

AER OBSERVATORY ON MIGRANT WOMEN

Concept Paper

1. Introduction

The European Commission designated 2007 as "European year of Equal Opportunities for all". The AER wants to give a voice to those women who are not normally heard: migrant women.

Being convinced that the regions have a tremendous role to play in promoting integration, through their policies on education, social inclusion, health and social services, the AER Group on Equal Opportunities, meeting in Brussels in March 2007, approved the creation of an AER Observatory on Migrant Women.

This Observatory should be a milestone in the field, both by creating a network of politicians, experts and NGOs from the regions working on the topic, and an AER database of regional good practice on migrant women. It will also be the first time in the AER that European regions will launch a collaboration with regions from the geographical area of Southern Europe and the Maghreb countries.

2. Aims

Migrant women suffer the most from discrimination and the notion of equal opportunities between women and men is often for them nothing more than a vague concept, alien to their daily lives. Their fundamental rights are often overridden.

Ensuring that those women's fundamental rights are fully respected can only be achieved if their integration is successful. Local and regional authorities, especially those with competencies in education and training, social inclusion, health and social services, are directly in touch with these migrant women, and they play a key role in their integration, helping them not only to live their lives in decent conditions, but also to fulfill their potential and acquire self-respect.

By establishing its Observatory on Migrant Women, the AER hopes it can contribute to the improvement of living conditions and the respect of the fundamental rights of Migrant Women in Europe. The Observatory will take the form of a one-stop information shop on migrant women and successful integration processes in Europe, which should become the first place that people search when they want to find out about migrant women and what regions can do to help them. It should help regional politicians and civil servants working with migrants and particularly migrant women to have a better understanding of the situation and of the possibilities available to help those women.

By collaborating in the AER Observatory, regions will not only be able to showcase their best practices, but also learn what their neighbors and other regions across Europe are doing in order to help Migrant Women to integrate.

3. Output

In order to achieve the above-mentioned aims, the AER will develop a Web Portal and Expert Network on Migrant Women. It should become a hub of knowledge where people can find answers to their questions, whether by learning from the experiences showcased or by asking questions to the network of experts.

This Web portal will be divided in a number of sections: one will draw up a map of the current situation; another one will display best practices from around the AER regions, with contact details; yet another one will be give access to links to press articles on the matter, as well as to web sites of specific interest; finally, a Q&A section will allow the debate to keep going and the Web Portal to be continuously updated. Hearings (for instance of Europol) could be organized and their results published on the Web Portal. And part of that last section could be opened to the public⁽¹⁾, allowing women from around Europe and the world to share their experiences of being migrant women.

In each of its sections, specific attention will be given to the AER priorities outlined in the Kiruna Declaration (2006): lack of financial independence that characterizes migrant women, violence and forced prostitution, education and the specific role played by religion in their lives. Newcomers will not get all the attention: it is a fact that women from the second and third generations have their own specific problems and those need to be tackled as well⁽²⁾.

The Expert Network will be a think-tank dedicated to debating the topic, striving to find solutions in order to improve the lives of migrant women in the AER Regions.

Finally, in the wake of the AEROMW, a seminar (hopefully to be followed by a series of seminars) on micro-credit for women will be organized to allow AER members to collaborate with NGOs specialized in that field. Subsequent training seminars could also be organized. An AER Award for Project Recognition (AERAPR) will also be created. It will reward a woman who has been successful in using micro- credit. Apart from the formal recognition of her accomplishment, she will be invited to present her work to the AER during a Conference on Equal Opportunities or at the seminar(s) on micro-credit. Her travel and accommodation costs will be covered by the AER.

3. Methodology

Regions interested in playing an active role in the AER Observatory on Migrant Women will sign a letter of intent at the Timisoara Conference on October 11-12, where the project will be officially launched. All AER regions are welcome to participate. A registration form is available on the AER website; if a region cannot attend the Conference in Timisoara but wishes to participate, it just needs to send the registration form to the AER Secretariat.

A Steering Committee of a minimum of 5 regions needs to be established. Ile-de-France, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Timiș could form a triumvirate around which the Steering Committee would be formed. All geographic areas should be represented in this Steering Committee, in order to ensure a wide variety of opinions and of experiences. Regions such as Valencia (ES) and Norrbotten (SE), for instance, would be rightful members of this committee.

The AER Secretariat will help the Steering Committee, writing proposals for questionnaires and for the web portal design. It will also make sure all AER regions as well as regions around the Mediterranean are contacted and invited to participate in the project. Women's associations from across Europe and North Africa will also be contacted in order to obtain their valuable input. Closer links with prominent organizations with expertise in the field, such as the European Women's Lobby, will also be sought. The new European Institute for Gender Equality, the official opening of which is scheduled in Vilnius in early 2008, could also become a key partner in the project.

The main output of the AER Observatory on Migrant Women will be its Web Portal and Expert Network, as well as the seminar(s) on small-scale credit for migrant women. This exciting AER project will not place a financial obligation on the regions (cf. budget); however, they will need to commit to informing the AER Secretariat of their policies and projects in this field, as well as to identifying experts in their regions that could join the team of experts.

1 - Posts submitted would have to be agreed by the Webmaster before going on-line, in order to avoid inappropriate comments.

2 - E.g. the Moroccan Family Law - Mudawana – competes with the Belgian and French laws regarding the rights of women with dual nationality. (cf. "Le nouveau Code de la famille marocain : réflexion sur son impact dans les pays de l'UE – Mrs. Françoise Michaud, President of AIPFE, available on : <http://www.a-e-r.org/fr/themes-majeurs/equal-opportunities.html>).



4. Budget

The AER does not have a specific budget for this Observatory. However, part of the Equal Opportunities yearly allowance (8000 EUR), which mainly pays for the interpretation of the group's meetings, could be put aside to help finance the web portal. Committee 2, to which the Group on Equal Opportunities belongs, could also be asked a contribution. The AER Secretariat would be involved in the technical management and maintenance of the web portal, considerably lowering its costs.

Therefore, there shouldn't be any actual financial participation of the regions. However, some staff working time could be counted in, mainly in order to forward the relevant information to the AER Secretariat. Members of the Steering Committee should also have a provisionary budget allowing them to meet twice in 2008 (meetings will be organized alongside those of the AER Group on Equal Opportunities).

Experts would normally be civil servants dealing with migration and equal opportunities issues. Their direct individual contribution could be relatively small when setting up the project, and therefore wouldn't require any special form of payment. For experts who do not come from member regions (e.g. European Women's Lobby,...), financial resources would need to be identified with Committee 2.

The AER Secretariat will also look for external sources of funding (e.g. PROGRESS).

5. Timeline

The official launch of the AER Observatory will be celebrated in Timisoara, Romania, on October 11-12, 2007, where the first regions will officially sign a letter of intent, pledging to forward all necessary information to the AER Secretariat.

The AER budget doesn't allow for the actual Web Portal to be on-line before 2009. However, both the Steering Committee and the AER Secretariat could do all the preparatory works in 2008, allowing the Observatory to be physically on line around Women's Day 2009. A special event will then be organized in Paris, where the project will be presented to the public in the presence of Commissioner Spidla, MEPs and other key European figures. The AER Group on Equal Opportunities could use that opportunity to have either a working meeting or a conference in Brussels the previous or the following day.

Month	Activity	Location
Oct. 12, 2007	Official signing of the Letter of Intention	Timisoara
Winter 2007	AER Regions registering and contacts with potential partners	AER Secretariat
Spring 2008	First meeting of the Steering Committee	Tbc
Summer 2008	Development of concept and content of Web Portal	AER Secretariat
Autumn 2008	Seminar on Micro-credit	Tbc
Autumn 2008	Second meeting of the Steering Committee	Tbc
Spring 2009	Development of Web Portal by IT Specialists	AER Secretariat
Spring 2009	Presentation of the Web Portal to the public	Paris