## WE-EMPOWER Training on Improving Visibility of Migrant Women towards the EU and in Media



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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This report has been created within the project, "Expanding Tools in Addressing Barriers for Migrant Women to Participate in Democratic Life" or WE-EMPOWER for short. We would like to thank all members and partners of the WE-EMPOWER project and WIDE+ migration and gender working group, migrant women activists, experts and decision-makers who contributed knowledge and expertise to our first international WE-EMPOWER training.

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## **ABOUT THE TRAINING**

The first international training event of the WE-EMPOWER project was held on 21 and 22 March 2023 in Brussels, Belgium. Representatives of project partners, experts, other feminist (migrant) associations and activists from the WIDE+ migration and gender working group, young mostly migrant volunteers, as well as Brussels-based organisations attended the training. 34 people in total took part. There was an introduction session for young volunteers on 20 March and the second WE-EMPOWER project meeting was held on 23 March.

The objectives of the training were:

- To create a common level of knowledge among partners in knowledge in social media and strategic communication.
- To reflect on a few effective communication tools that are most relevant for migrant women and gender non-conforming persons.
- To create a base level of knowledge among partners in knowledge about EU processes, EU institutions, and policies that are relevant for migrant women and gender non-conforming persons.
- To build capacity among partners and Europe-wide allies to promote the participation of migrant women and gender non-conforming persons.

This report will summarize the different components of the training and how its objectives were met through the workshops, panel discussion, a tour of the European Parliament, performances, and informal exchange.



A majority of participants with an available banner from a previous action in Brussels, 21 March 2023

## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

The first training day was dedicated to learning and exchanging knowledge about communication strategies and tools. The training kicked off with a workshop covering the basics of strategic communication through a feminist lens to enable participants to improve their strategies on how to amplify migrant women's voices.

Communication expert, Paula Morais Montes, gave an overview of different communication theories and took the participants through the basic steps of a communication strategy. She also addressed feminist communication theory. And finally, the participants worked in small working groups to practice how to approach target groups and sub-target groups.





## Strategic communicatior

- Thinking about communication
- Feminist and intersectional approach · Risks and negative response

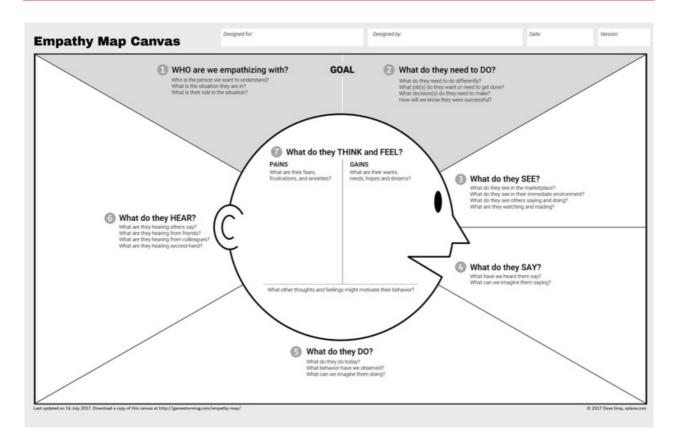
#### Workflow

- · Who are we
- What is our goal
  Who are we talking to
- What are we talking about
  Who else is talking about it
- What are we going to say
  Which form will it take
- · How will we present it to the world?
- Left: Paula Morais Montes, trainer of the workshop

Above: one of the slides of her presentation

Through outlining the steps in a strategic communication strategy with tools on how to practice each step, participants were able to reach a base-level understanding to set up and implement any communication plan. Paula Morais Montes explained that the first step is to find out 'who we are'. This is about defining one's mission, vision, goals, and values (for the campaign and/or association).

The second step is about 'what we want to communicate' and the third is about identifying one's (sub)target group(s). This is an important step to practice around, as it is more often not fully developed in communication planning of smaller NGOs. In order to improve approaching the (sub-)target group(s), we went through building an empathy map, a strategy developed in advertising. This is about creating an outlook of a member of o target group, answering what are their aspirations, goals, views, fears, concerns, lives and habits.



The fourth step, after defining the goal, the content, and target groups, is about **assessing the resources available**, including income and costs structures. The trainer shared useful tools on how to map these resources, including a SWOT analysis (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat).

After this groundwork is laid out, a communication strategy can begin with the actual shaping of the messages. This includes reflecting about the branding (colors, moodboards, etc.). Determining the strategy formats and platforms, such as video, audio, illustration, photography, website, social media, etc. And it is about reflecting and developing the discursive framework (imaginaries symbolism used, narratives including storytelling chosen, points of view, emotional tone, etc.). These steps are interlinked as the chosen format and platform(s) influences the way one chooses to make a message visible. The training went through these final steps through a bird's eye view, highlighting useful tools and practicing a few.

Above: an empathy map to fill in. Below: a template for mapping resources, and small working group discussion.





Paula Morais Montes focused on feminist communication theory, which emphasises the importance of centering women's voices and lived experiences. Migrant women are highly underrepresented in the media, and when they are mentioned, they are often portrayed in stereotypical ways and/or represented through the views of others (often politicians). Therefore, it is critical that **migrant women can share their stories in their own voices so that their perspectives are seen and heard.** 

A theory of intersectional feminism will be very useful for migrant women. Intersectional feminism acknowledges that multiple layers of power inequalities exist in our societies and are tied to aspects of people's identities, such as age, gendered expression, colour, sexual orientation and, religion, etc. This perspective allows people to address and consider individual experiences that are the result of structural inequalities, perpetuated by different discriminatory power systems. With this perspective people can be encouraged to be aware of all kinds of prejudices embedded in words for example, not only those relating to gender. For instance, in the context of migration, instead of using the term "illegal", which implies criminality and dehumanises migrants, the term "irregular" is less stigmatizing.



To illustrate how feminist communication can be used, Montes showed the example of a campaign to raise awareness of gender-based violence against migrant women in Spain, "Tirar del hilo" or "Pull the Thread" (www.tirardelhilo.info). The campaign made use of different communication/ media elements (podcast, videos and use of metaphors) to tell the stories of migrant women survivors through their own voices.

In terms of visual elements, Montes highlighted how the campaign was visualized with bright colours that reflect the diverse cultural heritage of migrant women, and also used threads as a visual marker to show how the complex web of gender-based violence, structural violence, and social exclusion are woven together. The thread is a constant design element in all aspects of the communications in this campaign, which shows the consistency in branding.

### STRATEGIC USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In the afternoon, participants split up in two groups and took part in two rounds of workshops. One of these workshops was conducted by Montes and focused on how to make use of different social media platforms. It addressed questions such as: 'which platform is best for which target audience?', 'how do the associations reach the people they want to communicate with?', and: 'how can groups adapt their strategies for each platform?'.

The reason for this workshop was that there are still a significant number of activists that use social media without much strategic reflection of choices in platform use, and that it pays off to develop a social media strategy that adapts the content a specific platform.

Montes showed how an appropriate tone and voice are connected to the kind of platform one uses. For example, Facebook (now Meta) suits well for a personalized communication style as the audiences on this platform are often friends and family members. In contrast, at a platform such as LinkedIn, a more suitable style of communication would be a professional one, as this platform is mostly used for professional networking.

#### DO WE USE EMOJIS?

- Yes? No? Why?
- · Which ones? Why



## WHAT LANGUAGE DO WE USE?

Formal? Informal? Humor? Information? Conversation?



Similar to targeting one's communication to a certain platform, community management cannot be an afterthought among activists - this involves engaging with the audience on social media and monitoring of trends among our target groups and audience members. Basic elements of designing different social media posts were discussed, making use of the experiences and challenges of participants.

Each platform has its own specificities of whom can be reached, with what kind of format (more or less visual, etc.), in what kind of attention span messages are viewed, etc. In the workshops it became clear that many (migrant)women-led associations use some of the different platforms, though none use all the platforms. In particular Facebook (Meta), Instagram and direct communication were common, followed by Twitter (X).

After explaining the different platforms (see image below), Montes address basic graphic design elements, such as color schemes, the importance and use of a website, and of (e-)newsletter(s).

Montes concluded her workshops with a final important element, which is the issue of digital safety that feminist activists consider when engaging online. Digital safety practices are especially crucial for migrant women activists to prevent any online attacks (hate speech, etc) and to avoid intrusive surveillance efforts by authorities. There have been several feminist digital safety training tools that migrant women associations can access, including a previous online training guide that has been made available at the WIDE+ website.



### **STORYTELLING**

The other workshop in the afternoon on storytelling was provided by Martha Salazar, co-founder of the migrant women association, Wo-Mi Women-Migrants in Denmark. Storytelling is а powerful communication tool. Becoming better storytellers has been shown to make a clear difference in the impact and efficacy of feminist groups and campaigns. How can feminists use storytelling as a strategy to tell stories that connect them to (migrant) political objectives? The workshop provided the participants with hands-on tools to connect the personal to the political.



Martha Salazar, explaining the GCM objectives

**GCM OBJECTIVES** 



Salazar explained the UN Global Compact on Migration (GCM), which is a comprehensive global plan of action to address migration, grounded in values of human rights and non-discrimination. It outlines 23 objectives that serve as a guideline for organisations, institutions, and governments working at local, national, regional, and global levels.

Using the Compact as a springboard for discussion, the participants reflected on whether their personal values, or professional work aligned with any of the objectives. Most of the participants are working on at least 1 of the 23 objectives in their associations.

In the storytelling workshop, every participant brought a personal item - a poem, a piece of jewelry, a picture, or a sheet of fabric, to share with the group the item's significance and how it is connected to their personal experiences and their work around promoting the rights of migrant women.

"I think that it's important to acknowledge and embrace the diversity of feminists in this room, to celebrate our differences in terms of where we come from, but at the same time, we are all so unified in this project to fight for migrant women's rights"

## Tamara Ibarrola Kumaritova, La Marche Mondiale des Femmes Belgique, who presented a string of colourful beads



Participants reflected on their migration journeys and shared items that symbolise their connections to their homelands, families and loved ones. They talked about how these souvenirs strengthened their determination to promote the rights of migrant women.



Silvia Dumitrache, the founder of ADRI Association, shared her work and personal experiences in advocating for the rights of Romanian women in Italy, many of whom are working as domestic workers under precarious work conditions. For her the "50 for 50" campaign that pushes for equal representation of women and men in politics has been a way to promote the participation of migrant women in political and democratic life.



While the sharing circle was a genuine bonding experience for the participants, it demonstrated the use of storytelling as a strategy that can bring out narratives and experiences that audiences can connect with, and how activists can embed it in their communications. While there is no formula for what makes a good story, Salazar emphasized that each of us has stories that can humanise complex political issues.

Participants in the storytelling workshop, in a sharing circle

## CAPACITY-BUILDING ON UNDERSTANDING EU INSTITUTIONS

The second day of the training focused on getting to know the EU institutions and processes. Gea Meijers, coordinator of WIDE+, explained in a plenary session the political role of each EU institution and that of member states through their competences and political decision making processes, and she provided insight on how to advocate for issues towards the EU institutions.

Meijers outlined the policies in gender equality, women's rights, migration, asylum and integration. These included the EU Pact on Asylum and Migration, and 'The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence' or better known as the Istanbul Convention. She took participants through the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, and pointed out areas where migrant women are considered, particularly in issues such as gender-based violence, access to the labour market and intersectional discrimination. She also briefly explained the budget cycles, including the European Semester.



"Migrant Women Leaders provide an invaluable source of experience and expertise to EU policymakers that will help them improve the implementation of EU democratic values."

Gea Meijers, coordinator of WIDE+, explaining EU institutions and policies that are relevant for migrant women

The committees of the European Parliament that are of particular interest to migrant women associations are the FEMM and LIBE committees that work on gender equality, and civil liberties, justice, and home affairs policy areas.

Meijers described steps to advocate towards Member of Parliaments (MEPs) and others at EU level, particularly those who can be potential allies for migrant women. The first steps are learning more about the policy area that one wants to impact, including doing a power-mapping of stakeholders, and getting to know more about the work of the MEPs and others that are involved in the policy area one wants to influence.

One key question to ask, is whether the persons one aims to target would be potential allies or people that would resist the envisioned change. A second question to ask what this person or group of persons can do for the change one seeks. Even if a person can only share information and is not involved directly in any decision making, obtaining this information can be a very valuable aspect for one's advocacy goals.

# ADVOCACY TOWARDS THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: MEETING WITH MEP RAMONA STRUGARIU





(left) Participants at the European Parliament with MEP Strugariu, (right) at the visitors centre

"I am inspired by the work that all of you do to promote the rights of migrant women in Europe, and I agree that more can be done to engage with the European Parliament, such as having debates with other parliamentarians on the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum." *MEP Ramona Strugariu* 

The participants had the opportunity to have a dialogue with MEP Ramona Strugariu at the European Parliament office after a tour of a plenary session at the Parliament. MEP Strugariu is a Romanian politician representing REPER with the Renew Europe Group. Nurhidayah Hassan, coordinator of WIDE+ migration and gender working group, presented the diverse range of work that the network's members and partners do to promote the rights of migrant women in Europe.

MEP Strugariu also prepared a list of responses to questions posed by the group which had been sent to her. The questions were about the migration and asylum policies of the EU, and how to increase women's representation in the parliament. Laura Albu from Romanian Women's Lobby who organised the dialogue, sees MEP Strugariu's role as opening doors for the group to the European Parliament. Albu observed that MEP Strugariu had shown "respect for the diversity of knowledge, wisdom, and dreams of our group of migrant women associations." Overall, MEP Strugariu agreed with the group that the work, expertise, and experiences of migrant women are important and that they should have the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes.

At one point during the meeting, after discussing issues around FRONTEX, border policies, and the treatment of migrant women in Europe, MEP Strugariu remarked candidly to the group, "Everything seems so easy and normal to discuss with you". The group's response was "It's because you're in a room with a group of feminists!"

# PANEL DISCUSSION ON MIGRANT WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE EU







(left) Anila Noor, NWC; Alexandra Weerts, EUROCITIES; Maria Galvez Davila, Red Latinas (centre) Jennifer Kamau, IWS; Anila Noor; Tahmina Ashraf, VOAW (right) Delmy Galeano, Red Latinas

## "We have to keep shaking the table, we have to avoid being tokenised." Anila Noor, New Women Connectors

Research shows that migrant women face multiple intersecting discriminations in European societies, resulting in many challenges for them, including barriers to their participation in political and democratic life. According to a 2021 report by the Council of Europe, there is a severe lack of participation of women in political and public decision-making from under-represented groups that include migrant women, Roma women, LGBTQIA women, and women of colour.

In this context, WIDE+ organised a panel discussion on the topic of "Political and Democratic Participation of Migrant Women in the EU" with **Anila Noor**, founder of Pan-European migrant and refugee women-led organisation, New Women Connectors; and members of the Red Latinas network, **Delmy Galeano**, **María Gálvez Dávila**, **Erika Castiblanco**, and **Alexandra Weerts**, Senior Project Coordinator at EUROCITIES.

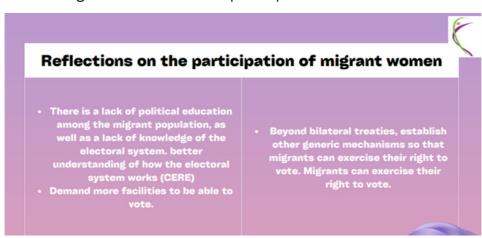
According to Anila Noor, who sits on the European Commission's 'Expert Group on the views of migration, asylum and integration', "Migrant women should be included in all steps of decision-making and not simply be called on for consultations. We need to be at the table, to keep shaking the table."

As a representative in different migration consultation bodies, Noor observed that the current forms of participation are at the level of tokenism, where migrants are invited to provide consultation in a passive manner, without room to make a real impact. Her organisation, New Women Connectors, is currently providing capacity-building for institutions to put the tools in place for systemic change.

Alexandra Weerts presented the work of EUROCITIES which is a network of cities across Europe working to develop "healthy and inclusive" cities, through focus areas like integration, mobility, innovation, and more. She shared more on a project, CONNECTION, in which over 20 cities connected to promote migrant integration. She agreed with Noor that, "integration policies cannot be designed without the participation of migrants, especially migrant women. True co-design of policies requires a structural approach."

Not all migrant councils developed by cities across Europe have gender parity, or have been sustainable. Weerts shared the positive example of Leipzig, Germany, where the city has institutionalised a permanent migrant council that has equal representation of migrant women and men. Several factors contributed to the success of this particular council, including having a financial budget, and a strong political will to nurture migrant participation and leadership.

In the panel discussion, members of the Red Latinas network presented some key findings from a nationwide survey that Red Latinas conducted on the participation of migrants in Spain. Close to 1,400 migrants took part in the survey, with equal representation of women and men. Regarding migrant women in Spain, it was found that there is a higher proportion of migrant women (compared to men) who lack political education/knowledge, even if they are more active in citizen participation. Additionally, more migrant men than women showed strong interest in electoral participation.



Slide from Red Latinas' presentation

There was a dynamic exchange of questions and comments between the audience and the speakers. Jennifer Kamau, founder of International Women Space, a Berlin-based feminist and anti-racist political group led by migrant and refugee women, questioned the meaningfulness of participation within migrants council or similar advisory structures, if such initiatives are not led or initiated by migrants.

There were also comments about the need for adequately resourcing migrant women's democratic participation. While migrant women often show up at meetings or discussions with decision-makers and provide valuable time and effort to give feedback and ideas, the work is often voluntary. This is not equitable and perpetuates exploitation, given that many migrant women associations already struggle with funding for their work. However, Weerts added that while these challenges exist, it will take time to shift mindsets, discussions like this one and current efforts are good steps towards full migrant participation.

Galeano from Red Latinas contributed a concluding statement that we should not give up, we should continue to tell our stories, and stand united in our collective fight to promote the rights of migrant women.

## **MIGRANT WOMEN'S ARTIVISM**



(left) WIDE+ young feminist volunteers, (centre) Maria Davila perfoming a Peruvian dance, (right) performance setup from Voiceless

Artivism is a dynamic and powerful tool for activism, combining artistic expression with political action to raise the visibility of demands of migrant women associations. Compared to other forms of advocacy and communication, art-based tools can also remedy power imbalances in knowledge production and facilitate the generation of new discourses.

Throughout the training, participants witnessed and participated in different forms of creative expressions of migrant women, either through dance, theatre performance or personal storytelling. They had the opportunity to exchange ideas with a migrant women's theatre group, "Voiceless" based in Brussels. The group choreographed a powerful performance titled "Maze" that expressed the complex journeys of migrant women, often tainted by violence, loss, and grief but who could also form connections and solidarity with other migrant women.

Diana Montes, founder of Voiceless, said she started the group because sometimes it is hard for migrant women to find the words to express the struggles, hopes and dreams they face, and art is a way to communicate to the world. It can transcend cultural, language, generational and other forms of boundaries. María Gálvez Dávila, a member of Red Latinas and originally from Peru, also performed an Andean ritual dance, siembra ('sowing'), an indigenous ritual which symbolises one's connection to land and spirituality.

WIDE+ young feminist volunteers whom most are also migrant women, spent some time in a sharing circle, expressing their ambitions, interests, and influences as young feminists keen to make an impact in the field of women's rights and migration. As Khaoula Hammami, a young feminist from Tunisia explained, "A lot of EU policies around migration, especially its externalization of borders, are still based on colonial power dynamics, we have to push to change the policies using a decolonial, antiracist and feminist approach."

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

WIDE+ conducted a short survey to find out the participants' feedback and thoughts about the training. Most found the meeting to be (very) useful and learnative and said they can apply the knowledge from the capacity-building sessions in their activism work. They also took away useful insights from the panel discussion and dialogue with MEP Ramona Strugariu and look forward to future exchanges with more parliamentarians.

The first WE-EMPOWER international meeting had been a successful starting point for the project partners, where they were able to learn and exchange with one another and collaborate to promote the participation of migrant women in Europe. Using the feminist practice of reflexive and collective learning, they were also able to deepen our bonds through our personal sharing within an environment that was filled with solidarity, energy and generosity. This meeting highlighted the creative and powerful leadership of migrant women, many of whom had undergone extreme hardships during their journeys to Europe.

"Migrant women are community leaders and social justice activists, we are key change agents and multipliers.

Migrant women often innovate and find creative ways to problem-solving. It is a loss not to tap into the rich expertise and experiences that we have when it comes to policymaking."

Nurhidayah Hassan, WIDE+





(Bottom) Seyran Khalili, NWC, Nurhidayah Hassan, WIDE+, Anila Noor, NWC, Martha Salazar, WIMN, Jennifer Kamau, IWS, Tahmina Ashraf, VOAW

## **ANNEX: SPEAKERS PROFILES**

#### **PAULA MORAIS MONTES:**

Paula Morais works as a freelance for various projects, mainly in the areas of podcast and digital communication. She has a background in journalism and media studies and has always loved searching for new ways to tell compelling stories. She is part of the team of "De eso no se habla", an independent podcast, and also part of the team that launched "Tirar del hilo", a project that seeks to raise awareness on gender-based violence among migrant women in Spain.

#### www.paulamoraismontes.com

#### **MARTHA SALAZAR**

Martha is a feminist co-founder of Wo-Mi Women Migrants in Denmark, as well as an activist member of Women in Migration Network, a global collective effort amplifying the agency of migrant women. She has a law degree from Copenhagen University (2015) and Colombia (1989) and she has working experiences with issues of Women Human and Economic Rights, Peace, Water, Natural resources and Afro descendants and Indigenous peoples. Her interest lies in social movement dynamics in mapping power shifts and privileges.

#### https://wo-mi.com

#### MARÍA GÁLVEZ DÁVILA

María Gálvez Dávila, aka Lily, is the president of Amalgama, a Latin American women association, and also part of Red de Mujeres Latinas en España. Born in Peru but currently living in Madrid, she graduated in Law and Political Science. She also has complementary studies in Intercultural Mediation, and has a big interest in activism, especially when it comes to culture and feminist movements.

#### https://redlatinas.es/

#### **ANILA NOOR**

Anila Noor is a refugee activist based in the Netherlands. Noor has diverse experience working with national and international nonprofit organisations and causes namely dealing with peace-building efforts, refugee integration, and special education focus on women's rights. She has advocated for refugee resettlement and social/political engagement of refugees in Europe.

Noor initiated New Women Connectors, a movement striving for mainstreaming the unheard voices of migrant and refugee women living across Europe. New Women Connectors is a perspective shift to the refugee agenda and advocates inclusion than integration as a policy choice.

www.newwomenconnectors.com

#### **ALEXANDRA WEERTS**

Alexandra Weerts works as Senior Project Coordinator at Eurocities. Up until recently, she was coordinating CONNECTION, an EU-funded project on migrant integration. The 3-year long project aimed at building the capacity of city officials to support and improve the inclusion of migrants and refugees at the local level. CONNECTION engaged 22 European cities that exchanged good practices, implemented new policies and developed practical guides for a wider audience on (1) the development of integration strategies, (2) migrant women, (3) migrant Employment, and (4) one-stop-shops.

www.eurocities.eu

#### **GEA MEIJERS**

Gea Meijers is currently WIDE+'s coordinator. She has promoted feminism through WIDE(+)'s collective action since 2006. She previously worked for several international and national NGOs, promoting secularism and peace. She has a master's in International Public Policy and a long track record in managing international networks, programmatic development, advocacy and administration tasks. She is a Dutch living in the Netherlands, having lived for years in the UK and Belgium.

www.wideplus.org

## **ABOUT WE-EMPOWER PROJECT**

Within the framework of the WE-EMPOWER project, participation in political and democratic life refers to having the right to vote, stand as candidates, join political parties, and have the right, opportunity, and space to influence public decision-making processes that contribute to the development of a society. The project also takes an inclusive approach to the term 'migrant women', referring to all women, including gender non-conforming persons, who have been displaced between countries, trafficked, have moved from a third or European country to a destination in Europe, or women who are second-generation migrants. WE-EMPOWER is an ERASMUS+ project, funded by the European Union, to which some partners contribute other resources as well. For more information about WE-EMPOWER, see: <a href="https://wideplus.org/we-empower-project/">https://wideplus.org/we-empower-project/</a>

### Partner Organisations for this project include:

WIDE+ (Europe) - www.wideplus.org

NGO Atina (Serbia) - www.atina.org.rs

Red Latinas (Spain) - www.redlatinas.es

Alianza por La Solidaridad (Spain) - www.alianzaporlasolidaridad.org

GADIP (Sweden) - www.gadip.se

KULU Women and Development (Denmark) - www.kulu.dk

Romanian Women's Lobby (Romania) - www.facebook.com/ROWLobby

#### In Collaboration with:

ADRI Association (Italy/Romania) - <a href="https://adriassociazione.wordpress.com">https://adriassociazione.wordpress.com</a> Gabriela Germany (Germany) - <a href="https://adriassociazione.wordpress.com">www.facebook.com/gabriela.germany.org</a>

### **WE-EMPOWER** project partners:









