Situation of women in rural areas of the EU

2007/2117(INI) - 28/01/2008

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted an own-initiative report by Christa **KLAß** (EPP-ED, DE) on the situation of women in rural areas of the European Union.

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 on rural out-migration and 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 the out-migration of women in 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 suitable measures for self-employed women with regard to maternity and sick leave;

- implement policies to improve the general living conditions of women in rural areas by ensuring access and availability of broadband services, cultural and sports centres, and general public services;
- design initiatives targeted at improving the entrepreneurial attitude, skills and capabilities of women in rural areas.

The report also 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) closely monitor the integration of the gender perspective into the rural development programmes submitted by the Member States.

The report also 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.