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Rural women in Europe

Report[1]
Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men
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Summary

Women are a driving force for the maintenance, conservation and development of rural areas, contributing to the agricultural workforce and the preservation of traditions in the face of a constant process of depopulation.

Unfortunately, rural women are confronted with major challenges in the achievement of gender equality, face discrimination in the enjoyment of their rights and are particularly vulnerable to violence. This situation might be aggravated by the combined effect of globalisation and the financial and economic crisis.

The member states of the Council of Europe should devise legal measures and policy specifically focusing on rural women and incorporate a gender-sensitive approach in the elaboration and implementation of policies having an impact on their situation.

1. 2011 - Second part-session

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A. Draft resolution[2]

1. Women are a driving force for the maintenance, conservation and development of rural areas, both in cultural and economic terms. Not only do they contribute to the preservation and transmission of traditions but they also represent a considerable proportion of the workforce in agriculture and contribute to the development of rural areas in the face of a constant process of depopulation.

2. Unfortunately, due to certain conditions prevailing in rural areas, such as unemployment, poverty, poor transport and lack of basic services in the field of education, health and care, and to the persistence of a traditional mentality imposing stereotyped roles for women and men and confining women to a subordinate role in both private and public life, women in rural areas are confronted with major challenges in the achievement of gender equality and the enjoyment of their rights. As a result of this situation, many women, in particular the young, tend to leave the countryside which, together with demographic changes, further exacerbates the depopulation process of rural areas.

3. This problem is often aggravated by the failure of Council of Europe member states to adequately ensure gender mainstreaming in the elaboration and implementation of legislative and policy measures relating to agriculture and rural areas. This was particularly the case during the privatisation process which took place in the 1990s in a number of states which are today members of the Council of Europe. In addition, rural women are seldom the subject of specific and targeted legislative measures and policy.

4. The Parliamentary Assembly notes that, despite marked regional differences in the situation of these women in member states, a number of common issues of concern can be identified: rural women are not adequately accounted for in national statistics; they have limited opportunities of finding employment, limited access to credits and social security cover; they have limited access to healthcare and social services; they face obstacles in access to property and inheritance rights; they face difficulties in reconciling work and family life and have limited decision-making power – if any – within the family business.

5. Furthermore, the Assembly notes with great concern that rural women are particularly vulnerable to violence, including so-called “honour crimes” and domestic violence, and that, in some member states where rural areas are affected by widespread unemployment and poverty, they are particularly at risk of becoming victims of trafficking in human beings.

6. The Assembly fears that the combined effect of globalisation and the current financial and economic crisis might further worsen the living conditions of rural women, increasing their vulnerability and their exposure to discrimination and human rights violations.

7. The Assembly, therefore, calls on Council of Europe member states to:

7.1. devise specific legal measures and policy specifically focusing on the situation of rural women and aimed at achieving progress in equal opportunities so as to create the conditions to enable women to remain in rural areas;

7.2. ensure a gender-sensitive approach in the elaboration and implementation of all the policies that have an impact on the situation of rural women;

7.3. involve rural women in the elaboration and implementation of policies and decisions affecting them;

7.4. promote greater participation by rural women in decision making, encouraging their presence in local political life, in the governing bodies of businesses, co-operatives, local agricultural boards and agricultural associations;

7.5. monitor the proper implementation of the law by law enforcement officials and other public officials in rural areas, in the fields of justice, labour law and criminal law, in order to strengthen respect of the rule of law;

7.6. ensure that law-enforcement officials and members of the judiciary in rural areas receive training on gender equality and on domestic violence, and promote the presence of female staff amongst them;

7.7. set up or support visibility and awareness campaigns, as well as information services to inform rural women about their rights;

7.8. promote the setting up of fora for exchanging knowledge, best practice and experience at national and international level on the situation of rural women;

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2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 2 December 2010.

7.9. apply gender-budgeting;

7.10. sign and ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197), ensure its strict implementation and co-operate with its monitoring mechanism (GRETA);

7.11. support the negotiations on the drafting of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

8. In addition, as regards statistics, the Assembly asks Council of Europe member states to:

8.1. draw up statistics aimed at providing a clear overview of the situation and living conditions of women in rural areas in order to elaborate focused policies;

8.2. improve statistical data and information on the reasons why women leave rural areas, with a view to implementing the necessary measures to curb this exodus;

8.3. produce statistical studies on the impact of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas, including a gender-impact assessment, in order to establish policies to tackle these problems;

8.4. consider setting up national observatories to collect and share data and information, and monitor the evolution of the situation.

9. As regards the improvement of the economic conditions of rural women, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member states to:

9.1. ensure that women are not discriminated against as regards access to property and inheritance rights;

9.2. introduce legal provisions relating to the concept of “shared ownership”;

9.3. end discrimination against women in access to employment and wage discrimination;

9.4. facilitate the provision of microcredits, funds and loans for rural women who wish to set up a business, by themselves or through co-operatives, especially as regards innovatory projects which create new jobs for women in rural areas;

9.5. organise training in rural areas to promote women’s entrepreneurship;

9.6. give added value to agricultural products, create commercial outlets for them and contribute to diversification of the rural economy;

9.7. promote the recourse to and availability of new technologies;

9.8. promote opportunities for rural women to work from home;

9.9. increase job opportunities in rural areas in sectors other than agriculture;

9.10. create incentives for businesses which decide to set themselves up in rural areas and employ women.

10. As regards the improvement of rural women’s social conditions, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member states to:

10.1. develop a comprehensive legislative framework on the status of helping spouses, affording them access to social security, retirement pensions, medical care, maternity leave and maternity entitlements, and ensuring the application of national safety and health regulations;

10.2. set up a system to register those who work as helping spouses, in order to ensure the enjoyment of their full social rights, in compliance with Assembly Resolution 1752 (2010) on decent pensions for women and Resolution 1329 (2003) on the status of collaborating partners in family businesses;

10.3. improve working conditions of women and men in agriculture and ensure a gender-sensitive approach to risk assessment and prevention of health hazards for agricultural workers. Special attention should be given to the situation of pregnant women and breast-feeding mothers;

10.4. strengthen the availability of essential services such as nurseries, compulsory schools, services for elderly persons and persons with disabilities, health and social services, to make it easier for rural women to reconcile work and family life;

10.5. ensure the availability of health care facilities in rural areas and services relating to sexual and reproductive health and family planning, if necessary setting up mobile units;

10.6. promote schooling, adult education and vocational training for women and girls in rural areas;

10.7. set up or encourage the establishment of information offices and advocacy centres providing rural women with advice on their rights and legal representation;

10.8. invest in infrastructures and services such as roads, public transport, broad band and internet connections, including in remote rural areas, so as to reduce the inhabitants' – in particular women's – isolation and increase their employment and education opportunities;

10.9. set up appropriate reintegration programmes and facilities for victims of trafficking in rural areas, as well as protection mechanisms, services and shelters for victims of violence, including domestic violence.

11. Finally, the Assembly calls on the European Parliament and the European Commission, within their respective remits, to:

11.1. pursue their efforts to ensure gender mainstreaming in all their policies and measures, including the Common Agricultural Policy and the Structural Funds;

11.2. monitor the implementation of Directive 2010/41 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity and repealing Council Directive 86/613/EEC.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Quintanilla Barba, rapporteur

1. Rural women and the Council of Europe

1. In tabling a motion for a resolution on the real situation of rural women in Europe in the Parliamentary Assembly (Doc. 11773), I was guided by my personal experience and commitment as President of Afammer (Association of Rural Families and Women), a Spanish non-governmental organisation which, since 1982, represents women in the development of rural areas and defends their rights.[3]

2. With this report, it is not the first time that the Assembly has devoted its attention to the situation of rural women. In 1997, at the initiative of the then Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, the Assembly adopted Recommendation 1321 (1997) on the improvement of the situation of women in rural society. Unfortunately, in replying to this text, the Committee of Ministers decided not to include any specific activity on rural women in its work programme, arguing that this would duplicate the work undertaken by the European Communities, the European Parliament and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).[4]

3. I regret to say that, in my opinion, this decision lacked vision: the mid-1990s were key years for the process of political and economic transition in a number of European countries which joined the Council of Europe in that period or immediately after. Rural women were particularly exposed to the negative consequences of this process. Formerly, they had the same access to privatisation of land and other properties as men, but, de facto, they were excluded. Their situation deteriorated as a result of the budgetary restrictions which led to the dramatic reduction of services – such as transport, schools, child-care facilities and hospitals – in the countryside. In many cases, they were the victims of a return to traditional cultural and religious values which confined them to the house and the care of children, depriving them of a public role in society and of the opportunity to obtain economic empowerment.

4. In a nutshell: rural women were the main victims of the lack of consideration of gender equality in the economic transition process of the 1990s and of its subsequent varied impact on women and men. Unfortunately, at the time, the Council of Europe failed to identify rural women as a groupparticularly at risk from social and economic exclusion, discrimination and human rights violations and put in place adequate projects to remedy this state of affairs.

5. In those same years, the most deadly conflict in Europe since the Second World War ravaged the countries of the former Yugoslavia. Rural areas suffered the most. The war was fought village by village and provoked generalised poverty, destruction and food shortages. People abandoned their land and farms to find refuge in the mountains, other areas of their country or abroad. Rural women were victims of sexual violence in the context of the conflict, many found themselves widows, others fell victim to trafficking. In general, women's standing in society and concerns for gender equality took a step backwards, due to a prevailing war mentality which primed the supremacy of men both in private and public life.

6. Since the mid-1990s things have evolved. Indeed, the European Union played a major role in moving the situation forward in its new member states. Not only did the newcomers have to adapt to the European Union *acquis* on equality between women and men in the context of employment, but also, in those same years, the European Union introduced a new approach to gender equality, extending gender mainstreaming to new areas of policy, including agriculture. In this context, the European Union started to reflect on the different impact that structural funds had on women and men and introduced initiatives specifically targeting women.

7. Despite this progress, the situation of rural women in European Union countries still varies considerably, not only from state to state but also from one region to another. If we look at the situation of rural women in the Council of Europe area – where the European Union has neither exerted the same influence nor allocated the same amount of resources – these disparities are even more striking. In any case, it is a fact that, due to specific objective conditions prevailing in rural areas and the persistence of a traditional mentality, women in rural areas are confronted with major challenges in the achievement of gender equality and the enjoyment of their rights.

8. At this particular point in time, the joint effect of the process of globalisation and the financial economic crisis risks further exacerbating existing gender inequalities and deteriorating the situation of women living in rural areas, unless Council of Europe member states anticipate and act.

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3. www.afammer.es/.
4. Committee of Ministers' reply to Recommendation 1321 (1997) (14 April 1998) (Doc. 8072).

9. In the present report, I will describe the situation in some selected Council of Europe member states in order to give an idea of the complex outlook of rural women in Europe. I shall examine their situation in the context of equality between women and men and women's economic empowerment, as a result of the mandate of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, for which I am rapporteur. I am pleased that the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs will be able to complement my analysis with its expertise, giving an opinion.

10. As a final point in my introduction, I should like to mention that this report is largely basedonahearing on "The real situation of rural women", which was organised by the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men on 26 March 2010,[5] and on information drawn from the reports and concluding observations resulting from the reporting mechanism established by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in particular its Article 14. I have also paid great attention to the work undertaken by the European Union under the Spanish Presidency, which considered the improvement of the situation of rural women as one of its priorities.

2. Rural women: an essential but invisible driving force worldwide

11. Women are a driving force for the maintenance, conservation and development of rural areas, both in cultural and economic terms. Not only do they contribute to the preservation of a rich and diversified cultural heritage and the transmission of traditions but they also represent a considerable proportion of the workforce in agriculture and contribute to the development of the rural sector in the face of constant depopulation.

12. Unfortunately, women in rural areas are also an invisible force. Their presence and role are not accurately reflected in statistics and many of those who are involved in agricultural work do not receive a separate income from their husbands or other male members of the household. As helping spouses of farmers and other self-employed men, they are not entitled to social security in their own right and often they do not hold property rights on land or farms.

13. It is estimated that, in Europe, approximately 14.6 million people work in agriculture. 41% of them are women, 78% of whom work helping spouses while the others are owners or co-owners. In general, in Europe, the majority of women who work in agriculture are the spouses of the owner, which leads to the invisibility of their employment status.

14. As the Secretary-General of the United Nations quotes in his report on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas, "Women constitute up to 70% of the agricultural labour force but most do not own or control any land. Rural women own less than 10% of the property in the developed world, and 2% in the developing world. It is estimated that women in Africa receive less than 10% of all credit going to small farmers and only 1% of the total credit going to the agricultural sector".[6]

15. The link between women, agriculture and development explains why United Nations entities, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO),[7] as well as global economic and financial institutions, including the World Bank, have paid special attention to women's critical role in developing countries.

16. In the past years, a clear understanding has emerged in the international community that neglecting gender issues in the context of development is not only contrary to human rights, but is also a missed opportunity to raise agricultural productivity and income. Especially in low income countries in which agriculture accounts for an average 32% of the GDP, women make up a substantial majority of the workforce and produce most of the food which is consumed locally.[8]

17. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, in 1995, represented a landmark event for the recognition of the contribution of women to development and the identification of the main areas of concern as regards the situation of rural women worldwide. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action greatly influenced the way in which governments and international organisations approached gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the following years.[9]

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5. The proceedings of the hearing are available from the committee secretariat.
6. A/64/190, 29 July 2009, paragraph 4.
7. The FAO was a pioneer in this field: in 1989 it launched its first Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development.
8. The World Bank, Gender in Agriculture, 2008.
9. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/index.html.

18. In the aftermath of Beijing, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a number of resolutions concerning the issue of rural women, in which it emphasised their extreme vulnerability as a result of the global economic downturn and the importance of sound gender-sensitive agricultural policies and strategies.[10]

19. The most comprehensive and detailed text adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on this issue is Resolution 62/136 on the improvement of the situation of rural women which, *inter alia*:

– requests that the relevant United Nations bodies and organisations, in particular those dealing with development issues, address and support the empowerment of rural women and their specific needs in their programmes and strategies;

– invites the Commission on the Status of Women to continue to pay due attention to the situation of rural women as a priority area;

– declares 15 October as the International Day of Rural Women, with a view to giving greater visibility to the question;

– asks states to take a number of measures to empower rural women and ensure that attention is given to their priorities, needs and contributions in the following areas:

– promoting the participation of rural women in decision making;

– strengthening the economic empowerment of rural women;

– providing health-care services;

– eliminating violence against women in rural areas;

– meeting the needs of women in vulnerable situations (rural women with disabilities, indigenous women and older women);

– asks the Secretary-General to submit a report reviewing the activities undertaken by United Nations member states and entities.

20. Two years since the adoption of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 62/136, in its first report drawn up at the General Assembly's request, the United Nations Secretary-General could but warn against the risk that the inequalities and discrimination faced by rural women might increase as a result of the confluence of the financial and economic crisis, the threat of climate change, and the fuel and food crises: "In times of crises, women also take on additional responsibilities to provide non-market substitutes for market goods that their families are no longer able to afford. Owing to climate vulnerability, agricultural production is expected to fall in both tropical and in most temperate regions, with a direct negative effect on agriculture where women represent a large part of the workforce. Sharp increases in food and fuel prices over the past few years have eroded the purchasing power of poor households, especially female headed households, which are the poorest of all. The food and fuel crises have raised serious concerns about food insecurity and malnutrition in many countries, which threaten the well-being and health of poor rural women and their families".[11]

3. A general portrait of rural women in Europe

21. Rural areas in Europe are strikingly varied in terms of social and economic structure, geography and culture. Likewise, rural women are not a homogeneous group; they have different roles and occupations, on farms and in family businesses, in employment outside the agricultural sector, in the household and the community. Their needs and interests differ too, particularly according to their age, level of education, the size and composition of their family and the age of their children.

22. The first obstacle in drawing up a portrait of rural women in Europe is the lack of gender-focused statistics. Data are collected for other purposes and then put together to highlight gender differences in rural areas, in particular in the agricultural sector. As a consequence, the available information is neither well targeted nor completely comparable.

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10. See Resolutions 62/206 on women in development, 62/190 on agricultural technology for development, 63/187 on the right to food, 63/229 on the role of microcredit and microfinance in the eradication of poverty, 62/138 and 63/158 on supporting efforts to end obstetric fistula, 62/140 on the girl child and 62/136 on the improvement of the situation of rural women.

11. United Nations Secretary-General, report on "Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas", A/64/190, 29 July 2009, paragraph 5.

23. A precious source of information for the European Union is Eurostat, which compiles statistics on agricultural structures, therefore making it possible to compare data on the labour force in agriculture broken down by gender. Based on this information, some general features can be identifiedin the European Union:

– women represent 28.7% of farm-holders and this figure is on the rise;

– on average, farms run by women are 40% smaller than those run by male farmers;

– the percentage of female sole-holders is higher in the new European Union member states than in the old member states.

24. Even if there is no uniform collection of comparable data or statistics applying to the entire Council of Europe area, from the information available it can be inferred that:

– a sizeable proportion of women employed in agriculture are helping spouses,[12] that is to say they assist or participate in the farm business without being a business partner in the formal sense;

– the unemployment rate in rural areas is much higher than in urban areas and affects women more than men;

– a sizeable proportion of women working on farms are hired on a temporary basis;

– many women working on farms also have another occasional or part-time job, often in a sector different from agriculture;

– a sizeable proportion of women are employed in seasonal work, sometimes in the shadow economy, a growing number of them are migrants.

4. The situation in selected countries

25. In this section, and fully acknowledging that the information is incomplete, I would like to describe the situation in a number of selected countries in order to give an idea of the complexity of the challenges faced by rural women in different Council of Europe member states.

4.1. Bosnia and Herzegovina[13]

26. The end of the 1992-95 conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina marked the beginning of a double transition: the transition from war to peace and an economic and political transition. Today, the country's gross domestic product is only half its pre-war level and social sector spending has dropped dramatically. According to Lenyara Khayasedinova, co-ordinator of the Gender Mainstreaming Programme for Central and Eastern Europe and Newly Independent States at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), after the war, "when family benefits and public social services were decreased, women's social standing in society plunged. There was a return to more traditional attitudes towards gender, and women who once held prestigious positions in public life are now often expected to stay home engaged in domestic duties".

27. Nevertheless, according to the IFAD, one quarter of the households in Bosnia and Herzegovina are headed by women, as a result of the war or of men having to go abroad in search for work. Only 35% of those employed in the country are women, who face discrimination and receive lower wages than men. In addition to having to reconcile work and family duties, women lack access to land, training, credit and equipment.

28. The situation of women is particularly difficult in rural areas where the legacy of the war has left deep scars and the mentality of the population is not gender sensitive. Although women and men are formally equal according to the law, de facto traditional customs of inequality persist in the areas of education for girls, right to property and inheritance.

29. There does not appear to be a problem with social cover (retirement pensions and disability insurance) for agricultural workers and members of their families who are involved in agriculture as their primary occupation. But only a small number of rural households are covered by health insurance.

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12. In the European Union, more than 80% of rural women are "helping spouses".

13. Sources: International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), *In post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina, women are a driving force for change*, www.ruralpovertyportal.org; UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *Consideration of reports submitted by states parties under Article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 18 April 2005,CEDAW/C/BIH/1-3.

30. Rural women have limited access to information on their rights and to health services, including counselling and family planning, due to the inexistence of appropriate structures in rural areas, insufficient funds to set them up, or the distance involved in obtaining such services.

31. Despite this difficult situation, the report by the United Nations Secretary-General on "Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas" takes stock of a number of steps in the right direction. These include the fact that a number of rural women's organisations were involved in the drafting of the national action plan on gender equality; the effort made by the government to integrate the gender perspective into rural development policies; the inclusion of women entrepreneurs in agricultural and trade fairs and the strengthening of mobile services in the field of reproductive health and family planning.

32. On 15 October of this year, on the occasion of the International Day of Rural Women, women's associations from the Republic of Srpska, in co-operation with the Gender Centre of the Government of Republic of Srpska, launched the campaign "Equality for Rural Women", which aimed at emphasising the problems faced by rural women, increasing their visibility and improving their status. Campaign activities conducted over one week included a number of round-table discussions, debates and seminars, cultural events, as well as street actions and promotions during which rural products and promotional materials were distributed to the public.[14]

4.2. Finland[15]

33. Finland has several characteristics which make it an interesting case study for this report: it is one of the best countries in terms of gender equality, is relatively rich, has a large agricultural sector and a very low population density per square kilometre, especially in rural areas.

34. In this country, for years there has been an awareness of the importance of incorporating the gender dimension in agricultural policies and specific bodies and action plans have been set up to this end on a periodic basis. In 2003, a working group on women set up under the national action plan (called the Rural Policy Programme) drew up an Action Plan for Rural Women. Finland's Rural Development Strategy for 2007-2013 includes a number of measures aimed at improving the situation of rural women, amongst other groups.[16]

35. The number of women landowners and entrepreneurs is relatively high, even if statistics are not accurate as regards co-ownership: when spouses are co-owners, statistics take account only of one of them – usually the man.[17] Training aimed at enhancing women's entrepreneurial skills are organised or promoted by governmental agencies, such as the Women's Enterprise Agency. It is not more difficult for women than for men to find employment in the countryside.[18]

36. A consolidated system of distance-learning and, more recently, substantial investments in the field of communication and information technology have made it possible to raise the education level of rural women, even in remote areas. In addition, the Nordic model of adult education organised by local rural institutes has proved very successful.[19]

4.3. Italy[20]

37. Italy has one of the lowest employment rates for women (42%) as compared to the European Union average (55.6%). As a result of the progressive deregulation of the labour market and the willingness to tackle the high unemployment rate, in the 1990s, a number of policies and legislative measures were introduced designed to support entrepreneurship. Examples of these are the simplification of procedures to set up a business, the reduction of relevant costs, easier access to credit, the improvement of the social security cover for self-employed workers, etc.

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14. www.kampanjainfo.org/.
15. Source: UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *Consideration of reports submitted by states parties under Article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Finland*, 26 February 2004, CEDAW/C/FIN/5.
16. Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, *National strategy plan pursuant to Council Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)*, August 2006.
17. This happens in Finland and Sweden (see European Commission, Advisory Committee on Women in Rural Areas, draft minutes of the meeting of 25 March 2010).
18. See footnote 16.
19. Presentation given by Ms Merja Siltanen at the hearing on "The real situation of rural women in Europe", Paris, 26 March 2010.

38. In addition, some specific measures addressed exclusively young people and women, such as Law 215/92 on Positive Actions for Female Entrepreneurship, which is a legal basis for the granting of subsidies for the setting up or development of entrepreneurial initiatives by women and aims at removing the socio-economic constraints which limit or prevent women's access to the labour market and enterprise, such as lack of adequate training or information.

39. According to the National Institute of Statistics (Istat), from 1999 to 2003 there was a slight increase in the number of farms run by women (from 26.3 to 27.3%), and even if this percentage is still low if compared to men, it is still rising.

40. In Italy, rural population ageing is one of the main constraints affecting rural development. Indeed, in agriculture there is a high percentage of women in the age group 35-54 (59.4%), a small percentage of 15-34 year-old-women (22.9%), while women over 50 total 33.9%. This is not in line with the age breakdown of women working in the industrial and service sectors, where there is a higher percentage of young women from 15 to 34 (39.2%) and a lower percentage of women over 50 (17.8%).

41. In general, the level of education of women working in the agricultural sector is lower than the national average. According to Istat data for 2001, only 1.7% have a university degree, 16.6% have a secondary school diploma, 36.5% finished compulsory schooling, while 5.6% did not complete compulsory schooling.

42. Rural women work longer hours than other female workers; 27.5% work part-time. The majority of farms run by women are efficient, innovative and oriented towards diversification, such as the direct marketing of farm products and agro-tourism.

43. In 1997, the Italian Government set up a National Observatory for Female Enterprise and Labour in Agriculture (ONILFA), headed by the Minister of Agriculture and comprised of representatives of a number of other ministries concerned. It aims to assess the actual employment possibilities of women in the rural sector and formulate the necessary strategy to enhance such opportunities.

4.4. Poland[21]

44. Since 1989, Poland, together with other countries in the region, has undergone radical socio-economic transformations which have had an impact on the characteristics of rural areas. Unfortunately, despite the importance of the agricultural sector for Poland's economy, issues connected with life in rural areas remain one of the research fields that have been the most neglected; rural women are seldom the focus of studies by researchers in agriculture or gender studies specialists.

45. At the moment, the Polish rural economy is based on small farms producing food mainly for their own use. Rural enterprise is also dominated by small family businesses and their earnings are significantly limited by low demand for goods and services, caused by rural unemployment and poverty. This situation is aggravated by the fact that a large number of farms are run by elderly and isolated people, whose main source of financial resources is social welfare aid and who have neither the resources nor the sense of initiative to change their way of farming methods or develop an innovative approach.

46. The rural population represents 38.6% of the overall population of Poland, with women accounting for 50.2% in rural areas. Rural settlement is fragmented, consisting of 53 000 localities, 15% of which are inhabited by less than 100 residents, 66% are inhabited by a population ranging from 100 to 500 residents, 13% by a population ranging from 500 to 1 000 inhabitants and only 6% by a population exceeding 1 000.

47. In the years 2000-2005, the percentage of working age population grew from 56.8% to 60.7% in rural areas (in urban areas this percentage amounted to 66.1%). According to forecasts, by 2015 this percentage will increase to 63.7% in rural areas and decrease to 63.2% in urban areas. This increase in rural areas is due, on the one hand, to the fact that rural families have more children and, on the other hand, to the fact that for fifteen years there has been a process of "return to the countryside". An increasing proportion of urban Poles – mainly entrepreneurs, affluent and with a good level of education – settle in rural areas in the proximity of cities. At the same time, the outflow of rural people to urban areas in search for jobs has halted and there is a marked return to rural areas.

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20. Main source: Navarra V., *Rural development policies and programmes in support of rural women, The Italian experience*, National Observatory for Female Entreprise and Labour in Agriculture (ONILFA), 2009, www.onilfa.gov.it.

21. Source: Krzyszkowski J. (ed), *Family and Counteracting Discrimination, Diagnosis of the Social and Professional Situation of Rural Women in Poland*, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Department of Women, Warsaw, 2008.

48. Ageing has become a serious problem for Poland, especially in rural areas, where the percentage of inhabitants in the economically post-productive age is higher than in towns. As regards the age structure of inhabitants in rural areas, men outnumber women in the age category below 54, whereas in the age category above 54 women outnumber men.

49. The employment status of rural women has not been measured, but research and surveys show that a higher percentage of rural women than men and urban women are unemployed. Amongst the main difficulties in finding employment are: the shortage of job opportunities in the place of residence, geographical inconvenience, poor local transport, the poor quality of roads and the lack of social infrastructure (nurseries, care homes or social services).

50. The Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS) insures 4.5 million farmers and is equally accessible for women and men. Social security benefits and rules are the same for both sexes, with the exception of a lower retirement age for women. In addition, rural women can benefit from birth allowances (three basic pensions) and maternity allowances (equivalent to eight weeks sick pay). These benefits may be claimed by women insured for at least one year.[22]

51. Even if Poland has been a member of the European Union since 2004, surveys show that rural women do not feel confident in taking advantage of European Union structural funds, mainly due to lack of knowledge of the administrative procedures. They are also reluctant to change the farming model for more innovative forms that have proven successful in other European Union member states, such as agro-tourism; similarly, not many rural women would consider working from home (teleworking).

52. There are, however, positive signs of change: women who contribute to the family income are more frequently treated as equal partners in decision-making and women's authority in the family is rising.[23]

4.5. Russian Federation[24]

53. In the Russian Federation there are 20 million women out of a total rural population of 38 million people; 9 million of these women are of working age. Women holding leadership positions as farmers, entrepreneurs or in large and medium-sized enterprises total 19%. The number of rural women with higher vocational education is 1.6 times higher than for rural men; however, proportionally, women's unemployment rate is higher.

54. The main social problems afflicting rural areas are poverty and low standards of living. The average income is €235 per month, which represents 47% of the wage in urban areas. Unemployment is nearly twice as high as in cities.

55. During the period 2000-2008, essential services such as nursery schools, schools, hospitals and local public transport have been reduced by 18%, 24%, 22% and 20% respectively. At the same time, 34% of rural villages do not have hard surface roads.

56. According to NGOs, in spite of the fact that the Russian Federation has undertaken a lot of measures aimed at the eradication of discrimination against women, de facto discrimination against women living in rural areas continues to take place, in different forms.

57. First of all, there is no up-to-date, comprehensive specific legal framework to address their situation, the most recent piece of legislation being the Resolution of the Supreme Soviet RSFSR 11/1/1990 N 298/3-1 on "urgent measures for the improvement of the position of women, families, motherhood and childhood advocacy in rural areas", from 1990. Similarly, there is no specific social welfare programme addressing the specific conditions of women living in rural areas.[25]

58. Secondly, rural women have no knowledge of their legal rights and, at the same time, the local and state authorities "close their eyes" to the application of the law in a variety of issues strongly affecting them, such as sexual violence, domestic violence, enforcement of labour rights and non-discrimination law (so-called "passive discrimination").

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22. UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *Consideration of reports submitted by states parties under Article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Poland*, 13 December 2004, CEDAW/C/POL/6), paragraphs 233-234.
23. Ibid.
24. Presentation given by Ms Elena Vasilieva at the hearing on "The real situation of rural women in Europe".
25. Novgorod Gender Centre, *Shadow report, Discrimination and Status of Rural Women in the Russian Federation*, for the 46th session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 2010.

59. Even if the negative consequences of the reforms in the agrarian sector undertaken in the 1990s have affected all the agrarian population, women are in the most disadvantaged situation. Reforms of the agricultural enterprises and their privatisation occurred without any participation of women, due to the poor representation of women in local authorities and to the fact that most women did not have the means and skills to set up their own farms.

60. In addition, like urban women, rural women have been strongly affected by the decreasing number of public health, educational and trade institutions in the countryside, where they were often employed by the state.

61. The accessibility of health services is a major problem. In rural areas, the reduction of governmental expenditure on public health services has led to the closing of specialised institutions and hospitals. The majority of medical services are not free of charge. First aid emergency services are rare.

62. Concerns have been raised about the problem of lack of confidentiality on HIV, drug addiction and hepatitis diagnoses by employees of medical institutions in rural areas. The diagnoses affecting mothers is also disclosed to schools, as this information is indicated in children's medical history cards, which can lead to discrimination not only against the mother but also against the child.[26]

63. Amongst rural women there is a high percentage of anaemia, owing to the decrease in the quality of food and the ecological conditions of the areas. The incidence of occupational illness remains high among women, the most common problems being those affecting the bone structure and respiratory organs.[27]

64. In spite of high unemployment and poverty, rural families tend to have a lot of children. This can be considered as a successful result of the government's policy aimed at fighting against demographic decline. A broad range of measures has been introduced to enhance the quality and availability of medical assistance and social benefits for mothers and their children and to support, also with financial incentives and tax reductions, young and large families, in particular those with more than three children.[28]

4.6. Spain[29]

65. In Spain, 24% of the population live in rural areas, including 5 million women. The average Spanish woman living in a rural area is married, over 50 years of age, has 2.3 children and devotes eight hours per day to domestic tasks and five to activities outside the house.

66. Less than 9% of farms are run by women. In the majority of cases, these exploitations are small (less than one hectare) which is below subsistence level. Only 3% of exploitations of more than 50 hectares are run by women. The level of responsibility that these women have in running their agricultural business does not correspond to their real decision-making power, because husbands or male family members have the upper hand as a patriarchal mentality continues to reign.

67. A growing number of women farmers are engaged in innovative entrepreneurial activities, such as rural tourism, production of organic food, transformation and trade of agricultural products, traditional handcrafts, etc. Some 32% of the women who hold the property rights of their farm or land are over 65 years of age, 7.4% are under 35 and only 1.4 under 25. The ageing of the population is particularly evident in Galicia (36%) and the Basque country (46%).

68. Eighty-two per cent of women living in the countryside are helping spouses or family members. Their status is not clearly defined in the legislation. They do not earn a wage and only 59% of them are covered by social insurance. In recent years, there has been a sharp increase in the number of migrant female workers in the agricultural-food industry who are employed as temporary farmhands.

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26. Ibid.
27. UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *Consideration of reports submitted by states parties under Article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Russian Federation*, 3 March 1999, CEDAW/C/USR/5.
28. Information provided by Mr Valery Parfenov (Russian Federation, EDG).
29. Unless otherwise stated, the source to this chapter is: Martinez Leon I. and de Miguel Gomez D., *La importancia de la mujer en el medio rural espanol*, Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena, 2007.

69. On 31 December 2006, there were 463 628 women amongst the beneficiaries of the Agrarian Social Security System (*Régimen Especial Agrario de la Seguridad Social, REASS*), 81% of whom were employees and the rest self-employed. The number of women receiving payments from another social security system for the self-employed (the RETA, *Registro de Inscritos en el Regimen Especial de Trabajadores Autonomos*) has increased for women by 51% in the period 1999-2006.[30]

70. In 2007, the government approved a plan to promote gender equality in rural areas and Law 45/2007 on sustainable rural development which established the principle of transversality in rural development policies by encouraging the active participation of women in positions of responsibility, and positive action. It also called for raising the profile of women's work and their participation as owners or co-owners of farms, retaining women or the incorporation of women in agriculture, female employment and diversification of activities, training, reconciling work and family life, and access to new technologies.[31]

71. An interesting example of good practice is the sponsoring by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAPA) of activities aimed at promoting the development of women's entrepreneurial capacity as well as their leadership. In 2010, the Ministry granted the First Award of Excellence for Innovation for Rural Women.[32]

72. Remarkable progress in the legal situation of rural women was made in 2009, with the entry into force of the Royal Decree on Shared Ownership which, in addition to setting out rights and obligations stemming from shared ownership in agriculture, introduces a number of incentives in areas such as social security payments, facilitated access to financial assistance, special benefits for employing young people, etc.[33]

4.7. Turkey

73. The agricultural sector is the traditional source of employment for Turkish women. They are at a disadvantage in the industrial and services sectors owing to their lower education level, less well-targeted vocational qualifications or family and cultural constraints. 73% of working women are engaged in agricultural activities, compared to 40% of men.

74. Compared to other sectors, agriculture employs a higher proportion of illiterate workers. In the period 1995-2006 the overall literacy rate was 88.1%, with 96% for men and 80.1% for women.[34] In 2008, the literacy rate for women increased to 86.91%, according to the Turkish Statistical Institute. Despite this improvement, on average three quarters of illiterate men and almost all the illiterate women in the labour force are engaged in agriculture. As the education level increases, both women and men prefer to relocate in order to work in other sectors of the economy.

75. Women are heavily involved in activities such as storage, maintenance, sale and processing, but they have little control or participation in the decision-making process at the farm level. This is the case even when women assume, de facto, the responsibility of running the farm as men migrate to cities in search of work.

76. Approximately 77% of women working in the agricultural sector are unpaid workers in family enterprises. Despite their contribution in agriculture, their important role is not well recognised. Women's work in traditional rural activities is often unpaid and is not considered work but a "lifestyle". In families with no land, most of the seasonal workers are women. These two categories are not covered by the social security system.

77. Most rural villages have a health centre or a health house that provides basic and mother-child health care services. According to the Turkish authorities themselves, however, this system is not sufficient to respond to serious health problems, for instance in the case of women with reproductive health complications (complications in pregnancy, etc.).[35]

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30. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, *Plan para favorecer la igualdad entre mujeres y hombres en el medio rural*, 2007, Appendix I.
31. www.mapa.es/desarrollo/pags/mujer/plan_igualdad/indice.pdf.
32. www.meattradenewsdaily.co.uk/default.aspx?Country=Spain.
33. www.boe.es/boe/dias/2009/10/14/pdfs/BOE-A-2009-16339.pdf.
34. UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *Consideration of reports submitted by states parties under Article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Turkey*, 24 November 2008, CEDAW/C/TUR/6.
35. Ibid.

78. Unsafe abortion is one of the major causes of death among women of reproductive age in Turkey. Despite the liberal nature of the abortion law, the number of legal abortions up to ten weeks performed in the country has been sharply restricted by the requirement that the procedure be carried out only by or under the supervision of gynaecologists. This factor is especially critical in rural Turkey, where medical specialists of any type are rare or non-existent. Many rural health facilities that are without a trained specialist are excluded from providing services. Consequently, a rural Turkish woman seeking an abortion within the first ten weeks of pregnancy may not be able to obtain one.[36]

79. The situation of rural women varies considerably according to the region they live in. The most comprehensive rural development project so far addresses the poorest area in Turkey and is known as GAP, Southeast Anatolia Development Project, and is still ongoing. One of the most innovative initiatives set up under the GAP is the establishment of multi-purpose community centres (ÇATOMs), which are designed to facilitate the participation of women in the development process and are run by women elected by participants themselves.[37] Amongst the ÇATOMs' main activities are:

– the provision of short courses on literacy, computer skills, English and home economics;

– programmes on hygiene, mother-child health and basic medical services;

– capacity building in management and leadership;

– training on income-generating activities, including handicrafts, sewing, hairdressing, etc.

80. In general, in recent years, the Turkish Government has made a huge effort to improve the availability of health care for rural women, including in remote areas, by setting up special structures in which women can give birth and remain for a period after giving birth, as well as helicopter services for emergency cases. Similarly, special programmes and campaigns have been set up to improve literacy, which is fundamental for women's empowerment.[38]

5. The role of the European Union

81. Thanks to its comprehensive legal framework and the case law of the European Court of Justice on non-discrimination on grounds of sex in the field of employment, the European Union has played a major role in contributing to the improvement of the situation of rural women in its member states, including the eastern European countries which joined the European Union in the two last rounds of accessions. These countries, in fact, were requested to adapt to the *acquis communautaire* in this area even before their formal membership.

82. In the 1990s, moreover, the European Union took a leap forward in the field of gender equality, by committing itself to ensuring gender mainstreaming in all European Union policies, including the Structural Funds. On 2 December 1996, the Council of the European Union adopted a resolution on mainstreaming equal opportunities for men and women into the European Structural Funds.[39] In the resolution the Council called upon European Union member states to take full advantage of existing possibilities for programming in the context of various forms of Structural Fund operations in order to promote equal opportunities, and to examine the scope for refocusing programmes in the light of the priorities to fight against unemployment and achieve equal opportunities. In addition, amongst other measures, the Council called upon the Commission to systematise the identification of good practice and the dissemination of information and experience relating to good practice, and to review the implementation of the resolution every year in its annual report on the Structural Funds.[40]

83. Since then, gender mainstreaming has been systematically taken into account in the context of the Structural Funds, including in the context of the Common Agricultural Policy, at all stages (it is explicitly mentioned in the objectives of the funds, and should feature in the preparation of programme proposals, in the management of the programmes and in the monitoring and evaluation). It has also been reiterated as a policy approach in a number of European Union regulations, directives and communications.

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36. Aritran Igde F. et al, *Abortion in Turkey : women in rural areas and the law*, British Journal of General Practiice, 2008, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2435661/.
37. *Innovations for Women's Empowerment in the GAP Region Project, Activity Report, January-June 2009*, GAP Regional Development Administration, supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.
38. Information provided by Ms Nursana Memecan (Turkey, ALDE).
39. Official Journal C 386, 20 December 1996.
40. Braithwaite M., *Mainstreaming Gender in the European Structural Funds*, 2000, http://eucenter.wisc.edu/conferences/gender/braith.htm

84. In addition, over the last twenty years the European Union has set up a number of financial programmes specifically aimed at supporting the effective implementation of the principle of gender equality. These include:

– NOW (New Opportunities for Women), an initiative to support training, employment creation and enterprise support projects, including for rural women;

– Leader+ (in operation in the context of the Common Agricultural Policy, from 2000 to 2006), an initiative aimed at supporting the creation of jobs for young people and women in rural areas by providing incentives for the development of new activities and sources of employment;

– PROGRESS (2007-2013), an employment and social solidarity programme covering actions against discrimination, equality between men and women, employment measures and the fight against social exclusion.

85. The Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union put a great deal of commitment and energy into moving forward the agenda of improving gender equality in rural areas, by promoting a number of visibility events, formal and informal meetings.[41] It also succeeded in pushing through a new directive on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity (Directive 2010/41/EU), which was finalised only a few days after the end of the presidency.

86. This text repeals the previous Council Directive 86/613 of 11 December 1986 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity, including agriculture, in a self-employed capacity and on the protection of self-employed women during pregnancy and motherhood,[42] as requested on several occasions by the European Parliament.[43]

87. Directive 2010/41 should be a landmark text, as for the first time it affirms the right of self-employed women and assisting female spouses of self-employed workers – who are the majority of women working in rural areas – the right to maternity leave and maternity benefits, as well as to autonomous social protection rights for helping spouses of self-employed workers.

88. It should be noted, however, that also before Directive 2010/41, a number of European Union member states, including Belgium, France and Spain, recognised the status of those helping spouses in agriculture, granting them the same rights as the owner in the field of social rights, access to financial assistance, etc.

6. Main areas of concern and measures to address them

89. In this chapter, I would like to summarise the main challenges which confront rural women and mention some basic recommendations on how to address them, which I develop in more detail in the draft resolution.

6.1. Economic conditions

6.1.1. Independent income

90. As already mentioned, the great majority of women are involved in agricultural work on the family farm; they do not earn a wage which is separate from their husband or relatives. However, since the income derived from the farm is often insufficient for the needs of the family, in many European countries rural women also have another job, usually in the nearby town. This lack of monetary income often creates a situation of dependence.

6.1.1.1. Recommendations:

91. Council of Europe member states should establish a registry of helping spouses and family members, they should include the registration of co-ownership in legal and statistical documents and they should provide or support the provision of vocational training for women in rural areas.

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41. See, for instance, the European Forum, *Las mujeres en el desarrollo sostenible de medio rural* (Caceres, April 2010) and its Final Declaration.
42. Official Journal L 359 of 19 December 1986.
43. European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2008 on the situation of women in rural areas of the European Union (INI/2007/2117).

6.1.2. Property and inheritance rights

92. Even if the legislation of Council of Europe member states has been revised in order to eliminate gender inequalities as regards property and inheritance rights, the persistence of patriarchal customs and practices often affects the capacity of women to enjoy these rights.[44]

93. The most common obstacles are:

– at the moment of registration, the person considered as the "head of household" – usually the husband – is indicated as sole owner of the farm or land;

– when the male sole owner dies, the wife shares the estate with the other heirs instead of having the right to sell it or mortgage it as a co-owner;

– in the context of inheritance, the land or farm is handed over to male heirs, who are considered better suited to continue this activity. In some cases, women give up their share of the inheritance in favour of male heirs, for the same reason.

94. In the context of the land reforms which took place in eastern and central European countries in the 1990s, this vulnerability of women to discrimination in the access to property rights has not been sufficiently taken into account.

6.1.2.1. Recommendations:

95. Council of Europe member states should set up awareness-raising campaigns as well as information services to inform rural women about their rights. They should also avoid a discriminatory application of the law by their officials, at all levels.

6.1.3. Securing credits and other funding

96. Obviously, rural women's limited access to property rights also affects their capacity to obtain bank loans. Some European countries have led the way in introducing special schemes to help women entrepreneurs set up new businesses. In Norway, for instance, women are recipients of approximately 50% allocated by the state for rural development.

97. A major obstacle, however, is rural women's poor knowledge of available funds and their lack of confidence in dealing with the necessary bureaucratic procedures.

6.1.3.1. Recommendations:

98. Council ofEurope member states shouldset up specific funds to promote employment opportunities for rural women, as well as their entrepreneurship. They should circulate information and promote training on the procedures to benefit from these funds in rural areas, as well as from allocations provided by the European Union or other organisations.

6.2. Social conditions

6.2.1. Social security

99. While women who own or co-own an agricultural business are entitled to social security as self-employed workers, the majority of rural women – due to their position as "helping spouses" – are not entitled to social security in their own right, but are considered as adult dependants. In general, therefore, they cannot benefit from social allowances, maternity leave and retirement pensions, unless this is specifically foreseen in national legislation. This situation should change in European Union member states, following the entry into force of the above-mentioned Directive 2010/41.

44. Outside Europe, inequality in the access to property and inheritance rights is still enshrined in the law. See the presentation by Ms Rachida Tahri at the hearing on the real situation of rural women.

6.2.1.1. Recommendations:

100. The European Union should closely monitor the implementation of Directive 2010/41 by its member states. Non-European Union member states should establish clear legal provisions on the situation of helping spouses and should recognise the right to maternity leave and maternity benefits, as well as to autonomous social protection rights for spouses of self-employed workers.

6.2.2. Working conditions

101. Women working in agriculture may be exposed to the same hazards and risks as male workers, but in addition they face further risks, particularly to reproductive health, for example from pesticides and biological agents.

102. A special issue of concern is that, usually, helping spouses fall outside the scope of safety and health legislation. Some Council of Europe member states, such as the United Kingdom, have decided to treat such farm workers as employees for the purposes of safety and health regulations and have covered the issue in sector guidance.

6.2.2.1. Recommendations:

103. Council of Europe member states should improve working conditions of women and men in agriculture and ensure a gender-sensitive approach to risk assessment and prevention of health hazards for agricultural workers. Special attention should be given to the situation of pregnant women and breast-feeding mothers.

6.2.3. Lack of services, including health and childcare facilities

104. Despite regional differences, throughout the Council of Europe area, rural areas are afflicted by limited availability of child-care facilities, hospitals and care facilities for the elderly and the disabled, as well as services relating to sexual and reproductive health and family planning. In some remote areas, there is a marked difference in the number of live births per woman in rural and urban areas, also because women in rural areas tend to have more children; the same can be said for women's mortality rate during childbirth.

105. Lack of roads and efficient transportation increases the isolation of rural women and girls, limits their possibilities to pursue an education or have a job outside the home, and aggravates the burden of reconciling farm work and family commitments.

6.2.3.1. Recommendations:

106. Council of Europe member states should provide rural areas with sufficient and good-quality transport, care and medical services, including in the field of reproductive health and family planning. They should envisage the creation of mobile health units. They should encourage the creation of internet connections, the provision of training in computer skills and promote teleworking.

6.3. Association and co-operation

107. Although on the rise, the participation of women in associations and clubs is still low, as is, in general, their standing in rural societies. The Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) is a network of women's associations operating in 70 countries and totalling 9 million individual members. The largest member association is the German *Landfrauenverband* (the Union of Country Women), which is also the largest women's association in Europe, comprising half a million members. Other major associations exist in countries with a long history of unions and non-governmental organisations, such as Italy, France, Spain and the Russian Federation.

108. At international level, co-operation and exchange of good practice are limited, especially outside the area of the European Union. An interesting example is the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South Eastern Europe (SWG),[45] an international organisation, linking the governmental institutions responsible for rural development in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and its federate states (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska), Bulgaria, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Kosovo,[46] Slovenia and "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", with headquarters in Skopje. Established in 2005, this agency

45. www.seerural.org.
46. All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

promotes sustainable agriculture and rural development in south-east Europe by enhancing horizontal co-operation amongst the institutions of the participating countries and territories. Its activities include the exchange of statistical data, protection and promotion of cultural heritage, promotion of environmental sustainability, etc., as well as the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women in rural areas.

6.3.1. Recommendations:

109. The Council of Europe member states should encourage the setting up of rural women's associations and involve them in the elaboration of policies affecting them. They should promote the exchange of information and good practice between such associations at international level. They should set up regional mechanisms to promote women's economic empowerment.

6.4. Vulnerability to violence and trafficking

110. Due to a complex situation of isolation, poverty, traditional mentality, poor knowledge and enforcement of the law, rural women are particularly at risk of violence, including so-called "honour crimes"[47] and domestic violence. Unfortunately, their lack of economic independence makes women more prepared to accept remaining in a violent relationship, as there is no other way in which they could ensure a living for themselves and their children. Violence against women, in particular within the family, is a widespread crime but goes largely unreported. Women are not encouraged to seek legal remedies against it; in fact, they are submitted to strong social pressure to tolerate it as "a fact of life".[48]

111. Similarly, the specific conditions of remote rural areas (such as poverty, ignorance and lack of services) make young rural women more vulnerable to trafficking, but at the same time make it virtually impossible for them to reintegrate into society when they return, voluntarily or forcibly. Social exclusion due to the stigma of prostitution, lack of economic prospects and absence of social services and reintegration programmes often condemns victims of trafficking to a lifetime of prostitution.

6.4.1. Recommendations:

112. Council of Europe member states should introduce legal frameworks of a high standard to tackle the phenomena of trafficking in human beings and violence against women, in all its forms, as serious human rights violations. They should ensure their strict implementation and promote information campaigns to make rural women more aware of their rights and of the dangers they run. They should address the root causes of trafficking in human beings, namely poverty and the lack of employment opportunities.

7. Conclusions

113. During the hearing on the issue of rural women which the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men organised in March 2010, I was particularly struck by the presentation of Ms Merja Siltanen, Area President, Europe of the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), in particular when she said that there was only one way to guarantee equal opportunities for rural women: legislation, legislation and … legislation.

114. Quite rightly, Ms Siltanen wished to be provocative, and she found the right audience: as legislators, parliamentarians have a primary duty and responsibility to take up the issue of rural women in their parliament and initiate legislation in this area. But not any kind of legislation will do. Legislation in this field must be:

– specific – and address the situation of rural women as a group which is particularly vulnerable to socio-economic exclusion and violations of their rights;

– gender-mainstreamed, in the sense that it should consider the different impact that measures have on women and men, and must involve women directly in its elaboration, implementation and assessment.

115. I hope that this report will be a useful contribution, providing examples of good practice on how to ensure that gender considerations can be taken into account in the context of agricultural policy and a source of inspiration for members of the Assembly and the governments of Council of Europe member states.

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47. See Doc. 11943, report on the urgent need to combat so-called "honour crimes" (Rapporteur: Mr John Austin, United Kingdom, SOC).
48. World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), *Violence against women in Azerbaijan, 2004*, pp. 18-23 and *Violence against women in Georgia, 2006*, p. 18; United Human Rights Council, *Domestic violence against women in Armenia*, www.unitedhumanrights.org.

116. But even once appropriate legislation is introduced, a major and daunting challenge remains. That is to change the patriarchal mentality which places women and men in stereotyped roles and confines women, in particular in rural areas, to positions of subordination and inferiority, both in private as well as in public life. Unfortunately, the experience of a number of Council of Europe member states shows that the impact of advanced legislation can be nullified by societal customs and tradition.

117. I think that the greatest contribution that the Council of Europe as an international organisation could make to the improvement of the situation of rural women and their full empowerment is ensuring that tradition never overrides the law.

Appendix – Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

1. States Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the present Convention to women in rural areas.

2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:

a. To participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;

b. To have access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counselling and services in family planning;

c. To benefit directly from social security programmes;

d. To obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, inter alia, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency;

e. To organize self-help groups and co-operatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self employment;

f. To participate in all community activities;

g. To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes;

h. To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.