Situation of women in rural areas of the EU

2007/2117(INI) - 12/03/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted, by 601 votes to 25 with 39 abstentions, a resolution on the situation of women in rural areas of the EU in response to Commission Communications on rural development.

The own-initiative report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Christa **KLASS** (EPP-ED, DE) on behalf of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality.

Members are 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. They call 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 emigration from rural areas in the EU. The Commission is also asked to provide statistics on poverty and social exclusion disaggregated not only by gender and age but also by the urban/rural dimension.

Member States are called upon to:

-develop strategies aimed at curbing emigration of women from rural areas, especially those who are highly educated;

-create incentives for the participation of women in the labour force, with the aim of addressing the problem of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas;

-adopt measures for self-employed women with regard to maternity and sick leave;

-support the transition from agricultural-based rural areas to rural areas with broader economic bases;

-implement policies to improve the general living conditions of women in rural, 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;

-design initiatives targeted at improving the entrepreneurial attitude, skills and capabilities of women in rural areas.

Parliament goes on to call the EU institutions, Member States and the regional and local authorities to support projects to promote – and business start-up advice for – the creation of innovative primary agricultural production enterprises in rural areas that are apt to provide new jobs taken up predominantly by women, with the main spheres of action being unused or under-utilised products, adding value to agricultural products and seeking sales outlets for these, the use of new technologies and contributing to the economic diversification of the area and the provision of services enabling the reconciliation of working and family life.

It stresses the need to give the greatest possible value to women's work, including that of immigrant women, who do not belong to families owning farms and provide labour in the fields, and are especially affected by the difficulties related to their position as women in the world of agriculture.

The resolution points out that women in rural areas are more affected by hidden unemployment than men due to traditional female roles and the lack of appropriate infrastructure in many sectors. Members call upon Member States to: (i) encourage the establishment of regional resource centres for women who face

unemployment; (ii) improve education and training facilities, as well as childcare infrastructure, care for the elderly and disabled people, and health services; (iii) address the lack of good transport infrastructure in rural areas; (iv) support companies that invest in rural areas and offer high-quality employment to women.

The Council, the Commission and the Member States are called upon to increase funding for innovative measures for women in rural areas. In this context, MEPs call on the Commission to: (i) set up LEADER networking projects for the exchange of experiences and best practices; (ii) monitor closely the integration of the gender perspective into the rural development programmes submitted by the Member States.

Parliament draws attention to the strong taboos surrounding sexual and/or domestic violence against women and girls in rural areas. Member States are called to take appropriate measures to ensure better protection and support of victims and those at risk of becoming victims of such violence.

Lastly, Members deeply regret 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: (a) the compulsory registration of assisting spouses so that they are no longer invisible workers; (b) 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 pensions, maternity benefit and replacement services as well as disability benefits.