

## RESEARCH

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# AFRICAN ASSOCIATIONS IN CATALONIA: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

## *Asociaciones africanas en Cataluña: fortalezas y debilidades*

Núria Llevot Calvet.<sup>1</sup> University of Lleida. Spain

[nllevot@pip.udl.cat](mailto:nllevot@pip.udl.cat)

María Paz López Teulón. University of Lleida. Spain

[mpaz@pip.udl.cat](mailto:mpaz@pip.udl.cat)

### ABSTRACT

The evolution of the migratory phenomenon in Spain has led, among other issues, to the continuous growth of organizations created by immigrants. This increase takes place, on the one hand, due to the interest of the Africans themselves and, on the other hand, because of the will of the representatives of the administrations to generate interlocutors facilitating contact with immigrants. Likewise, the positions taken by different policies (state and autonomous) are fundamental when conditioning the roles played by immigrant associations. This study<sup>2</sup>, in the realization of which the qualitative methodology (in-depth interviews) has been used with a territorial perspective, covers all of Catalonia, it focuses the object of study on immigration and associationism of African immigrants and, more particularly, in their needs and their demands to public and private institutions.

### KEY WORDS

African immigration - Associationism - Public Administrations - Catalanian Nongovernmental Organizations.

### RESUMEN

La evolución del fenómeno migratorio en España ha comportado, entre otras cuestiones, el continuo crecimiento de organizaciones creadas por inmigrantes. Este aumento se produce, por una parte, por el interés de los propios africanos y, por otra, por la voluntad que tienen los representantes de las administraciones de generar interlocutores que faciliten el contacto con los inmigrantes. Asimismo son

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Núria Llevot Calvet<sup>1</sup> University of Lleida. Spain.

[nllevot@pip.udl.cat](mailto:nllevot@pip.udl.cat)

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fundamentales las posiciones que adoptan las diferentes políticas (estatales y autonómicas) al condicionar los papeles que desempeñan las asociaciones de inmigrantes.

Este estudio<sup>3</sup> en cuya realización se ha empleado metodología cualitativa (entrevistas en profundidad) con una perspectiva territorial abarca toda Cataluña, centra el objeto de estudio en la inmigración y el asociacionismo de los inmigrantes africanos y, más particularmente, en las necesidades que tienen y en las demandas que dirigen a instituciones públicas y privadas.

#### **PALABRAS CLAVE**

Inmigración africana - Asociacionismo - Administraciones públicas - Organizaciones No Gubernamentales catalanas.

### **ASSOCIAÇÕES AFRICANAS EM CATALUNHA - FORTALEZAS E DEBILIDADES**

#### **RESUMO**

A evolução do fenómeno migratório na Espanha comportou, entre outras questões, o continuo crescimento de organizações criadas por imigrantes. Este aumento se produz, por uma parte, o interesse dos próprios africanos e por outra, a vontade que tem os representantes das administrações de gerar interlocutores que facilitem o contato com esses imigrantes. Também são fundamentais as posições que adotam as diferentes políticas (estatais e autonômicas) ao condicionar os papéis que desempenham as associações de imigrantes. Este estudo cuja realização se empregou uma metodologia qualitativa (entrevistas em profundidade) com uma perspectiva territorial abarca toda a Catalunha, centra o objetivo de estudo na imigração e a associacionismo dos imigrantes africanos e, particularmente mais, nas necessidades que tem nas demandas que dirigem a instituições públicas e privadas.

#### **PALAVRAS CHAVE**

Imigração africana - associacionismo - Administrações públicas - Organizações não Governamentais catalães.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study lays emphasis on the associationism of immigrants. Partnering means voluntarily joining with a common purpose and objective. In general, within the associations, sensitivities and interests are shared, which allows people to deepen the analysis of reality and take action to achieve the proposed objectives, whatever they may be. There are many reports pointing out that participation in associations promotes trust and commitment in their members (Halpern, 2005).

Specifically, Morales and Mota (2006), in their study of associationism in Spain, confirm that the Spanish case appears as a representative of the so-called southern syndrome of low levels of participation in associations, although the trend is toward gradual growth.

Over the last thirty years, the phenomenon of associationism of immigrants in Spain has been studied, among others, by a number of researchers (Veredas, 1999; Lluch, 2000, Morell, 2005; Morales and Anduiza, 2009; Aparicio and Tornos 2010; Gadea and Albert, 2011 and Garreta *et al*, 2013) who, in general, believe that the active participation of immigrants through associative entities facilitates their participation in the host society, increases their civic commitment and makes it possible to respond to their basic needs.

This study, in which a qualitative methodology has been used (in-depth interviews) with a territorial perspective that covers the field of Catalonia, focuses the object of study on immigration and associationism. In this paper, we aim to analyze the different stories we were told by the technicians of the public (local, regional, autonomous) administrations and the interviewed representatives of the entities and NGOs that had as objective to work in favor of the African immigrants in Catalonia.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are shown below:

- 1) Review the evolution of associationism of African immigrants in Spain and Catalonia.
- 2) Detect the existing discourses of the technicians of the public administrations and institutions who, due to their activity, are interlocutors of the associations of immigrants.
- 3) Describe the needs of these associations and the demands they address to public and private institutions.
- 4) Present the interventions that are designed and implemented in associations.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

We opted for a double methodology. First, from the research group, we defined the associations of African immigrants in Catalonia from a quantitative perspective (we conducted a survey to find out the year of creation of the associations, the number and profile of the partners and beneficiaries, the organizational structure, objectives and activities, coordination with other institutions and organizations, etc.).

And then we laid emphasis on the qualitative analysis, for which reason we conducted twenty interviews to representatives of administrations and institutions who are interlocutors with associations of African immigrants in Catalonia.

The profile of the sample corresponding to the representatives of the administrations and institutions is composed of ten men and seventeen women, with an average age of forty years. Out of them, sixteen held positions of technicians in various Catalan public administrations and eleven were responsible for the areas of immigration in entities with the following cast: six in NGOs, four in entities related to unions and one in a neighborhood association. Their training profile corresponds mainly to graduates, qualified workers and graduates in Social Sciences, and four of them had received specific training in the migratory phenomenon.

We believe that, in general, the interviewed people who work in the administrations and entities express their commitment to the management of the migratory phenomenon and have witnessed its evolution in Catalonia, adapting to the needs and peculiarities in each territory. At the time of the fieldwork, their great concern was that the budget cuts due to the economic crisis did not affect some projects and they would have to do without consolidated services.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

A first common perception in most of the interviewees, and coinciding with Garreta, Palaudàrias and Serra (2008), is that most of the African associations move away from the theoretical model of "Catalonian associationism", which wants to see associations as cultural non-profit entities, with a transparent structure and management and with a rigid regulation.

The interviewees believe that African immigrants come from other countries where the concept of associationism is different from ours, they organize themselves differently and also have another vision of what an entity is, maybe they see it rather as a resource of support for their own group.

At the same time, they acknowledge that they are - in general - quite ignorant of the internal structure of associations: whether they are officially registered or not; of the organization chart; of the changes of their representatives (ENEMHLL10<sup>4</sup>), of whether they remain active all the time (ENEHT10, ADEMB10I, ADEHG10III), etc. But they do distinguish that there is a minority of associations that work well and are more present because they have hired personnel who can devote the whole working day to the projects of the association. And, on the contrary, there is a majority of smaller African associations, with willing people with a lot of desire but few resources -of all kinds-, even of personal subsistence and who are accustomed to functioning as informal networks of mutual aid (ADEMT10). Even some of them are not registered (ADEHG10III).

In order to better understand the African associative panorama, some administrations consider creating a reliable registry (ADEMT10II) to be able to contact associations more easily.

They mention that, when the seat is a civic center or a space where they socialize, they only have as reference the mobile phone number of the representative or an email or the home address and this obviously makes the relationship difficult "(...) associations that have no premises and meet in the house of the secretary or the president" (ENEMB10); besides doubting that the associations can develop their daily activities normally.

Other administrations, such as the *Municipal Council of Immigration* of Barcelona, have opted for a strategy they assure that works well: if they do not come for some time to the meetings to which they are summoned, they are discharged from the Council.

The second perception is that immigrant associations are useful, "*because they empower the African people*" (ADEMG10II) and become visible. To technicians, empowerment<sup>5</sup> is the belief that, through associations, it is easier for immigrants to participate in the host society and to have access to much more information than those not associated.

They are also related, even if only punctually, to other indigenous and immigrant entities and it is easier for Africans to participate in activities and in the life of the population where they reside. In addition, they believe that there is a clear objective: through associations, it is easier to work on what matters to the administration, such as female genital mutilation or other issues that affect them culturally or are of interest to them (gender perspective).

Although, from the administrations, they recognize that there are many immigrants who are not associated, they believe that those who are the ones who are more willing to be part of the host society.

Thanks to the visibility of associations, the host society realizes that Africans exist, that they live among us and that they are not only labor force but full citizens, "*as they are citizens, they associate and carry out activities like the ones we can do, and I think they can be a support point and can do many things for which they are coming and a lot of pedagogy*" (ENEMG10II).

In fact, the interviewees agree that Africans already have a long tradition of meeting, of grouping, of associating, and this happens much more than in other groups of immigrants –such as Latin Americans or Asians.

In this sense, almost all representatives of Catalonian administrations, entities and NGOs recognize that, in recent years, there has been a very clear intention to encourage the growth of African associations. The state<sup>6</sup> and regional policies have influenced and indeed any technician (ENEHG10II) reminds us that, in the strategy of *Pla de Ciutadania i de les migracions: horitzó 2016*, they were encouraged to strengthen the associative movement among immigrants with the ultimate goal to favor their social integration and to have a contact person (ADEMLL10II).

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<sup>5</sup> "The empowerment, awareness of *me* as an immigrant, the *I* as a citizen in the host culture, of *us* as a group with transforming capacity and *us* together with the native population stand as fundamental structures for the construction of an inclusive society in which participation is *sine qua non* for a part of it" (Lewis *et al.*, 2015. 124).

<sup>6</sup> Organic Law in art. 69.

From the *Secretaria d'Immigració* of Girona, they think that having interlocutors is very important because they are aware that most host issues are solved in the informal networks: if you come to the interlocutor or the association representative you can access his network and encourage it. In addition, from "*by contacting immigrant organizations and gaining confidence with them, you can get to know in a more real way the situation in which they are*" (ADEHG10III).

At first, knowing that there were material and economic resources for immigrant associations caused some of said associations to be created very quickly with the idea of receiving aid, but they did not really have a broad social basis (ENEHG10II); in fact, the technicians of the autochthonous entities come to detect some association that is created only for personal purposes, such as repatriating the corpse of a fellow citizen or receiving a subsidy.

For this reason, some of the interviewed professionals are critical of this type of policy because they believe that they do not promote the quality of associationism but its quantity. Others, however, think that if the immigrant is offered the possibility of associating, he is being given part of the power of any citizen to say what he wants to do or to collaborate in making the host society better.

In any case, technicians recognize that the administration has been working closely with the associations to solve all the difficulties that arose at the time of their creation, registration and start-up (ADEMT10I, ADEHG10II).

And later, at the time of accessing public calls for aid to finance the projects and activities of the association. In general, interviewees consider that the administrations have been of great help in being involved in the training of those responsible for the associations.

According to the discourse of the interlocutors of entities and administrations, we can classify associations into two types: North African or Maghrebian and Sub-Saharan. If we discard the place of origin, the associations of women and those dedicated to co-development stand out because they consider they have grown the most in recent years.

#### **4.1. The associations of sub-Saharan immigrants**

The entities in the counties of the region of *Maresme* (Barcelona) say they have known them for many years because it is the first immigrant group that came over thirty years ago. They recognize that the first solidarity support came from the African communities themselves, they made sure newcomers did not sleep on the street, they fed them and found a place to house them. And then came the entities like *Cáritas* or the Red Cross and, finally, the administrations.

This efficiency in emergency situations leads technicians to consider that sub-Saharan associations work well, even if they are not registered, because they have a very powerful network of communities that continues to function for the reception, or in case someone runs out of money and cannot return, or to defray, in case of death, the expenses of repatriation of the corpse to his population of origin.

Entities in the demarcations of Girona and *l'Alt Empordà* (ENEHG10II, ADEMG10III, ENEHG10I, ADEMG10II) emphasize that, besides mutual aid, what characterizes sub-Saharan associations is their playful aspect and be a place of

cultural encounter. The associations are very masculinized and, therefore, they believe they do not have, in general, activities related to gender <sup>7</sup>.

The technicians of the administrations explain they have a good relationship with the sub-Saharan associations, and this partly has to do with the fact that their representatives quickly learn the Castilian and Catalan languages, which facilitates their communication; in any case, they are more autonomous, unlike the Maghrebis, who are with the whole family, and the sub-Saharans who come now are mostly young men with more education who turn less to social services.

Among sub-Saharan women, the Senegalese associations stand out, which seem to be the best known and the ones that enjoy better assessment in terms of participation level and organizational capacity. In this case, it is usual to recognize the academic training and the previous associative experience of their leaders as one of the reasons for their greater associative participation, but also the role of solidarity within the group, something that is not found even in other groups of sub-Saharans. They also note, like Massó (2013), that they perform a double function that could seem paradoxical since they serve both to generate dynamics among the Senegalese population and to generate integration in the society of arrival or, in other words, "they generate intergroup integration and intragroup integration" (Massó, 2013: 129), dynamics that are not contradictory but complementary. Of all of them, they coincide in pointing out the professionalized SENECAT association, which they define as a lay entity that fights for the promotion of the socio-cultural integration of the Senegalese community in Salt (Girona).

The administrations and entities of Tarragona also certify that Senegalese associations have grown in number in recent years, they are very active and know how to work very well as a group; but they show signs of weakness in terms of structure: they are localistic and do not have their own spaces and are accustomed to using the ones given to them by city councils (civic, cultural centers or adult schools) and also, as regards the number of members, since with the crisis they know that they move from one population to another in search of work.

NGOs perceive that there are many Senegalese associations with few members, and they believe that they would do better if they were fewer and with more members, in order to be a stronger voice before the administration. Although others believe that it does not have to be negative and it is more a matter of prejudices of the autochthonous society:

*" it is true that there are many, very split up, but their being a lot is better than their being just a few, as before" (ENEHG10I).*

In this sense, we have been struck by the fact that the discourse of the entities and NGOs was centered around the Senegalese associations, even though in our study we have contacted other sub-Saharan groups from Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Mauritania, Cameroon, Burkina Faso. While it is true that the Senegalese population in Catalonia is the first in terms of population<sup>8</sup>, nor is the population of immigrants

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<sup>7</sup> Virtually, all interviewed indigenous organizations refer to an association with great media presence, which fights against FGM AMAM, and that claim is well guided by the public administration.

<sup>8</sup> With a population of 20,280 Senegalese in 2014

from Gambia, Mali, Nigeria, Ghana or Mauritania lower. Only some technicians referred to other sub-Saharan African associations: Senegambians (ADEHG10III), associations closely linked to co-development projects.

There is also a certain concern by the immigration technicians for not promoting a very folkloric associationism that represents a very stereotyped image of sub-Saharan immigrants (ADEMLL10). And they recognize that, in recent years, their collaboration with sub-Saharan associations has focused especially on the drafting of transnational cooperation or co-development projects to help their populations of origin.

#### **4.2. The associations of North African or Maghrebian immigrants**

Interviewees identify two types of North African associations, some more linked to religious practice and others that are, so to speak, more secular.

The former are associations that interviewees identified as being linked to centers of Islamic cult, but they can also be a space for social and cultural meeting, since, as they explain, there the Arabic language and culture are also taught, as well as readings of the Koran. They are organized around the oratory, which serves as a mosque and allows them to fulfill their traditional precepts (Mata and Giró, 2013). These more religious associations have "more clarified issues of leadership and internal organization" (Mata and Giró 2013: 125-126) as well as a more formalized structure and more compact social relations thanks to common religious beliefs. In fact, they have associates, a board of directors and a treasurer like any other association, and some of them are registered in the regime of Islamic entities of Catalonia and Spain.

The interviewees of the districts of Tarragona believe that, in their districts, they have the oldest associations with their own headquarters and premises that they intend for the oratory. In general, migration technicians say they do not know the inner workings of these Islamic associations and how they finance themselves to maintain the facilities, although they do know that these associations have sufficient economic resources because practicing families have to give a percentage to the mosque ( ENEMLL10II).

Some of them express their concern about the increase in associations of a Salafist nature <sup>9</sup> in Girona and Tarragona, especially because of the media repercussion and the difficulty it may involve in the process of immigrant integration in small towns. Other interlocutors say they work very well with these associations and do not have any kind of prejudice in this regard.

In short, from the administrations and entities, it is considered that these associations -ones and others- are an important referent for the Muslims in each locality -also for the sub-Saharans-, even though, due to their mobility or their little integration, they do not always know one another, but they share a space of faith. In

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<sup>9</sup> Salafism involves a very strict and conservative interpretation of the sources of Islam, which means that it has to be an Islamic law to guide all aspects of life (clothing, food, education, etc.). Not so much a movement, it is rather a school of thought (Garcia-Romeral, 2013).

these Islamic associations, the sense of community is clearer and the relationships are more compact among a group of people who share religious beliefs.

The **second** North African associations, either secular or religious, are those that were created to meet legal problems of the first Maghrebis, especially those from Morocco who came to Catalonia. Over time they have evolved, and in addition to working for attention and welcome, they now focus on their integration into the host society. Although they are immigrant associations, their structure and operation is very similar to that of a non-governmental organization or company.

As a North African association of a lay nature, technicians have as reference the *Ibn Batuta* Association (which currently has several offices in Catalonia), founded by a group of university students of Moroccan origin who worked as monitors of the children of Moroccan families, teaching in their free time. Over time, these students also began to cover what was a basic need for the first families: human accompaniment in all administrative processes, enrollment in schools, etc., to later carry out different sociocultural projects. Based on the discourse of the technicians and professionals of the different autochthonous entities, they consider them in a more positive way than the religious ones. They say that these associations work in a very organized way and they relate to them since their beginning and consider them almost as an entity of the third sector.

We also want to mention other associations such as ATIMCA or *ADIB-Biladi* that also impinge upon two lines of work, immigration and development, and cover a wide range of projects, their scope goes beyond their own population and covers the whole of Catalonia. After a few years of recognition in the Maghrebian community, they now seek to consolidate their work with other entities, prioritize participation, carry out diverse activities and, above all, create public opinion in the local, regional and state media, and even in their country of origin on current issues that concern Maghrebian migrants. In addition, some technicians knew that these associations helped create other associations (such as the cultural and Islamic association of Côte d'Ivoire or Alcover) and were advising some mosques in the province of Tarragona, among others, the large mosque in Tarragona or the one in Valls.

NGOs point out that many North African unrelated to the religious phenomenon but related to their culture of origin are associated or have links with *imazighen* associations<sup>10</sup>, especially in district of Girona and Tarragona.

As for the relations between these two types of North African associations whose objectives are different, they have sometimes been confronted and it has been the indigenous entities which have had to approach positions, acting as mediators.

#### **4.3. The associations of African women**

"The strict separation of sexes, characteristic of certain cultures, also influences the roots of associationism, severely limiting the participation of

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<sup>10</sup> *imazighen* are considered the indigenous people of North Africa, whose territory was Arabized and Islamized in the seventh century. They are spread over a territory called *Ta mazigha*, comprising areas of Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Mauritania, Egypt, Mali and Niger. An estimated two-thirds of Moroccans in Catalonia are *imazighen*.

women in such structures (for example, Moroccan women in associations of an Islamic character), but also fostering, in parallel, the emergence of a feminine associative movement oriented to the attention to the problematic of this population in the new context "(Veredas, 2004, p. 99).

Migration technicians are aware of the presence of women in associations of men and, in some cases, of the existence of associations of immigrant women, established primarily from a country of shared origin. They also know about the existence of more or less informal networks of immigrant women that have cooperative experiences in economic activities.

From the *Secretaria de la Immigració* of Girona, they state that, since 2008, at the request of municipalities, there has been an increase in sub-Saharan women associations focused on literacy, fighting against female genital mutilation or just as a meeting point; in other administrations (ADEMT10II) women have been the ones who have come to public entities seeking advice and led by an intercultural female mediator (see Llevot and Garreta, 2013). Also, at the city council of Lleida they value the desire of African immigrant women to group, to share experiences, to solve conflicts and find elements for their integration through the associationism.

The local administrations and entities are the ones that above all have promoted associations, taking into account the gender variant and identifying those women who can have a role of reference and leadership that multiplies in their community. The role of these associations is essential for women to participate in all areas and for their voices to be represented in the links with administrations.

Finally, those associations that technicians denominate co-development associations stand out, because they intuit that the entire association is dedicated to this activity.

## **5. AS A MODE OF OPEN REFLECTIONS**

The technicians of the administrations expressed their satisfaction with the adoption of the Law on Reception in Catalonia, and the representatives of institutions and NGOs, on the one hand, say they feel very recognized by African immigrants and, on the other hand, very subject to state and regional migratory policies that determine local work.

### **5.1. Strengths**

Generally, they consider it to be a strength that having associations empowers immigrants, and public authorities are allowed to have direct access to their leaders, who become valid interlocutors to work with involvement policies; and in addition, it allows them to have greater access to their informal networks. Associations make Africans visible in the host society. Over time, the presence of African associations is being gradually normalized and they end up being part of the Catalan associative fabric.

They positively value the African associations as they consider said associations a tool to find references among the different groups, to implement socio-educational

activities of these entities and to promote social participation of immigrants. We believe that the representatives of the interviewed administrations and indigenous organizations recognize the value of associations of African immigrants, they say said associations are effective to welcome newcomers or to provide services or financial assistance in cases where it was necessary. In general, they promote the participation of immigrants in the host society.

Over time, the presence of African associations is being normalized and they end up being part of the Catalan associative fabric. There is a growing relationship with the autochthonous entities.

A big plus is the fact that these associations work on issues of interest to the administration, such as genital mutilation, gender perspective, etc.

And, finally, the efforts of representatives to learn how to create and manage an association in Catalonia and how to design and draft projects are appreciated.

## 5.2. Weaknesses

The interviewees working in public administrations and entities recognized, as a weakness, that immigrant associations do not always represent the social segments they are attached to. They also admit that, on many occasions, immigrants prefer to go to their associations because they say they solve their problems more effectively and allow them to establish social relationships and mutual support with their fellow citizens.

They agree that, in general, associations do not follow the theoretical model of a "Catalan association", which wants to see associations as cultural non-profit entities. In fact, some African associations operate rather as a resource for mutual aid, they do not even register in Catalonia.

They recognized that one of the weaknesses of associations is that, in general, they are quite ignorant of the internal structure of associations: their organization chart, whether they are officially registered or not, their functioning, their criteria to prioritize activities, etc., and this is something that should be improved in the future. In the case of associations acting in a more local context, they sometimes resort to different administrations to subsidize the organization of acts aimed at the entire population, which allow them to participate socially and obtain resources. In this regard, the authorities consider that they should have clearer criteria for giving grants and institutional support to immigrant associations: internal democracy, that leaders are legitimized by their associates and cooperate with other associations, both immigrants and native.

A pressing problem, especially in the smaller associations, is economic financing and lack of their own premises.

Finally, they detect, as a weakness, the existence of false associations, ie those associations that are created and run by special interests (leadership, personal, resourcing ...) and do not work for the community.

In short, from the perspective of the interviewees who work for private companies and public administrations in Catalonia, they distinguish a minority of African associations in Catalonia that work very well, almost as an entity of the third sector, and a majority of smaller associations with fewer resources that work as if

they were in Africa. They show some distrust of associations created quickly, with less than five partners and supported by chairmen who seem to be guided by a personal interest.

And they classify the diversity of African associations in Catalonia according to origin: North African and sub-Saharan; or according to their consolidation: almost professional and with a historical trajectory, or very young, created since 2005, almost all of them focused on international cooperation activities. They are expectant – like us – about the associations of women and the projects they want to develop.

Upon completion of the study, we present the conclusions recently drawn by Mata and Bernad<sup>11</sup> (2016) who are committed to strengthening immigrant associations by way of different strategies: support and exchange of experiences, hiring services among different associations (capillarity) and accompanying these processes from those responsible for public administrations and entities and nongovernmental organizations.

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<sup>11</sup> Anna Mata and Olga Bernad (2016) collected the conclusions of the "II International Workshop associationism and immigration" organized by the Research Group Social Anàlisi i Education (GRASE) held at the Faculty of Education, Psychology and Social Work at the University of Lleida, November 2016. It aimed to advance the understanding of the roles being undertaken by the association of immigrant origin and their impact at social and cultural level, and that entailed the work of 35 researchers from different universities and countries such as Chile, France, Senegal, Mexico, Argentina, among others.

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## **AUTHORS**

### **Nuria Llevot Calvet.**

Bachelor's degree in Education from the University of Barcelona and PhD in Educational Psychology from the University of Lleida. She is currently Associate Professor (Serra Hunter Program of the Government of Catalonia), Faculty of Education, Psychology and Social Work. She is currently director of the Pedagogy and Psychology Department and a member of the Board of INDEST Research Institute. She is a researcher at the *Grup de Recerca Anàlisi Social i Educativa* (GR-ASE) at the University of Lleida. She has stayed in foreign centers to do research (Quebec, Bosnia-Herzegovina, France, Senegal, Italy, among others) to collaborate on different projects on their lines of research: intercultural education and mediation, associationism, cultural and religious diversity and, in recent years, she has worked in inter-university cooperation with Africa. She is the author of several books, book chapters and articles on these issues in recognized publishing houses and journals and has participated in courses and talks with organizations and institutions.

<https://lleida.academia.edu/NúriaLlevotCalvet>

[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Nuria\\_Llevot\\_Calvet](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Nuria_Llevot_Calvet)

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6945-2502>

### **María Paz López Teulón**

Bachelor's degree in Therapeutic Education from the University of Barcelona and PhD in Psychopedagogy from the University of Lleida. She is currently Permanent Collaborator Professor at the Faculty of Education, Psychology and Social Work. Researcher at the *Grup de Recerca Anàlisi Social i Educativa* (GR-ASE) at the University of Lleida. She has collaborated with several institutions working in the field of social

exclusion in different countries in Africa. Research projects have focused on children at risk of social exclusion, cultural diversity, Socio-Cultural Encouragement, religious diversity and immigrant associationism. She is the author of several articles regarding the aforementioned issues.