

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3651/03

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to the Commission

Subject: Poor working conditions for au pairs in the Netherlands

Is the Commission aware of the poor working conditions which apply to 70% of au pairs in the Netherlands, who are compelled to perform too much, and excessively heavy, domestic work and to care for children for more than the permitted 30 hours per week, as revealed by a report by the Netherlands Ministry of Justice which is as yet unpublished but will be published shortly (according to the Volkskrant newspaper of 25 November 2003)?

Is the Commission further aware that the proliferation of agencies on the Internet, the lack of any quality certification system for such agencies, the protracted visa procedures and the high costs, due to which many au pairs are employed illegally, lead to a situation in which au pairs' rights are insufficiently respected?

Is the Commission aware that these circumstances do not accord with its own recommendation to the Member States to sign and ratify at the earliest opportunity the Council of Europe's European Agreement on au pair placement of 24 November 1969, which lays down rules, inter alia, on working conditions and the setting-up of national consultative and information bodies?

Can the Commission establish to what extent au pairs are similarly exploited in other Member States?

How will the Commission tackle this practice, bearing in mind, inter alia, the growing uncertainty about the safeguarding of au pairs' rights - irrespective of their own responsibility - and in view of the Commission's duty to encourage close cooperation among the Member States in the field of social policy (Article 136 in conjunction with Article 140 of the EC Treaty)?