Women and their roles in rural areas

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The European Parliament adopted by 523 votes to 104, with 58 abstentions, a resolution on women and their roles in rural areas.

Parliament recalled that the economic crisis has affected the European Union and has had a severe impact on many rural areas and regions. Women directly experience the impact of the crisis in the management of their farms and homes.

Moreover, women represent slightly less than 50 % of the total working-age population in the rural areas of the EU, but only about 45 % of the total economically active population. Many are never registered as unemployed or included in unemployment statistics and no clear figures exist on women's involvement in farming as owners or employees.

Promoting women in rural areas: Parliament emphasised the active role of women in rural areas and recognised women's contribution to the economy in such areas as **entrepreneurs, heads of the family business and promoters of sustainable development**. It took the view that, from a social, economic and environmental perspective, female entrepreneurship is a major sustainable-development pillar for rural areas and should therefore be promoted, encouraged and supported within rural development strategies, and, in particular, through **education and vocational training**, promotion of female ownership, entrepreneurs' networks and access to investment and credit, promotion of their representation in managerial bodies, and through creating the opportunities necessary to support young, self-employed, part-time and often lowpaid women.

Parliament called on the Commission, together with the Member States, to support successful reconciliation of work-life balance, the stimulation of new job opportunities and better quality of life in rural areas, as well as encouraging women to put their own projects into practice.

The Commission and the Member States are called upon to promote access to the labour market for women in rural areas as a priority in its future rural development policies.

In this regard, Member States are called upon to:

- include in their rural development programmes strategies focusing specifically on women's contribution to achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy;
- promote information and technical assistance measures and an exchange of good practices between Member States concerning the establishment of a professional status for spouses in farming, enabling them to enjoy individual rights, including, in particular, maternity leave, social insurance against accidents at work, access to training and retirement pension rights.

Parliament recommended that the Commission keep and improve thematic sub-programmes on "Women in rural areas" when reforming the CAP in the future, basing these programmes, inter alia, on the marketing, direct sale and **promotion of products at local or regional level**. It called on the Member States, in the light of the conditionalities as regards equality between women and men, as an obligation and a core objective of the EU and its Member States, and of non-discrimination, to create greater synergies while using the instruments available under the EAFRD, Leader+, Horizon 2020 and the European Social Fund (ESF) for **creating better living and working conditions in rural areas** and to raise awareness of all possibilities offered to them in rural areas under existing legislation.

Parliament hoped that a better understanding of the situation of women in rural areas will allow the development of a **European Charter for Women Farmers** in the medium term, defining this concept, identifying direct and indirect forms of discrimination against women in rural areas and positive discrimination measures to eliminate them.

Specific measures should be taken to promote **training and employment** and safeguard the rights of the most vulnerable groups of women with specific needs, such as women with disabilities, migrant women, including seasonal migrants, refugees and minorities, victims of gender-based violence, women with little or no training and single mothers, etc.

Gender equality in farming: Member States are encouraged to promote equality between women and men in the various management and representation bodies. Effective measures should be taken to reduce the existing gender pay and pensions gaps.

Parliament called on the Member States and regional and local governments to provide affordable, high-quality facilities and public and private services for everyday life in rural areas, particularly with regard to health, education and care. It added that this would require the inclusion of **rural childcare infrastructures**, healthcare services, educational facilities, care homes for elderly and dependent people, sickness and maternity replacement services and cultural services.

Education: given that the inclusion of women and girls in education and lifelong learning, particularly in areas of science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM), as well as in entrepreneurship is necessary for achieving gender equality in the agricultural and food production sectors, Parliament called for:

- adequate informational material on support possibilities specifically aimed at women farmers and women in rural areas;
- full access to education and vocational training in agriculture and all related sectors;
- the involvement of women with higher-level qualifications in agriculture, livestock-raising and forestry to be encouraged, and facilitated in so doing by training programmes to develop activities linked to the provision of advisory services to farms and innovation.

Violence against women: Parliament condemned all forms of violence against women and noted that assistance to victims plays a crucial role. It called, therefore, on the Member States and regional and local governments to send a strong message of **zero tolerance for violence against women**, and to implement policies and offer services tailored to the conditions existing in rural areas in order to prevent and combat violence against women, therefore ensuring that victims have access to assistance.

It called on the Member States and regional and local governments to ensure that victims of violence against women living in rural and remote areas are not deprived of equal access to assistance.

Funding and land acquisition: Member States are called upon to facilitate equitable access to land, ensure ownership and inheritance rights and facilitate access to credit for women. Parliament encouraged, further, the Member States to address the issue of land grabbing and land concentration at EU level. New models of agricultural credit which have become possible in the context of close cooperation between the Commission and the European Investment Bank have been highlighted.

Lastly, Parliament stressed that better use should be made of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund to expand and upgrade transport infrastructure and to provide a secure energy supply and reliable high-speed broadband infrastructure and services in rural areas.