

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

2007/2191(INI)

6.5.2008

OPINION

of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

for the Committee on Regional Development

on the impact of cohesion policies on the integration of vulnerable
communities and groups
(2007/2191(INI))

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development calls on the Committee on Regional Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Points out that impoverishment and exclusion are not unique to urban areas but also affect rural areas, even though they may assume specific forms in those areas, particularly on account of the fact that, in rural areas, social exclusion is compounded by territorial exclusion and since the exclusion of those areas from economic development means that all the social categories living there are affected;
2. Points out that, although women play a central role in the rural economy, they are almost entirely invisible within decision-making bodies, hence action should be taken at all levels in order to ensure that women are better represented within cooperatives, trade unions and local political bodies; specific action should also be taken to support women in rural areas, in order to safeguard their rights and combat poverty;
3. Points out that, although seasonal workers have always been one of the most vulnerable groups in rural areas, seasonal work is these days largely in the hands of migrant workers; hence, considers that such workers should have the benefit of employment contracts and working conditions similar to those of resident workers;
4. Considers that, although rural exodus acted in the past as a safety valve for farmers excluded from their original activity, this is no longer the case these days, since unemployment is seriously affecting the unskilled; hence the industrial units established in rural areas are amongst the first victims of restructuring and relocation operations, which have the effect of reducing the scope for the multiple activity upon which small farmers in difficulty used to be able to rely in order to supplement their income from farming; this has the effect of driving them even more rapidly into penury;
5. Calls for income-generating activities to continue in rural areas, for which purpose particular attention should be devoted to family farming and to small and medium-sized farmers, with the CAP being revised in order to make it fairer, as well as to non-agricultural entrepreneurial activities which supply goods and services that are essential to maintaining the population and welcoming new arrivals;
6. Points out that farming is very often the last remaining activity in rural areas, hence stresses the importance of the continuing provision of high-quality public services in rural areas (including in mountain and extremely remote areas) in order to combat isolation and to provide universal access to education, healthcare, transport and communications, culture and a decent life for farmers and their families; considers that incentives must therefore be introduced to encourage young farmers to set up farms, but that in addition to the viability of their farms there should be a particular focus on favouring equal access to public services (post offices, schools, public transport, health services, etc.) and the preservation of services for the public (day-care facilities for young children, facilities for the elderly, subsidised housing and housing available for rent, etc.) and of social forums that make it possible to break isolation (shops, cafés, cultural centres, etc.);

7. Believes that the production of energy from renewable sources, such as agricultural biogas and wood-chip fuel from forestry, in local energy-generating plants has the potential to revitalise the economies of rural and peripheral areas and to support a sustainable energy policy, provided that the positive carbon balance of the process is guaranteed, and a negative impact on international security of food supply and the agro-ecosystem can be avoided; calls for more Structural and Cohesion Funds to be invested in developing technologies for such energy production;
8. Stresses the importance of agricultural and non-agricultural economic activities (such as processing and direct marketing of agricultural products, tourism, services, small and medium-sized industries) in rural areas for employment and the prevention of poverty and rural exodus; calls, therefore, for improved facilities for further vocational training in rural areas to support the development of businesses;
9. Considers that particular attention should be devoted to the new Member States, since although those countries experienced net migration to the countryside during the period of transition to a market economy, that trend could go into reverse in the future, thus aggravating the problems of impoverishment not only in the countryside but also in urban areas;
10. Points out that low population density in rural areas and hence those areas' lack of electoral weight also have implications in terms of political choice; observes that job-seekers are being encouraged to specialise, which is difficult to reconcile with the multiple activity required in rural areas on account of the precarious nature of employment; points out that more extensive support should be provided for young farmers in order to combat rural depopulation;
11. Points out that attention must be paid to linkage and complementarity between funds mobilised for the development of rural areas, whether stemming from regional policy or the CAP;
12. Stresses the importance of protecting traditional forms of agriculture, such as crofting, which underpin the cohesion of rural communities in peripheral regions;
13. Stresses the need to boost support for farmers' associations, cooperatives, wine cooperatives and other local institutions in the field of crafts and other activities in addition to farming so as to facilitate the marketing of products, the creation of local markets and closer links between producers and consumers.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	6.5.2008
Result of final vote	+: 33 -: 0 0: 0
Members present for the final vote	Vincenzo Aita, Peter Baco, Bernadette Bourzai, Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos, Giuseppe Castiglione, Giovanna Corda, Joseph Daul, Albert Deß, Carmen Fraga Estévez, Ioannis Gklavakis, Lutz Goepel, Friedrich-Wilhelm Graefe zu Baringdorf, Lily Jacobs, Elisabeth Jeggle, Heinz Kindermann, Véronique Mathieu, Rosa Miguélez Ramos, James Nicholson, Neil Parish, María Isabel Salinas García, Agnes Schierhuber, Willem Schuth, Czesław Adam Siekierski, Donato Tommaso Veraldi, Janusz Wojciechowski, Andrzej Tomasz Zapałowski
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Liam Aylward, Esther De Lange, Ilda Figueiredo, Gábor Harangozó, Wiesław Stefan Kuc, Astrid Lulling, Kyösti Virrankoski