



Migration and integration



Editorial

This year's General Assembly (GA) in Tampere, Finland, marked a turning point in the history of the Assembly of European Regions.

For the first time since AER's creation in 1985, members were privy to a contest between three candidates vying for what has become a much sought-after presidency.

I was fortunate enough to win that election in Tampere, and it is with great pleasure that I begin a two-year adventure as the political head of AER, an organisation I first joined in 1998. As the largest independent network of regional authorities in Europe, AER plays a crucial role in shaping policy across a wide range of issues – many of the ideas put forward in the European Commission's recent Green Paper on territorial cohesion were first proposed by AER, for example.

As AER President it will be my job to act as the figurehead for the organisation in discussions with other stakeholders – such as the Committee of the Regions and the DGs of the European Commission – and to ensure that we are having a real impact on regional policy.

One of the key areas that I want to focus on during my presidency is how we can open up to regions on the other side of the Mediterranean and get them to cooperate with us. I was born in Tunisia, and like many French people I have a close affinity with the countries of North Africa – indeed, the Union for the Mediterranean has been a major element of the French presidency of the EU in the second half of 2008 – and I believe that we have much to gain from working with the regions there, especially as we try to take a more concerted approach to key areas of importance such as energy supply or – as we discussed in Tampere – immigration and integration.

I will also, I hope, carry on the good work of my predecessor, Riccardo Illy, who re-shaped AER to focus on core economic and social issues, the areas where we, as regional politicians, can perhaps do the most to help the people that we are elected to represent. <

Michèle Sabban,

AER President
Vice-President of the region Ile-de-France (F)

A warm welcome?

IMMIGRATION HAS BEEN A KEY ISSUE FOR THE FRENCH PRESIDENCY OF THE EU, BUT THE TOPIC OF THIS YEAR'S AER GENERAL ASSEMBLY SUGGESTS THAT POLITICIANS SHOULD FOCUS MORE ON MAKING IMMIGRANTS FEEL WELCOME THAN ON TRYING TO KEEP THEM OUT ALTOGETHER



European regions: putting together the pieces of the migration puzzle

The issue of immigration has featured prominently on the European agenda over the last six months. The French presidency of the EU has called for a more concerted approach towards immigration on the part of all 27 member states, focusing essentially on opening up the doors only to those migrants who can fill specific needs in the labour market – a system that essentially sends out the message that “we only want you to come if you can help us fill some short-term need, and then we want you to go back home”.

There appears to be widespread support for the French approach, with many European governments keen to appease an electorate increasingly concerned about their own future job prospects. Indeed, as the global economic climate worsens, the likelihood is that immigrants will face an ever more hostile reaction from host countries keen to bolster the perception that they are doing all they can to protect local jobs and boost their own economic growth.

Yet this view – shared by most national governments – of immigration as a necessary evil whose predominantly negative impact must be

alleviated as quickly and painlessly as possible is often in stark contrast to the more positive experience of many of Europe's regions. The regions, after all, are where immigrants live and work, and where their presence is most clearly felt as either a benefit or a threat, or both. That is why many regions take a far more pragmatic approach to immigration, orientated far more towards integration: making migrants feel like part of the local community through the provision of language, housing and other vital services.

The wide variety of approaches to, and experiences of, integration and the management of migrant flows was the main theme of this year's AER General Assembly in Tampere, the Finnish city which also gives its name to the first EU agreement on a shared immigration policy in 1999. After three days of discussion and debate, AER members endorsed the Tampere Declaration on Migration and Integration, acknowledging that the rewards of welcoming new migrants “far outweigh the negative examples of misunderstandings and prejudices” and throwing down a challenge to national political leaders across the wider Europe not to bring down the shutters on ‘fortress Europe’. <

Photo: Arno Fougeres/AER

Reaping the benefits

THE TAMPERE DECLARATION HIGHLIGHTS THE BENEFITS OF MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION – BENEFITS THAT HAVE ALREADY BEEN WIDELY FELT BY AER MEMBER REGIONS

Supporters of immigration as a beneficial and positive process may seem few and far between in today's Europe, with most of the political rhetoric focusing on how migrant flows can be stemmed rather than encouraged. Yet for the regions, encouraging migration is exactly what Europe should be doing, because the benefits of doing so cannot be ignored.

The Tampere Declaration, adopted on 14 November by the AER's General Assembly, sets out to highlight some of these benefits, and many of the speakers at the GA bore witness to their own beneficial experiences. One of the key statements in the declaration is that "integration of migrants implies mutual learning, respect, and 'give and take'. Regions that welcome migrants according to these principles will invariably be rewarded with a richness of society and a competitive workforce. These rewards far outweigh the negative examples of misunderstandings and prejudices." This was a point of view shared by many of the delegates at the GA, whose overwhelming experience of immigration has been a positive one precisely because of their efforts to make migrant workers feel welcome (see our interview with David Kirk below).



Around 450 participants from across Europe adopted the Tampere Declaration

Photo: Arno Fougères/AER

Another key element of the Tampere Declaration is that integration can be better achieved "through education, through mobility within

and outside Europe and through promoting effective language acquisition – including a good command of their mother tongue".



Interview

David Kirk

David Kirk is a member of Hampshire County Council (UK)

"You cannot force people to stay and become part of a community, that has to come naturally, and all we can do as local politicians is create the right environment for that to happen."

AER: What has been your region's experience of immigration?

David Kirk: It is easy to talk about all the bad things that immigration can bring, but far harder, and rarer, to talk about the benefits. But we would not have been able to fill many local posts – both skilled and unskilled – without the arrival of immigrants from Eastern Europe, Poland in particular. For my region, immigration has been a very positive experience, despite the challenges that it has brought.

AER: What have those challenges been?

DK: Well, language has been a major challenge for us – not necessarily for migrants arriving to work but for their families. The number of first languages spoken in schools across Hampshire has risen from 67 to 105

in just three years, so it has been important for us as regional politicians to provide the necessary support services for all these different language groups. But it has been a positive experience on the whole.

AER: Do you have a particular approach to integration that you want to share?

DK: I think that what is important about our approach is that we have tried to make people coming to our region to work feel that they are welcome here without necessarily expecting them to stay forever. Our experience is that people are far more mobile now than in the past – they want to come and work, to earn some money and experience and then take that back home with them, no matter how warm the welcome has been.

Workplace integration works in the same way: when someone starts a new job, they are made to feel welcome in order to get the most out of them, but no employer would expect them to stay in the same job forever. This should not be used as an excuse not to encourage people to integrate, of course, but at the same time you cannot force people to stay and become part of a community, that has to come naturally, and all we can do as local politicians is create the right environment for that to happen.

This is an explicit recognition that immigrants are more likely to become effective members of any local community if they are encouraged to retain their own culture – including language – as well as that of their host country.

The declaration also calls for “integration through access to housing by providing appropriate housing while avoiding the proliferation of migrant ‘ghettos’ that lead to social segregation”, and the Spanish region of Catalonia has worked hard to ensure that migrant workers from North Africa, attracted by the region’s extensive fruit harvest, are properly housed. “The region has worked closely with the local authorities most affected by the influx of migrants to ensure that workers are welcomed and well-housed,” said Angelina Puig I Vallis of the region’s employment service. “We have a budget of €1.5m to help local authorities, some of which can be offered to the local community to encourage the provision of more accommodation for temporary migrant workers.”

She added that local regulations required employers to find accommodation for migrant workers within a radius of 75km of their place of work, and to help them get to and from home. The employment service also makes regular inspections of local accommodation to ensure that it is up to scratch.

The need to ensure greater support for female migrants is recognised in the declaration’s commitment to “integration through gender equality by including a strong gender perspective in regional policies”. Osnat Lubrani of the Brussels office of UNIFEM, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, said that it was vitally important for the role of female migrants to be better understood. “Women migrants are mostly in low-skilled, underpaid jobs related to traditional gender roles, often in informal, unprotected labour,” she said. “Successful integration of migrants means not leaving women out of the equation – yet gender is often hijacked as an argument against integration, citing questions of the alleged treatment of women by certain religious groups. But for many women in the home countries, migration is an empowering issue, with women migrants seen as risk-takers and mould-breakers, not least because they often become the sole bread winners in their household in the host country.”

That is why, she said, migrant women had to be given the same rights as men when it came to language and skills training, education, the right to work and protection; integration policies that failed to take this into account were unlikely to succeed.

Migrants should also be encouraged to “participate in regional democratic processes and civil society” in the interests of greater integration, the declaration notes, and AER President Michèle Sabban said that this was vitally important at a time of increasing financial concern. “Immigrants play a vital role in many local

economies and now more than ever they need a voice at the local level in order to defend that role. The economic crisis should not be used by national governments as an excuse for a new, tougher, immigration policy – it is not immigrants that have caused the crisis, and they should not be made to suffer as a result.” She added that it would be “wrong to look for solutions to the crisis by closing the door” to migrants and depriving them of a voice. “Immigration and the financial crisis will be the two main issues in the 2009 European elections, and immigrants must have the opportunity to stand up for their achievements at such an important time in the political calendar.”

The Tampere Declaration, according to Sabban, is designed to show that “integration is not a one-sided process, but one of mutual learning and respect” and that while each region has a different approach to integration, everyone has something to learn about the process. “The declaration sends a clear message: it doesn’t say that we don’t want migrants in Europe – far from it. It emphasises that migration is an enriching process as experienced at the regional level, and that the European institutions and national governments should learn from this experience.” <



Interview

Rinus Penninx

Rinus Penninx is professor of ethnic studies and director of the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES) at the University of Amsterdam (NL)

“Many immigrants define themselves by the place they live in – they are not Dutch but from Amsterdam”

AER: Is there a role for regions in the integration process?

Rinus Penninx: It is true that cities and local authorities have the main role to play in managing integration of migrants, and the role for regions is not necessarily that clear. I think where they can help most is in supporting local and city authorities in defending their integration policies against national governments, whose policies are often more focused on preventing immigration. Regions could also apply for money from the European integration and refugee fund to help with this work.

AER: Just how serious is this gap between local and national politicians on integration?

RP: It is clear that local policies are much better than national ones, because they obviously cater for local needs. IMES studies show that many immigrants define them-

selves by the place they live in – they are not Dutch but from Amsterdam, for example – evidence that they feel much more closely integrated at the local rather than the national level. Policymaking by national governments has a completely different logic – national politicians want results within four years, to help them get re-elected, but the integration process at the local level takes at least 25 years.

AER: So what should be the role of national and EU politicians in the integration process?

RP: Their role should be as facilitators – making the funds available for regional and local-level integration policies to work more effectively. Europe should also do more to make it easier for local and regional integration policies to work, facilitating the exchange of best practice, for example.

Different strokes...

THERE ARE MANY TOOLS AVAILABLE TO REGIONS TO HELP THEM DEVELOP SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION POLICIES, FROM FINANCIAL INCENTIVES TO LEARNING FROM OTHERS

Integration policies vary as widely as the regions that operate them – inevitably, since each region faces different migration flows, different economic and social issues and different national immigration policies. The GA gave AER member regions the opportunity to learn from each other, and from regions from other parts of the world, about what works, and what doesn't.

Gérard Bouchard, Co-President of Québec's consultative committee on cultural accommodation, made some important points about the perception of immigrants in the French-speaking province of Canada. "Around 11% of the population of Québec are immigrants, and the local government has for many years practised a policy of 'reasonable accommodation' – that is, adjusting the application of local laws to ensure that immigrants are not discriminated against. But in recent years this has begun to be seen as a threat to Québec's unique

position as a French-speaking province in an overwhelmingly Anglophone country. Immigrants were seen as imposing their culture at the expense of the local culture, which is itself a minority culture in Canada."

The consultative committee was set up in March 2007 to assess whether this perception had any grounding in reality. "What we found was that it was 'business as usual' in all government agencies, schools etc. There was no threat to Québécois culture from immigrants. Yet that perception remained very strong among the Québécois public, fuelled in part by the media, and this was leading to immigrants, especially Muslim immigrants, being increasingly marginalised by being made to feel unwelcome," Bouchard said.

Yet Québec's peculiar case meant that the local government could not adopt the usual multiculturalism approach in tackling the problem. "Multiculturalism means that any

one culture must not override another, but this will not work in Québec, where people have fought long and hard to defend their Francophone culture," said Bouchard. "What we have adopted instead is an approach based on interculturalism – where cultures can live side-by-side, independently of each other but sharing their experiences." He stressed that the media would play a key role in cementing this approach in the public perception.

GA delegates also heard from Maria Nowak, President of the association for the right to economic initiative (ADIE), on the vital importance of micro-credit in helping immigrants integrate fully. "Giving migrants the opportunity to work for themselves, by helping them with affordable loans, is an area that is still widely overlooked in many countries," she said. "Research shows that providing micro-credit to help people to help themselves is around a third of the cost of putting immigrants in government-sponsored jobs, or a sixth of the cost of putting them on unemployment benefits." The regions are well-placed to take advantage of micro-credit opportunities, she added, with the opportunity to apply directly for funding from the EU's FEDER programme and the Jeremie programme operated jointly by the European Commission and the European Investment Bank. <



Photo: Arno Fougeres/AER

Winners of AER Awards 2008 : Centre, Heves, Noord-Brabant

GA Round up

As well as the election of Michèle Sabban as the new AER president, a number of other officers were elected at the GA. Two new vice-presidents were appointed – Constantin Ostaficiuc (President of Timis, RO) and Peter Straub (President of Baden-Württemberg Assembly, D) – as well as a vice-president treasurer, Urs Wüthrich-Pelloli (Regional Minister, Basel-Landschaft, CH). The following committee presidents were also appointed: Håkan Sandgren (Jönköping, S) for Committee 1 (Economy and Regional Development); Christina Wahrolin (Värmland, S) as acting President of Committee 2 (Social Policies and Public Health); Johanna Mikl-Leitner (Niederösterreich, A) for Committee 3 (Culture, Education and Youth).

Seats were also allocated for AER's executive political Bureau, which now includes a number of regions that had not been in the Bureau before.

The winners of two AER awards were also announced at the GA. The 'Communicating Europe to citizens' award was given to two regions this year: in the Regional Media category, the prize went to the French region of Centre for its project "The week of Europe", while the winner of the category 'Children and Youth' was the Hungarian region Heves for its project "Europe classrooms".

According to the judges, Centre's project was a great example of dedicated and effective regional communication with citizens, while Heves showed how much can be done with a very small budget. Mauri Pekkarinen, Finland's Minister of Economic Affairs, handed over the award to both regions.

The 'Award for Innovative Regions', meanwhile, went to the Dutch province of Noord-Brabant, for its efforts to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship with particular focus on tackling the issue of ageing populations. <



AER - ARE - VRE Dossier
Migration and integration – Autumn 2008
 Thematic Dossier by the Assembly of European Regions (AER)

Director of Publication - Klaus Klipp
Chief Editor - Richard Medic
Editor - Chris Jones
Assistant Editor - Francine Huhardeaux
Translation - Ursula Gerstenmaier (F & D)
Design and Layout - Agence Contexte - Strasbourg (F)
Printed - OTT Imprimeurs - rue des Pins - 67310 Wasselonne (F)
Published (in three languages): 4 500 ex.
 Reproduction authorised with mention of the source
 December 2008

AER www.aer.eu
 General Secretariat - 6, rue Oberlin - F-67000 Strasbourg
 Tel.: + 33 3 88 22 07 07 - Fax: + 33 3 88 75 67 19
 E-mail: secretariat@aer.eu

Brussels Office - Boulevard Baudouin 12 - B-1000 Brussels
 Postal address: 2, Place Saintelette - B-1080 Brussels
 Tel.: + 32 2 421 85 12 - Fax: + 32 2 421 83 69
 E-mail: aer.brussels@aer.eu



Europe for Citizens' Programme
 Co-financed by the European Union within the
 programme 'Europe for Citizens' 2007 - 2013