Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1806 (2011)[1]

Rural women in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

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 handing down of traditions but they also represent a considerable proportion of the workforce in agriculture and support the development of rural areas in the face of a constant process of depopulation.

2. Unfortunately, due to the predominance of certain conditions in rural areas, such as unemployment, poverty, poor transport and lack of basic educational, health and care services, 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. In addition, rural women from ethnic minorities, especially Roma women, face multiple and serious forms of discrimination – more so than men from the same ethnic groups or women in the majority population. As a result of this situation, many women, in particular young women, 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 development 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 policies.

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; their opportunities for finding employment are limited, as is their access to credit, social security cover, health care and social services; they face obstacles in access to property and inheritance rights; they have difficulties reconciling work and family life and have limited, if any, decision-making power 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.

1. Assembly debate on 14 April 2011 (17th Sitting) (see Doc. 12460, report of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, rapporteur: Ms Quintanilla Barba; and Doc. 12532, opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Ms John-Calame). Text adopted by the Assembly on 14 April 2011 (17th Sitting).

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

7.1. devise specific legal measures and policies focusing in particular on improving the situation of rural women and aimed at achieving progress in equal opportunities to create conditions which will enable women to remain in rural areas;

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

7.3. provide for the involvement of rural women in agricultural policy development at national, regional and local levels and in all 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, anti-discrimination, labour law and criminal law, in order to strengthen respect for 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 in the workforce;

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

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

7.9. support information and communication networks between rural women and government institutions, with the help of professional organisations, civil society and the media;

7.10. apply gender budgeting;

7.11. 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);

7.12. support the negotiations on the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210).

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 develop 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 monitoring centres to collect and share data and information, and monitor the evolution of the situation.

9. In order to improve 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. assess the value of unpaid or low-paid work performed on the farm during married life so that it can be taken into account in the event of a couple’s separation or divorce;

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

9.5. 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 innovative projects which create new jobs for women in rural areas;

9.6. include in regional and local development strategies training programmes for rural women to improve their vocational skills in the field of sustainable agriculture and develop their entrepreneurial skills;

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

9.8. promote the recourse to and availability of new information and communication technologies;

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

9.10. increase job opportunities in rural areas in sectors other than agriculture, such as telecommunications, local services, tourism and leisure;

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

10. In order to improve the social conditions of rural women, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member states to:

10.1. develop a comprehensive legislative framework on the status of women working as helping spouses, affording them access to social security, retirement pensions, medical care, maternity leave and maternity entitlements, and ensure the application of national health and safety 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 and accidents for agricultural workers. Special attention should be given to the situation of pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers;

10.4. strengthen the availability of essential services such as nurseries, compulsory schools, care services for elderly people and people 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, broadband and Internet connections, including in remote rural areas, so as to reduce inhabitants', and 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/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union 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.