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REPORT

on the situation of women in rural areas of the EU
(2007/2117(INI))

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

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CONTENTS

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION.....	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	4
RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE.....	4

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the situation of women in rural areas of the EU (2007/2117(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the EC Treaty, in particular Articles 3 and 13,
- having regard to Council Decision 2006/144/EC of 20 February 2006 on Community strategic guidelines for rural development (programming period 2007 to 2013)¹,
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)²,
- having regard to Commission Regulation (EC) No 1974//2006 of 15 December 2006 laying down detailed rules for the application of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)³,
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1290/2005 of 21 June 2005 on the financing of the common agriculture policy⁴,
- having regard to Council Directive 86/613/EEC of 11 December 1986 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity, including agriculture, in a self-employed capacity, and on the protection of self-employed women during pregnancy and motherhood⁵,
- having regard to Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation ⁶,
- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999 of 21 June 1999 laying down general provisions on the Structural Funds⁷,
- having regard to the Council Resolution of 2 December 1996 on mainstreaming equal opportunities for men and women into the European Structural Funds⁸,
- having regard to its resolution of 13 March 2003 on the objectives of equality of

¹ OJ L 55, 25.2.2006, p. 20.

² OJ L 277, 21.10.2005, p. 1.

³ OJ L 368, 23.12.2006, p. 15.

⁴ OJ L 209, 11.8.2005, p. 1.

⁵ OJ L 359, 19.12.1986, p. 56.

⁶ OJ L 204, 26.7.2006, p. 23.

⁷ OJ L 161, 26.6.1999, p. 1.

⁸ OJ C 386, 20.12.1996, p. 1.

opportunities between women and men in the use of the Structural Funds¹,

- having regard to the Council Conclusions of 22 July 2003 on employment in rural areas under the European Employment Strategy²,
- having regard to the "Review of the EU's Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) - Renewed Strategy"³,
- having regard to the Commission communication to the Spring European Council entitled "Working together for growth and jobs. A new start for the Lisbon Strategy" (COM(2005)0024),
- having regard to the Commission communication entitled "Tackling the pay gap between women and men" (COM(2007)0424),
- having regard to the Commission communication entitled "Employment in rural areas: closing the jobs gap" (COM(2006)0857) and the accompanying Commission staff working document (SEC(2006)1772),
- having regard to the publication "Women active in rural development: Assuring the future of rural Europe"⁴,
- having regard to SERA – Study of Employment in Rural Areas 2006,
- having regard to the 2006 Report "Rural Development in the European Union – Statistical and Economic Information",
- having regard to the Conclusions of the Lisbon European Council of 23 and 24 March 2000 on the Lisbon Strategy for employment and growth,
- having regard to the Conclusions of the second European conference on rural development in Salzburg "Planting seeds for rural futures - building a policy that can deliver our ambitions", held from 12 to 14 November 2003,
- having regard to the reports of the European Foundation for Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) on "First European Quality of Life Survey: Urban–rural differences", "Social capital and job creation in rural Europe" and "Women's entrepreneurship in rural areas",
- having regard to Council Decision 2005/600/EC of 12 July 2005 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States⁵,
- having regard to the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2007⁶,

¹ OJ C 61 E, 10.3.2004, p. 370.

² OJ C 186, 6.8.2003, p. 3.

³ Council document 10117/06, 9.6.2006.

⁴ Directorate-General for Agriculture, European Commission 2000

⁵ OJ L 205, 6.8.2005, p. 21.

- having regard to the European Pact for Gender Equality adopted by the Brussels European Council of 23-24 March 2006,
 - having regard to its resolution of 25 June 1993 on the assessment of women's unwaged work¹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 3 July 2003 on women in rural areas of the European Union in the light of the mid-term review of the common agricultural policy (cAP)², and its resolution of 13 March 2007 on a roadmap for equality between women and men (2006-2010)³,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (A6-0031/2008),
- A. whereas, from a European perspective, rural areas⁴ are dealt with via the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP); whereas this resolution deals with the second pillar of the CAP, i.e. rural development and whereas, however, social and economic policies must also be taken into consideration,
- B. whereas one of the major rural development policy objectives of the European Union is to enhance the quality of life in rural areas and to promote diversification of economic activities,
- C. whereas making rural areas more attractive requires the promotion of sustainable, integrated growth and the generation of new employment opportunities, particularly for women and young people, as well as the provision of high-quality health and social services,
- D. whereas the economic and social changes that rural areas are undergoing do not affect all women in the same way, offering opportunities to some and causing very serious challenges to, and problems for, others,

⁶ Council document 6694/07, 23.2.2007.

¹ OJ C 194, 19.7.1993, p. 389.

² OJ C 74 E, 24.3.2004, p. 882.

³ OJ C 301 E, 13.12.2007, p. 56.

⁴ The definition of rural areas applied in this resolution was drawn up in the context of Decision 2006/144/EC. The Commission has consistently used the OECD methodology. The OECD methodology is based on population density (OECD, Creating rural indicators for shaping territorial policy, Paris, 1994). It is based on a two-step approach: First, local units (e.g. municipalities) are identified as rural if their population density is below 150 inhabitants per square kilometre. Then, regions (e.g. NUTS 3 or NUTS 2), are classified in one of the 3 categories:

- Predominantly Rural region (PR) : if more than 50% of the population of the region is living in rural communes (with less than 150 inhabitants / km²)
- Intermediate Region (IR) : if 15% to 50% of the population of the region is living in rural local units
- Predominantly Urban region (PU) : if less than 15% of the population of the region is living in rural local units.

The 1284 NUTS 3 regions of the EU-27 are broadly evenly divided between the three rural-urban categories. The Commission is currently undertaking work on alternative definitions that better reflect the diversity of significantly rural areas, including peri-urban areas.

- E. whereas the Lisbon targets on generating growth and promoting the social market economy can only be met by making full use of the significant potential of women in the labour market in both rural and urban areas,
- F. whereas women's labour is often regarded as an unlimited natural resource to be exploited and whereas, furthermore, the inequitable segregation of the labour market is becoming ever more rigid,
- G. whereas, for both men and women, employment rates are lower in rural areas, and, additionally, a lot of women are never active in the official labour market and, therefore, are neither registered as unemployed nor reflected in unemployment statistics; whereas rural areas are badly affected by the lack of high-quality employment opportunities,
- H. reiterating its view that implementation of Directive 86/613/EEC has not been effective hitherto or fulfilled the original objectives of that directive, in particular that of improving the status of assisting spouses,
- I. whereas many women in rural areas are engaged in occupations which are comparable to a professional activity but are not recognised, protected or paid as such,
- J. whereas only a small number of women are the owners of farms - typically small-sized economic operations with low profitability - and most women in the countryside work alongside their male companions (fathers, brothers or husbands), who have exclusive property rights to the farm in question (agriculture or stockbreeding);
- K. whereas the situations in rural areas vary considerably, both between the Member States and within individual Member States, and whereas, therefore, rural areas with differing development potential all have to be given adequate support, as do the people living in those areas,
- L. whereas rural areas can offer a high quality of life for families with children and for elderly people but they still posit a wide range of challenges, such as a lack of education and training infrastructure at all levels and inadequate social services networks without, for example, a sufficient number of appropriate child-care facilities, outreach services and care for elderly or sick people or those with disabilities, as well as facing pressure from ongoing agricultural restructuring and environmental protection measures,
- M. whereas the significant contribution made by women to local and community development is inadequately reflected in their participation in the relevant decision-making processes,
- N. whereas women mostly volunteer for voluntary work within and in relation to their families, and the family is the fundamental societal unit,
- O. whereas rural areas are particularly affected by ageing populations, low population density and, in some areas, depopulation,
- P. whereas the out-migration of females in economically active age groups continues to result in a degree of "masculinisation" of the rural population, with negative consequences

for the quality of life of the community and demographic trends,

- Q. whereas women in rural areas, in particular, spend a lot of time driving their children and other family members to doctors, schools and sports and whereas young people are disadvantaged by the lack of local public transport services and therefore have fewer opportunities to find vocational training or work,
 - R. having regard to the greater obstacles to access to information and communication technologies in the countryside, especially for women,
 - S. whereas rural areas offer real opportunities in term of their potential for growth in new sectors and the provision of rural amenities, craft activities and tourism, which are mostly run by women and are a significant economic factor for underdeveloped, but scenically interesting, areas,
 - T. whereas more consideration should be given to gender budgeting with a view to effective governance of rural development programmes and, in particular, better targeting of funding at the specific needs of women in such areas,
 - U. whereas the elimination of inequalities and the promotion of equal opportunities for men and women are prime objectives of Council Regulation (EC) No 1260/1999,
1. Is convinced that mainstreaming gender into the rural sector is a key strategy not only for the promotion of equality between women and men but also for economic growth and sustainable rural development;
 2. Calls on the Commission to improve statistical data and information as regards this phenomenon and to analyse the patterns of, main reasons for and consequences of the out-migration from rural areas in the EU; calls on the Member States to develop strategies aimed at curbing the out-migration of women in rural areas, especially those who are highly educated;
 3. Calls on the Member States, in collaboration with local government and business, to create incentives for the participation of women in the labour force, in particular by getting rid of any discrimination against women on the labour market, with the aim of addressing the problem of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas; notes that poverty is widespread in rural communities, especially in the new Member States;
 4. Calls on the Member States to adopt suitable measures for self-employed women with regard to maternity and sick leave;
 5. Calls on the Commission to provide statistics on poverty and social exclusion disaggregated not only by gender and age but also by the urban/rural dimension;
 6. Calls on the Member States to support the transition from agricultural-based rural areas to rural areas with broader economic bases;
 7. Calls on the Member States to implement policies to improve the general living conditions of women in rural areas and to safeguard the future of rural areas by offering accessible

rural services, such as postal services, broadband and new applied-technology services, cultural and sports centres, fire brigades and general public services;

8. Calls on the Member States to promote women's entrepreneurship, support female business networks, such as tutoring/coaching models or alliances of female entrepreneurs, and design initiatives targeted at improving the entrepreneurial attitude, skills and capabilities of women in rural areas;
9. Calls on the Council, the Commission and the Member States to financially increase innovative measures for women in rural areas; calls on the Commission to set up LEADER networking projects for the exchange of experiences and best practice;
10. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to take account of the substantial group of - usually female - partners assisting with farming and in small and medium- sized enterprises (SMEs), who, in many Member States, suffer from a lack of legal status, which leads to specific financial and legal problems in relation to the right to maternity and sick leave, the acquisition of pension rights and access to social security as well as in the event of divorce;
11. Calls on the Member States to provide ideological and financial support for unremunerated work and voluntary work;
12. Points out that women in rural areas are more affected by hidden unemployment than men due to traditional role models and the poor endowment of many areas with the appropriate infrastructure, such as childcare facilities;
13. Calls on the Member States, in cooperation with regional authorities, to encourage the establishment of regional resource centres for women, particularly those between the ages of 25 and 60 who face unemployment, and to support them in taking steps towards self-employment or in developing services within their own communities through grassroots consultation and needs assessment;
14. Calls on the Member States to improve education and training facilities as well as childcare infrastructure, care for the elderly and disabled people and health services, especially the availability of primary health care; calls on the Member States to assure the provision of paramedical and emergency doctors' services in rural areas;
15. Draws attention to the strong taboos surrounding sexual and/or domestic violence against women and girls in rural areas, calls on the Member States to take appropriate measures to ensure better protection and support of victims and those at risk of becoming victims of such violence;
16. Urges the Member States to address the lack of good transport infrastructure in rural areas and develop positive policies to improve access to transport for all, particularly disabled persons, as transport continues to be a factor in entrenching social exclusion and inequality in society, primarily affecting women;
17. Calls on the Commission, in the framework of the revision of rural development programmes, to closely monitor the integration of the gender perspective into the rural

development programmes submitted by the Member States;

18. Welcomes, in this connection, ESF/EQUAL projects which seek to highlight and improve the position of women within agriculture and in rural areas; calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote such projects within the European Union;
19. Calls on the Member States to support companies that invest in rural areas and offer high-quality employment to women;
20. Calls on the EU institutions, the Member States and regional and local authorities to encourage the holding of forums for the exchange of knowledge or similar activities, both nationally and internationally, specifically regarding the situation of women in the countryside;
21. Refers to the fact that women are under-represented in formal rural or regional leadership positions, despite the fact that they play an important role in the 'informal' community, where women often play an essential role in the community's social life by influencing the emergence of social capital through their involvement in informal local networks (e.g. in the framework of voluntary community work or various thematic associations);
22. Calls on the relevant national, regional and local authorities to encourage the participation of women in local action groups and the development of local partnerships under the Leader axis as well as to ensure gender-balanced participation on their management boards;
23. Regrets the fact that the Commission has not responded to Parliament's aforementioned resolution of 3 July 2003 by undertaking a radical revision of Directive 86/613/EEC, despite the fact that the Commission itself acknowledges that the application of that directive to date has been ineffective and that minimal progress has been made in recognising the work of, and providing adequate protection for, assisting spouses of persons engaged in self-employed or agricultural activity in the Member States; calls again on the Commission to submit, by the end of 2008, a revised directive providing for independent social and pension rights for women assisting on agricultural holdings and women assisting in SMEs;
24. Deeply regrets, moreover, the fact that the Commission has yet to make any practical response to Parliament's previous resolutions on the situation of spouses assisting persons engaged in self-employed activities, which included calls for:
 - compulsory registration of assisting spouses so that they are no longer invisible workers;
 - the obligation on Member States to take the necessary measures to ensure that assisting spouses are able to take out insurance cover for health care, retirement pension, maternity benefit and replacement services and disability benefits;
25. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions, and to the executive and elective bodies responsible for equal opportunities at local, regional, and national level in the Member States.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Introduction

The life of women in rural areas creates a multiplicity of opportunities and problems.

Development of rural areas can not be based on agriculture alone, diversification both within and beyond the agricultural sector are indispensable in order to promote viable sustainable rural development.¹

According to the estimates of the European Commission, rural areas in the European Union represent 92 % of the territory and 56 % of the population. They are strikingly varied in terms of social and economic structure, geography and culture. Rural economies generate 45% of GVA and provide 53% of the employment, but tend to lag as regards the number of socio-economic indicators compared to non-rural areas². Rural areas offer real opportunities in terms of their potential for growth in new sectors, the provision of rural amenities and tourism, their attractiveness as a place to live and work, their role as a reservoir of natural resources and highly valued landscapes, their settlements with a rich history and architectural remains, and protected areas such as regional or national parks.

The processes of globalisation have different affects on various rural areas, leading to restructuring and decline of the agriculture sector, the growth of services sector and increased emphasis of technology. These undergoing economic and social changes affect women. Rural women are not homogenous group; therefore, these changes affect women in various ways. Their particular situation depends on variety of factors: women's needs and interests differ as differ the opportunities and challenge they face.

On 20 February 2006 the European Council has adopted Strategic guidelines for rural development. Full involvement of women and women's contribution to revitalising the local communities, establishing new businesses, maximising human resources are crucial in meeting the priorities set out in the Guidelines, especially in improving the quality of life in rural areas, encouraging diversification of the rural economy, improving competitiveness of rural areas. Moreover, ensuring that women and men have equal opportunities is essential for sustainability of rural development

According to the objectives set out at the Lisbon European Council in 2000, by 2010 European Union should become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth together with a quantitative and qualitative improvement in employment and greater social cohesion. Achieving the Lisbon targets on employment will require a further improvement of efforts made by Member States, especially as regards the access of women to labour market. Women play crucial role in socio-political, social, economic, environmental development of rural areas. Europe's rural areas must fully exploit their potential or risk falling behind in meeting the Lisbon targets,

¹ Final declaration "Planting seeds for rural futures - building a policy that can deliver our ambitions", The European Conference on Rural Development, 12 -12 November 2003, Salzburg.

² Impact assessment.

particularly in the remotest and most agricultural areas.

Problematics

Despite the dominance of urban areas and the attention metropolises get in the discourses of elected representatives, executives, decision-makers from central, local, metropolitan and regional government as well as the media, a bigger part of the social and economic life happens in rural areas. Although cities undoubtedly contribute to the achievement of goals set out in the Lisbon agenda, sustainable development of rural areas offer opportunities that are vital for the growth of the EU economy.

Indicators reveal that employment rates of both men and women are lower in rural areas. Furthermore, in many EU countries unemployment combined with a lack of diversification in employment is more common for women than that of rural men. Traditionally female activity rates are lower in rural areas as female working in farms are not always counted in the labour force and fewer paid employment opportunities exist compared with more urban areas.

Rural areas are experiencing demographic, social and cultural changes. Demographic ageing, being and important issue throughout the Europe, is especially evident in the predominantly rural areas of some Member States. Women dominate as the providers of the primary care for children and other dependent people. Women make working-time adjustments to fulfil caring obligations, and thus experience negative short-term and long-term consequences in terms of career, earnings and pensions. This also applies to urban areas as well, but there the infrastructure is better and usually the journeys are shorter, because everything is more centralised.

Europe's rural areas are diverse and include many leading regions. However, some rural areas, and in particular those which are most remote, depopulated or dependent on agriculture face particular challenges. They need support to meet the challenges of growth and sustainability in the coming years. Various problems tend to cumulate here: an unfavourable demographic situation, lower employment rates and higher unemployment rates, lower levels of income, unbalanced division of labour in the domestic household, difficulties in combining working and family lives, insufficient technical and social infrastructure, the provision of various services i.e. health care services, local public transport, child care facilities and social services for elderly and the sick; a slower development of the tertiary sector; weaknesses in skills and human capital; lack of education and training facilities; lower percentage of households who have access to 'broadband' internet; lack of business services supportive to women's projects and enterprises; low investment activities; small number of women in decision making and planning, etc.

In today's Europe the inequalities are observable not only on the rural-urban spectrum but also between the richer and poorer EU countries, where inequalities are clearly expressed in the data across a wide range of domains, making a case for prioritising the needs of the new Member States. There are different women's groups in rural areas - old and young, unemployed and economically active, women farmers, women living in central and marginal areas - and thus, different activities for the different women's groups are needed. In the poorer

countries of the enlarged EU, it is the rural areas that deprivation is most marked¹. A potential problem here is the possibility that the more rural and remote regions of the new Member States will be seen as having limited growth potential and will not receive their share of investment; this is despite the fact that, as evidence suggests, it may be these very areas that people experience the highest levels of deprivation and the poorest quality of life.

Such a situation contributes to a continuing out-migration of especially young and well-trained persons in many places. As a majority among those who leave are women, there are negative effects on the social life of that rural area and rural economy. Furthermore, it contributes to the deterioration of the number of “communal households”. The institutions of social infrastructure and services of public interest are heavily impaired. Additionally to a loss of population, observable lower fertility rates endanger medium to long-term development of these regions.

Recommendations

Women in rural areas need particular political attention. Rapporteur asks for genuinely support for local initiatives, community action and an integrated approach to rural development, focused on women. Mainstreaming gender into the rural sector must be a key strategy not only for the promotion of equality between women and men, but also for sustainable economic growth. Specific measures are crucial in order to target and address the urgent problems and needs faced by women in rural areas. Rapporteur emphasizes that first of all the society's awareness of the disadvantages of women in rural areas has to be raised. Furthermore, rapporteur calls for the necessity to ensure that gender dimension is taken into account in the impact assessments of the EU rural development policies as well as into all budgetary processes linked to the implementation of rural development policies. Furthermore, to counterbalance an unbalanced situation there must be financial incentives to encourage local authorities to enforce specific measures.

Rural women everywhere are in a minority in decision-making and planning. The low level of participation of women in decision-making inevitably leads to biases in the priorities and. The challenge for rural development programmes is to identify the constraints on women's full participation in the economic and public life at local level, and to develop specific initiatives in their favour. It is important to support the development of networks as highly transformative in terms of improving women's employment opportunities i.e. establishing regional resource centres for women that could focus its efforts on empowering women, particularly those between the ages of 25 and 60 years who faced unemployment and to support them towards self-employment or in developing services within their own communities through grassroots consultation and needs assessment.

Diversification is necessary for growth, employment sustainable development in rural areas. It is important to strengthen the entering and involvement of women in new economic sectors such as telecommunications, leisure services, and environmental improvement. By entering into self-employment and setting up small businesses women can be at the forefront on innovation and diversification in rural areas. Tourism, crafts and the provision of rural amenities are growth sectors in many regions and offer opportunities both for farm

¹ First European Quality of Life Survey: urban - rural differences.

diversification and the development of micro-businesses in the broader rural economy. In promoting training, information and entrepreneurship the particular needs of women should be considered. Moreover, the successful LEADER programme should be continued as it has helped many women develop paying activities in the fields of tourism, crafts and regional products.

The reconciliation of work with family life in a rural environment is hindered by the distance between the dwelling place, the workplace and the different services. Because of the unequal distribution of household activities in a couple, women are often confronted with the issue of reconciling work with family life. EU should support the Member States to promote the reconciliation of working and family lives in rural as well as in urban areas, especially in economically underdeveloped rural regions, in close connection with the communities by promoting an access to employment, most particularly community jobs, by developing external help for household chores and by making various means of communication easier accessible. Whereas these elements belong to the public sphere, one more important element is linked to the changing social behaviour and concerns the sharing of household activities between women and men. This must be done individually however, the overall social development must be pressed ahead.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	28.1.2008
Result of final vote	+: 27 -: 0 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Edit Bauer, Lívía Járóka, Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, Esther De Lange, Astrid Lulling, Doris Pack, Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, Zita Pleštinská, Anna Záborská, Edite Estrela, Lissy Gröner, Pia Elda Locatelli, Christa Prets, Teresa Riera Madurell, Anne Van Lancker, Siiri Oviir, Hiltrud Breyer, Věra Flasarová, Eva-Britt Svensson
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Elisabeth Jeggle, Christa Klaß, Gabriela Crețu, Anna Hedh, Marusya Ivanova Lyubcheva,
Substitute(s) under Rule 178(2) present for the final vote	Petru Filip, José Ribeiro e Castro, Eva Lichtenberger