18 |

1. List of Abbreviations and Organisations

| | |
|--------------|---|
| ABF | Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (Workers' Educational Association) |
| Erasmus+ | EU Programme for Education, Training, Youth and Sport |
| Folkbildning | Popular Adult Education |
| GADIP | Gender and Development in Practice |
| Study circle | A democratic workshop |
| S-Kvinnor | The women's wing of the Swedish Social Democratic Party |
| We-Empower | The international project Expanding tools in Addressing Barriers for Migrant Women to Participate in Democratic Life' |
| Wide+ | Women in Development, Belgium |

2.- Introduction

2.1 About GADIP

GADIP was founded in 2007 in Gothenburg and established as a nonprofit organisation in 2012. It is a dynamic network that unites feminists from academia and civil society. As an independent organisation, GADIP fosters dialogue and knowledge exchange on gender and development issues both within Sweden and globally. The organisation unites academics, practitioners and feminist activists to address critical global challenges from a gender perspective.

GADIP collaborates closely with the European network WIDE+, connecting with over 60 practitioners and researchers across Europe. GADIP is currently engaged in two key EU-supported projects - WE-EMPOWER, focused on overcoming barriers to migrant women's participation in democratic life, and COPGendered, centred on gender and climate justice - and continues to drive impactful change.

GADIP organises international feminist conferences that address pressing global issues from a gender perspective. The conference of 2022, Gender Backlash 3, examined the impact of the anti-gender movement in Sweden, strategies for trans-inclusive feminism, and the successful mobilisation for abortion rights in Argentina and Ireland. It also highlighted the resistance of Belarusian feminists leading peaceful initiatives for a democratic, violence-free Belarus.

Gadip's board



3. Folkbildning (Popular Adult Education) and Study circles in Sweden

Study circles have been part of Swedish popular education for many years and are rooted in the idea that learning is 'for and by the people'. This approach originated in the late 19th century and was introduced by the working class, the LO trade union and the COOP cooperative. By the beginning of the 20th century, study circles had become an important method of mobilising communities to improve living conditions. Through democratic and egalitarian education, these labour groups sought to raise the economic status of the working class. They eventually formed what is now Sweden's largest political party, the Social Democrats.

The study circle's pedagogy helped workers reach a higher level of knowledge and access the information relevant to getting other jobs. Workers, trade unions and cooperatives came together to form what is now known as ABF, Workers Educational Association. ABF is a school for adults where study circles are the basis of their pedagogy. The goal of the study circles is to have free access to education, culture and literature as part of a democratic and free process. With the slogan 'free and voluntary' a new way of teaching was created in Sweden.

4. Study Circles - a Collaborative Strategy for Inclusive and Equitable Popular Education

4.1 GADIP and ABFs Study circles

GADIP has collaborated with ABF Göteborg for many years, organising study circles and lectures on various topics related to gender, economic security and development. ABF (Workers' Educational Association) is an adult education institution founded by workers, trade unions and co-operatives, where study circles and popular education form the core of teaching.

Study circles are democratic workshops where participants learn about a specific topic over several sessions and develop skills to participate in group discussions. The learning process is based on horizontal participation without hierarchies. The study circles aim to ensure free access to education, culture and literature as part of a democratic and inclusive process.

4.2 Aims of the Project

GADIP has mainly used study circles as a method within the framework of the WE-EMPOWER project. The primary project objectives are to inform about and promote women's general and democratic rights, increase the participation of immigrant and refugee women in Swedish society and introduce women with little or no education, who are far from the labour market to a sustainable economic life. The project also aims to promote the 2030 Agenda's international sustainable development goals, particularly Goal 5, which focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in education, and to achieve sustainable social and economic development through community education. The initiative aims to create new educational opportunities for migrant women in cities like Gothenburg, where many women lack economic stability.

Specific objectives include creating a printed workbook for conducting study circles based on Sweden's 'free and voluntary' popular education system, as proposed by the working class for ABF. Further objectives include training women in relevant subjects and leading study circles in the community, enabling them to share knowledge after the project, creating resources for future initiatives and starting study circles that focus on sustainable economy, women's rights, health care and the links between these.

4.3 Study Circles with Immigrant Women in Practice

GADIP has organised a series of study circles in Trollhättan in cooperation with ABF. Following a request from a group of Somali women in Trollhättan, GADIP and ABF formed a working group with local politicians from the Social Democratic Women's Association. The aim was to start study circles on topics such as integration, the school system, healthcare and women's rights. The participants, Somali women from the organisations Strong Women and Shabelle, wanted to learn more about how schools and social services work, especially after negative experiences with municipal institutions, where some families felt they had lost authority over their children. Participants stated that it was a fresh start that strengthened their independence in life.

The first step was to create a study guide. Based on this guide, we started a series of study circles. The study circles were conducted with five sessions in the autumn of 2022 and were designed to empower the women by providing them with important information about their rights and increasing their understanding of women's participation in society. The primary goal was to increase these women's engagement in society and enable them to make informed, democratic choices. For many participants, this initiative marked a new beginning in their journey towards independence.

The study circles covered the following topics:

- New family structures
- Children's needs and rights
- International conventions: women's rights
- Domestic violence and honour-based violence
- Health care: the right to make decisions about your own body
- How social services work in the municipality



4.4 Together with Baby Project

In Lilla Edet, the municipality started a project to integrate migrant women on parental leave into Swedish society. The project required cooperation with different organisations and finding a suitable venue for the introductory meeting. A particular challenge was the language barrier and working with teaching for women who had little or no formal education. The study circle was in Swedish with translations into Somali. It took time to translate and go through questions as time was short.

GADIP, ABF and an integration group Lilla Edet municipality's integration group established study circles as a structured method to interact with these women in a calm and supportive environment, promoting integration. An initial study circle, 'Together with Baby', was organised by ABF together with the integration group in Lilla Edet. The circle included teaching the Swedish language and was complemented by music and instruments to sing with the children and babies, helping the women to learn Swedish through music.



Maria Norberg from Lilla Edet municipality and Nancy Contreras from GADIP and ABF worked together as project leaders in the project 'Together with Baby'. Maria describes the project as an integration opportunity for refugee women on maternity leave in Swedish society.

GADIP also contributed to the project by organising study circles focusing on women's rights. The study circle on women's rights started as an information tool for the group with the clear intention of raising awareness. Women's rights are human rights, and every woman should have access to this life-enhancing information. The discussions within these circles provided valuable information to the refugee mothers and some fathers who had recently arrived in Sweden and helped them navigate their new environment. The study circle was held every two weeks during a six-month period.

Maria Norberg and Nancy Contreras



4.5 Results of the Study Circles

According to Nancy Contreras, the outcome of the study circle was very successful thanks to the expertise of the working group on different topics. S-Kvinnor had experience working at the municipality and this made it easier to relate certain topics directly to reality. GADIP and ABF helped with the study plan and study guidance. Another factor that made the study circle successful was the continuity and openness to talk about difficult topics, such as domestic violence or honour-related violence against women. The working group received a very good response from the Somali group after the study circle. The women reflected on the information they had received and were grateful for the time the two groups spent together.

The main results of the study circle were:

- **Empowerment and engagement:** In Trollhättan, 30 women gained essential knowledge about democratic principles and practices. This led to the participants from the NGO Starka kvinnor (Strong Women) taking their own initiatives for study circles and continuing to work on the Swedish language and social issues.
- **Improved democratic awareness:** Participants engaged with a range of topics, including international conventions, children's needs, the Swedish school system, sexuality, and issues of violence and oppression, deepening their understanding of democratic values and their rights.
- **Successful collaboration:** The project effectively involved local politicians and a school teacher, which enriched learning and provided practical insights into the functioning of local institutions.
- **Improved integration and access:** In Lilla Edet, 20 women improved their Swedish language skills and received an introduction to human rights, facilitating their integration into Swedish society. The project's collaboration with the municipality led to improved access to key services, including health centres and schools, benefiting both the participants and their families.

4.6 Good Practice for Study Circles

Good practices to facilitating study circles effectively involves multiple key strategies to ensure productive, inclusive, and engaging discussions:

1. Create a Welcoming Environment

- **Foster Inclusivity:** Ensure that all participants feel welcomed and valued. Encourage respect for diverse opinions and experiences.
- **Set Ground Rules:** Establish guidelines for respectful communication and active listening at the outset.

2. Prepare Thoroughly

- **Set Clear Objectives:** Define the goals of the study circle and what participants should gain from the sessions.
- **Organise Materials:** Prepare relevant resources, handouts, and discussion prompts in advance.

3. Facilitate Open Dialogue

- **Encourage Participation:** Use open-ended questions to stimulate discussion and encourage everyone to share their perspectives.
- **Balance Contribution:** Ensure that all voices are heard by actively involving quieter members and managing dominant voices.

4. Use Structured Methods

- **Plan Sessions:** Outline the structure for each session, including discussion topics, activities, and time management.
- **Employ Various Techniques:** Utilise different facilitation techniques such as small group discussions, role-playing, and case studies to keep participants engaged.

5. Promote Critical Thinking

- **Challenge Assumptions:** Encourage participants to question and critically analyse the material and each other's viewpoints.
- **Support Exploration:** Allow time for deep exploration of topics and provide opportunities for participants to reflect on their learning.

6. Foster Group Dynamics

- **Build Trust:** Develop a sense of community and trust among participants by being approachable and supportive.
- **Encourage Collaboration:** Promote teamwork and peer learning through group activities and collaborative problem-solving.

7. Be Adaptable

- **Respond to Needs:** Be flexible and responsive to the needs and interests of the participants, adjusting the facilitation approach as necessary.
- **Handle Challenges:** Address conflicts or difficulties in a constructive manner, maintaining a focus on the group's objectives.

8. Evaluate and Reflect

- **Seek Feedback:** Regularly solicit feedback from participants on the effectiveness of the sessions and areas for improvement.
- **Reflect on Practice:** Continuously assess and refine your facilitation techniques based on feedback and personal reflection.

9. Encourage Action

- **Apply Learning:** Facilitate discussions on how participants can apply what they've learned in their own lives or communities.
- **Follow-Up:** Provide resources and support for continued learning and action beyond the study circle.

5. Experiences from Addressing Language and Socio-economic Barriers

5.1 Language and Integration Challenges

Limited proficiency in Swedish often impedes communication, access to services, and employment opportunities for migrant women. The language barrier makes it difficult for them to access education and vital societal information. Coupled with responsibilities such as childcare and household management, these women face significant obstacles to learning Swedish and engaging with society. Additionally, a lack of access to technology or inadequate digital skills restricts their ability to obtain essential information and educational resources. Many migrant women also encounter challenges in establishing a sustainable economic presence, exacerbated by limited access to current economic information and cultural knowledge. This issue has become particularly acute in Sweden since the migration wave of 2015, with many migrant women struggling to enter the labour market. Research on democratic participation among refugees in Sweden highlights a gap in understanding the importance of democracy and political engagement, leading to reduced interest in decision-making processes and increased marginalisation.

5.2 GADIP's Strategies for Addressing the Challenges

GADIP has effectively tackled these challenges through its study circles, enhancing accessibility and support for migrant women. The "Together with Baby" project, for instance, addressed barriers to participation by allowing migrant mothers on maternity leave to bring their children to meetings. This initiative not only facilitated Swedish language learning but also improved access to societal information and integration opportunities.

In Trollhättan, study circles organised by GADIP created a community space for immigrant women to learn about Swedish society, essential services, and their rights. These circles provided a safe and inclusive environment for discussing democratic processes and understanding their roles within Swedish society. The success of these study circles underscores their effectiveness in making education and language learning more accessible to immigrants, particularly women.

By fostering a democratic and inclusive learning environment, GADIP ensures that every participant's voice is valued and heard, enhancing their ability to practise human rights and engage in political participation.

5 Key Takeaways:

1. **Effective Empowerment through Study Circles:** Study circles offer a democratic and inclusive learning environment, empowering migrant women by educating them on their rights and societal functions, which aids in their integration and active participation.

2. **Addressing Language Barriers:** Language proficiency is a major hurdle for migrant women. Initiatives like "Together with Baby," which combine language learning with childcare, effectively make education more accessible and facilitate integration.

3. **Managing Socio-Economic Challenges:** Study circles that cover practical topics like financial management and local economic systems help migrant women tackle financial and employment challenges, improving their economic stability and job prospects.

4. **Providing Safe and Supportive Spaces:** Study circles create a safe, community-focused space for discussing sensitive issues, fostering trust and open dialogue, which enhances the learning experience and supports integration.

5. **Benefits of Local Collaboration:** Collaborating with local organisations and leaders enriches study circles, ensuring they address relevant issues and provide practical insights into local systems, thus improving participants' integration and empowerment.

5.3 Building Community and Empowerment Through Associations

Research shows that participation in civil society organisations can empower migrants, offering them a platform to voice their concerns and better integrate into the host society. In Sweden, refugees have the right to form organisations, supported by the state through the Agency for Youth and Civil Society. Many local refugee organisations join national networks or umbrella groups, which facilitate integration and civic engagement.

6. Red de Mujeres Latinoamericanas in Spain: Political Schools

6.1 About Red de Mujeres Latinoamericanas

As part of the WE-EMPOWER project, a seminar was held called: Women's voices for greater democracy. In addition to the previously mentioned; Nancy Contreras from GADIP/ABF and Maria Nordberg from Lilla Edet municipality, Delmi Galeano, an activist from the Spanish organisation Red de Mujeres Latinoamericanas, took part in the seminar.

Delmi Galeano shared her own experiences as an activist and talked about the work of Red de Mujeres Latinoamericanas, also known as Red Latinas, in Spain. The organisation Red Latinas was created to ensure that immigrant women have a powerful voice in their own narratives. Red Latinas brings together 13 associations and individual feminists of Latin American origin in Spain and transforms the role of immigrant women from objects of study to active political actors. The network promotes empowerment, mutual support and respectful dialogue, defending the rights of immigrant women and highlighting their important contribution to social, political and cultural development. Red Latinas emphasises the importance of resilience and diverse experiences and works to build collective thinking that promotes active participation in society.

6.2 Political Schools as a Method

Furthermore, Delmi Galeano spoke about their methods, known as Political Schools. Political schools are educational institutions dedicated to teaching individuals about political processes, civic participation and advocacy, with a focus on empowering marginalised groups. They provide a comprehensive curriculum that includes political theory, governance, public policy, human rights and social justice, along with practical skills such as campaign strategies and public speaking.

These schools often target specific groups, including women, migrants and young people, helping them to understand their rights and engage with political systems effectively. Political schools promote collective action and solidarity by focusing on civic engagement and grassroots organising. Many political schools also link to broader social movements and provide participants with the skills to conduct effective advocacy work. This includes training on how to interact with decision-makers and influence public opinion.

Using methods such as popular education, these schools encourage experiential learning and personal reflection to deepen political awareness. As a method, political schools play a crucial role in promoting democratic participation and social justice by empowering individuals to become active and informed citizens.

The Political School organised by Red Latinas is specifically designed to increase political participation among migrant women in Spain. However, it is important to note that this model can also be beneficially applied in Sweden and other countries, where migrant women face similar challenges. It focuses on empowering immigrant women by providing them with knowledge and skills related to citizenship, political engagement and how to deal with the particular challenges they face, especially in terms of gender-based violence and systemic barriers.

The Political School's methodological approach is based on several key principles:

- **Popular education:** The schools followed the principles of popular education, emphasising experiential learning and active participation. This approach encouraged participants to connect the material to their own experience and context.
- **Feminist perspectives and reflective participatory action research:** Focusing on both the content and the learning process. This encouraged participants to reflect on their experiences and the societal structures that affect their lives.
- **Experiential education techniques:** The program used experiential pedagogical techniques, integrating the body, emotions and actions into the learning process. This holistic approach aimed to engage participants on multiple levels.
- **Participatory methods:** The sessions were designed to be interactive, allowing participants to share insights, experiences and knowledge. This collaborative environment fostered a sense of community and solidarity.
- **Transformative learning:** Central to the education model was a transformative learning aspect that helped participants see their personal experiences as political and use collective reflection as a tool for social change. The aim was to empower participants to act/engage within their communities.

6.3 Challenges and Lessons learned from the Project

Delmi Galeano also discussed key lessons learned from the implementation of political schools. The political schools project was overall successful, but challenges still needed to be solved. Many migrant women in Spain face precarious working conditions, with irregular working hours, low wages and insecure employment. These factors affect their personal and political lives, making consistent engagement in political education and advocacy difficult. Additionally, a widespread sense of scepticism towards politics can further complicate an active engagement. This scepticism, often rooted in negative experiences with or perceptions of political systems, can lead to a lack of commitment and reluctance to engage in political processes and advocacy.

The political schools, which mainly targeted Spanish-speaking migrant women, also faced language barriers. Many participants were not fluent in Spanish, which hampered their ability to understand and engage with the education. In addition to this, the transition to a fully remote online format presented a number of challenges. Many of the migrant women faced problems of unreliable internet service, inadequate technical equipment and insufficient technical skills to participate effectively in an online learning environment.

To address these challenges, Red Latinas implemented several solutions. Flexible scheduling and recorded content allowed participants to attend the sessions at their convenience. During the in-person sessions, support services such as childcare and transportation assistance were offered. The political school also integrated motivational elements into its curriculum, including success stories, real-life case studies and practical examples of political advocacy, which helped to build confidence and motivation among participants. To address digital access challenges, the school provided technical support and training to improve participants' digital skills and ensure they could use the online platform effectively.

6.4 Advantages of Political Schools as a Method

Political schools offer significant benefits for migrant women. They strengthen migrant women's understanding of their rights and the political processes that affect their lives. By educating them about citizenship and participation, they are empowered to assert their rights and engage more actively in the political debate. The educational modules address the unique obstacles faced by migrant women, such as bureaucratic barriers to citizenship, lack of recognition of qualifications and experiences of violence. This targeted approach helps participants develop strategies to overcome these challenges effectively. The program encourages participants to transform their personal experiences into political agency. Through collective reflection and activism, migrant women can redefine their experiences and push for their needs and rights in their communities.

The school fosters a sense of community among participants, enabling them to share experiences, build solidarity and collaborate on advocacy work. The network offers ongoing support and resources for political engagement. By emphasising the concept of "care-citizenship", the schools highlight the importance of caring in political participation and encourage migrant women to see themselves as integrated citizens with a role in shaping their communities. The school aims to create a sense of political engagement among participants, motivating them to assert their rights and actively engage in political processes, including advocating for policy changes that benefit migrant communities.

Delmi Galeano, Sedoac



Red latinas y del Caribe