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Rural women in Europe

Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men
Rapporteur: Ms Carmen Quintanilla Barba, Spain, EPP/CD

Draft report

A. Preliminary draft resolution

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 of traditions but they also represent a considerable proportion of the workforce in agriculture and contribute to the development of the countryside 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. These together with 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.
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 '90s in a number of states which are current members of the Council of Europe. In addition, rural women are seldom the subject of specific and targeted legislative and policy measures.
4. The Assembly notes that, despite marked regional differences in the situation of rural women in Council of Europe 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 suffer 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 Council of Europe member states where rural areas are affected by widespread poverty and unemployment, 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 deteriorate the living conditions of rural women, aggravating their vulnerability and their exposure to discrimination and human rights violations.

Doc.

7. The Assembly, therefore, calls on Council of Europe member states to:
 - 7.1. devise specific legal and policy measures specifically focusing on the situation of rural women and aimed at achieving progress in their equal opportunities;
 - 7.2. ensure the incorporation of a gender-sensitive approach in the elaboration and implementation of all the policies that having 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 companies, co-operatives, local agricultural boards, and agricultural associations;
 - 7.5. monitor the implementation of the law officially and through public administration in rural areas, in the fields of justice, labour law and criminal law, in order to strengthen the 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 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 forum for exchanging knowledge, **best practice** and experience at national and international level on the situation of rural women;
 - 7.9. apply gender-budgeting;
 - 7.10. sign and ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (ETS 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. elaborate 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 the countryside 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 which help to tackle these problems;
 - 8.4. consider setting up national observatories to collect and share data, information and monitor the evolution of the situation.
9. As regards the improvement of rural women's economic conditions, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member states to:
 - 9.1. ensure that women are not discriminated against in having 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 rural 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;
 - 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, setting up, if necessary, mobile units;
 - 10.6. promote rural schooling, adult education and the provision of 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 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 remit :
- 11.1. pursue its effort to ensure gender mainstreaming in all its policies and measures, including the Common Agricultural Policy and the Structural Funds;

Doc.

- 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

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
1. Rural women and the Council of Europe	5
2. Rural women: an essential but invisible driving force worldwide	6
3. A general portrait of rural women in Europe	8
4. The situation in selected countries	8
4.1. <i>Bosnia and Herzegovina</i>	9
4.2. <i>Finland</i>	9
4.3. <i>Italy</i>	10
4.4. <i>Poland</i>	11
4.5. <i>Russian Federation</i>	12
4.6. <i>Spain</i>	13
4.7. <i>Turkey</i>	13
5. The role of the European Union	14
6. Main areas of concern and measures to address them	15
6.1. <i>Economic conditions</i>	15
a) <i>Independent income</i>	15
b) <i>Property and inheritance rights</i>	16
c) <i>Securing credits and other funding</i>	16
6.2. <i>Social conditions</i>	16
a) <i>Social security</i>	16
b) <i>Working conditions</i>	17
c) <i>Lack of services, including health and child-care facilities</i>	17
6.3. <i>Association and co-operation</i>	17
6.4. <i>Vulnerability to violence and trafficking</i>	18
7. Conclusions	18

1. Rural women and the Council of Europe

1. In tabling a motion on the real situation of rural women in Europe in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,¹ 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.²

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).³

3. I regret to say that, in my opinion, this decision lacked vision: the mid-90s 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. Formally, 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.

¹ 'The real situation of rural women in Europe', motion for a resolution, Doc. 11773.

² <http://www.afammer.es/>.

³ Reply to Recommendation 1321 (1997) from the Committee of Ministers (14 April 1998).

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 '90s 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 group particularly 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, 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 of 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-90s things have evolved. Indeed, the **European Union (EU)** played a major role in moving the situation forward in its new member states. Not only did the newcomers have to adapt to the EU *acquis* on equality between women and men in the context of employment, but also, in those same years, the EU introduced a new approach to gender equality, extending gender mainstreaming to new areas of policy, including agriculture. In this context, the EU started to reflect on the different impact that structural funds had on women and men and introduced specific initiatives targeting women.

7. Despite this progress, the situation of rural women in EU countries still differs 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 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.**

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 based on a hearing on "The real situation of rural women", which was organised by the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men on 26 March 2010,⁴ 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 also represent a considerable proportion of the workforce in agriculture and contribute to the development of the countryside in the face of constant depopulation.

⁴ The proceedings of the hearing are available from the Secretariat.

12. Unfortunately, women in rural areas are also an invisible force. Their presence and role is 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. As the Secretary-General of the United Nations quotes in his report on "Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas, *'Women constitute up to 70 per cent of the agricultural labour force but must do not own or control any land. Rural women own less than 10 per cent of the property in the developed world, and 2 per cent in the developing world. It is estimated that women in Africa receive less than 10 per cent of all credit going to small farmers and only 1 per cent of the total credit going to the agricultural sector'*".⁵

14. The link between women, agriculture and development explains why United Nations entities, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO),⁶ as well as global economic and financial institutions, including the World Bank, have paid special attention to women's critical role in developing countries.

15. 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 also a missed opportunity to raise agricultural productivity and income**. Especially in low income countries in which agriculture accounts for an average 32 percent of the GDP, women make up a substantial majority of the workforce and produce most of the food which is consumed locally.⁷

16. 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.⁸ 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 years to come.⁹

17. In the aftermath of Beijing, the UN General Assembly adopted a number of resolutions concerning the issue of rural women, in which it emphasised the extreme vulnerability of this group as a result of the global economic downturn and stressed the importance of sound gender-sensitive agricultural policies and strategies.¹⁰

18. The most comprehensive and detailed text adopted by the UN General Assembly on this issue is **Resolution 62/136** on "Improvement of the situation of rural women"¹¹ which, amongst others,

- requests that the relevant UN 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);

⁵ A/64/190, 29 July 2009, paragraph 4.

⁶ FAO was a pioneer in this field: in 1989 it launched its first Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development.

⁷ The World Bank, Gender in Agriculture, 2008.

⁸ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/>.

⁹ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/index.html>.

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, 62/140 and 63/158 on supporting efforts to end obstetric fistula and 62/136 on improvement of the situation of rural women.

¹¹ A/RES/62/136.

Doc.

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

19. Two years since the adoption of UNGA Resolution 62/136, in its first report drawn up at the General Assembly's request, the UN Secretary-General could not 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".*¹²

3. A general portrait of rural women in Europe

20. Rural areas in Europe are strikingly varied in terms of social and economic structure, geography and culture. **Rural women too are not a homogeneous group**: they have different roles and occupations, on farms and 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, on the size and composition of their family and the age of their children.

21. 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.

22. 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 up by gender. Based on this information, some general features can be identified in the EU:

- 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 EU member states compared to the old member states.

23. 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,¹³ that is 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

24. 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.

¹² UN Secretary-General, report on 'Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas', A/64/190, 29 July 2009, paragraph 5.

¹³ In the EU, more than 80% of rural women are "helping spouses".

4.1. Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁴

25. The end of the 1992-1995 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.

26. According to Lenyra Khayasedinova, coordinator 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. Nonetheless, according to IFAD, one quarter of total 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 per cent 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, access to 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 appears not 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.

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

31. Despite this difficult situation, the report by the UN Secretary-General on *"Improvement of the situation of women in rural area"* takes stock of a number of steps in the right direction, such as: 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. This year, on the occasion of 15 October (International Day of Rural Women), women's associations from the Republic of Srpska, in cooperation 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 citizens.¹⁵

4.2. Finland¹⁶

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

¹⁴ Sources: IFAD, In post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina, women are a driving force for change (www.ruralpovertyportal.org); 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).

¹⁵ <http://www.kampanjainfo.org/>.

¹⁶ Source: 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).

Doc.

periodic basis. In 2003, a working group on women set up under the national action plan (called Rural Policy Programme) drew up an Action Plan for Rural Women. Finland's Rural Development Strategy for 2007-2010 includes a number of measures aimed at improving the situation of rural women, amongst other groups.¹⁷

35. The number of women land-owners 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.¹⁸ 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 men to find employment in the countryside.¹⁹

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.²⁰

4.3. Italy²¹

37. Italy has one of the lowest employment rates for women (42%) as compared to the EU 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 '90s, 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.

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 years-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 occupied in the agricultural sector is lower than the national average: according to ISTAT data of 2001, only 1,7% of them has 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 the 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), which was 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.

¹⁷ 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).

¹⁸ 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).

¹⁹ See Finland's Rural development Strategy for 2007-2013.

²⁰ Presentation given by Ms Merja Siltanen at the hearing on "The real situation of rural women in Europe".

²¹ Main source: Veronica Navarra, Rural development policies and programmes in support of rural women, The Italian experience, National Observatory for Female Enterprise and Labour in Agriculture (ONILFA), www.onilfa.it

4.4. Poland²²

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 and its inhabitants 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 companies, and their earnings are also 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 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 1000 inhabitants and only 6% by a population exceeding 1000.

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 15 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.

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, the lack of social infrastructure (nurseries, care homes or social services).

50. The Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS) insured 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 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.²³

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 EU structural funds, due to lack of knowledge of the administrative procedures. They are also reluctant to changing the farming model for more innovative forms that have proven successful in other EU 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.²⁴

²² Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Department of Women, Family and Counteracting Discrimination, *Diagnosis of the Social and Professional Situation of Rural Women in Poland*, edited by Jerzy Krzyszkowski, Warsaw 2008.

²³ 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.

²⁴ 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).

4.5. Russian Federation²⁵

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 enterprises are 19%. The number of rural women with higher vocational education is 1,6 times bigger 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 euros per month, which represents 47% of the wage in urban areas. Unemployment is nearly twice as high as in cities.

55. Over the period 2000-2008, the provision of essential services such as nursery schools, schools, hospitals and local public transport has gone down, by 18, 24, 22 and 20%. 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.²⁶

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').

59. Even if the negative consequences of the reforms in the agrarian sector undertaken in the '90s 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, similarly to urban women, rural women have been strongly affected by the decreasing number of public health, educational and trade institutions in the countryside, where they used to be 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 services are rare.

62. Concerns have been raised about the problem of lack of confidentiality on HIV, drug addition 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 medical history cards, which can lead to discrimination not only against the mother but also the child.²⁷

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.²⁸ In

²⁵ Presentation given by Ms Elena Vasilieva at the hearing on "The real situation of rural women in Europe".

²⁶ Shadow report, Discrimination and status of rural women in the Russian Federation, prepared by the regional public organisation 'Novgorod Gender Centre' (Russian Federation) for the 46th session of the Commission on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 2010.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ 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 (CEDAW/C/USR/5).

spite of high unemployment and poverty, rural families tend to have many children. NGOs argue that having children is considered as a source income, in the form of birth allowances.²⁹

4.6. Spain³⁰

64. In Spain, 24% of the population live in rural areas, including 5 million women. The average Spanish woman living in rural areas is married, over 50 years old, has 2,3 children and devotes eight hours per day to domestic tasks and five to activities outside the house.

65. 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% exploitations above 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.

66. 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 handicrafts, etc.

67. Thirty-two percent 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 percent 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.

69. As of 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 are employees and the rest self-employed. The importance of another social security system for self-employed persons (the RETA, Registro de Inscritos en el Regimen Especial de Trabajadores Autonomos) has increased for women of 51% in the period 1999-2006.³¹

70. In 2007, the government approved a plan to promote gender equality in the countryside 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, reconciliation, and access to new technologies.³²

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.³³

4.7. Turkey

72. 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. Seventy-three percent of working women are engaged in agricultural activities compared to 40% of men.

²⁹ Shadow report, Discrimination and status of rural women in the Russian Federation, prepared by the regional public organisation 'Novgorod Gender Centre' (Russian Federation) for the 46th session of the Commission on the elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 2010

³⁰ Unless otherwise stated, the source to this chapter is: Inocencia Maria Martinez Leon and Dolores de Miguel Gomez, La importancia de la mujer en el medio rural español, 2007.

³¹ Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, Plan para favorecer la igualdad entre mujeres y hombres en el medio rural, 2007, Anexo I.

³² http://www.mapa.es/desarrollo/pags/mujer/plan_igualdad/indice.pdf

³³ <http://www.meattradenewsdaily.co.uk/default.aspx?Country=Spain>

Doc.

73. Compared to other sectors, agriculture employs a higher proportion of illiterate workers. Recent data show that the overall literacy rate is 88,1%, with 96% for men and 80,1% for women.³⁴ Although this situation is changing, 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.

74. 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.

75. Approximately 80% of women working in the agriculture sector are unpaid workers in family enterprises. Despite their contribution in agriculture, the 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.

76. Most rural villages have a health centre or a health house that provide basic and mother-child health care services. According to the Turkish authorities themselves, however, this system is not sufficient in responding to serious health problems, for instance in the case of women with reproductive health complications.³⁵

77. Induced abortion is a national problem in women's health and 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 10 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 10 weeks of pregnancy may not be able to obtain one.³⁶

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

5. The role of the European Union

79. Thanks to its comprehensive legal framework and case-law of the European Court of Justice on non-discrimination on the 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 organisation 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.

80. In the '90s, moreover, the European Union took a leap forward in the field of gender equality, by committing itself to ensuring gender mainstreaming in all EU policies, including the Structural Funds. **On 2**

³⁴ 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 *Ibidem*

³⁶ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2435661/>.

³⁷ Innovations for Women's Empowerment in the GAP Region Project, Activity Report, January-June 2009; study supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

December 1996, the Council adopted a resolution on mainstreaming equal opportunities for men and women into the European Structural Funds,³⁸ in which it called upon EU 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 each year, in its annual report on the Structural Funds.³⁹

81. 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) and reiterated as a policy approach in a number of EU regulations, directives and communications.

82. In addition, over the last twenty years the European Union has set up a number of financial programmes specifically intended to supporting the effective implementation of the principle of gender equality, such as:

- **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 aiming at supporting the creation of jobs for young 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.

83. The **Spanish Presidency** of the Council of the European Union put a great deal of commitment and energy in moving forward the agenda of improving gender equality in rural areas, by promoting a number of visibility events, formal and informal meetings⁴⁰ and succeeding 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.

84. 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 in the protection of self-employed women during pregnancy and motherhood,⁴¹ as requested on several occasions by the European Parliament.⁴²

85. 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.

6. Main areas of concern and measures to address them

86. In this chapter, I would like to summarise the main challenges to which rural women are confronted and mention some basic recommendations with which to address them, which I will develop more in detail in the preliminary draft resolution.

6.1. Economic conditions

a) Independent income

³⁸ Official Journal C 386, 20.12.1996.

³⁹ Dr Mary Braithwait, Mainstreaming Gender in the European Structural Funds, 2000.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, the Foro Europeo, Las mujeres en el desarrollo sostenible de medio rural (Caceres, Avril 2010) and its Final Declaration.

⁴¹ Official Journal L 359 of 19.12.1986.

⁴² For all: European Parliament resolution of 12 March 2008 on the situation of women in rural areas of the EU.

Doc.

87. 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 deriving from the farm is often insufficient for the need of the family, in many European countries rural women also have another job, usually in the nearby town. The lack of monetary income often creates a situation of dependence.

88. **Recommendations:** 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; they should provide or support the provision of vocational training for women in rural areas.

b) *Property and inheritance rights*

89. 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.⁴³

90. The most common hindrances are:

- at the moment of the registration, the person considered as the “head of household” – usually the husband - is indicated as sole-owner of the farm or land;
- as a result, 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.

91. In the context of land reform, which has taken place in eastern and central European countries in the '90s, this vulnerability of women to discrimination in the access to property rights has not been taken into account adequately.

92. **Recommendations:** Council of Europe member states should set up awareness 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.

c) *Securing credits and other funding*

93. 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 fifty percent allocated by the state for rural development.

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

95. **Recommendations:** Council of Europe member states should set up specific funds to promote the employment opportunities of 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*

a) *Social security*

96. While women who own or co-own an agricultural business are entitled to social security as self-employed, the majority of rural women – due to their quality as ‘helping spouses’ - are not entitled to social security in their own right but considered as adult dependants. In general, therefore, they cannot benefit from social allowances, maternity leaves and retirement pensions, unless specifically allowed by national legislations. This situation should change in EU member states, following the entry into force of the above mentioned Directive 2010/41.

⁴³ 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.

97. **Recommendations:** *The European Union should closely monitor the implementation of Directive 2010/41 by its member states; non-EU 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 helping spouses of self-employed workers.*

b) Working conditions

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

99. A special issue of concern is that, normally, 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.

100. **Recommendations:** *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.*

c) Lack of services, including health and child-care facilities

101. 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 child-birth.

102. 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 house, and aggravates the burden of reconciling farm work and family commitments.

103. **Recommendations:** *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

104. Although on the rise, participation of women in associations and clubs is still low and also, 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 counting nine million individual members. The biggest member association is the German *Landfrauenverband* (the Union of Country Women), which is also the biggest women association in Europe, counting half a million members. Other major associations exist in countries with a long history of unions and non-governmental organisations, such as the Italy, France, Spain and the Russian Federations.

105. At international level, co-operation and exchange of good practice is 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)⁴⁴, 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, Kosovo⁴⁵, Slovenia and 'the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', with headquarters in Skopje. Established in 2005, this agency promotes sustainable agriculture and rural development in South East Europe by enhancing horizontal cooperation amongst the institutions of the participating countries and territories. In addition to exchange of statistical data, protection and promotion of cultural heritage, promotion of environmental sustainability, etc. features the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women in rural areas.

⁴⁴ www.seerural.org.

⁴⁵ 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.

106. **Recommendations:** Council of Europe 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

107. 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'⁴⁶ and domestic violence. Unfortunately, their lack of economic independence makes women more prepared to accept to remain 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 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'.⁴⁷

108. 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 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 falling back into prostitution.

109. **Recommendations:** Council of Europe member states should introduce high-standard legal frameworks to tackle the phenomena of trafficking in human beings and violence against women, in all its forms, as major human rights violations; they should ensure their strict implementation; they should 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 of human beings, namely poverty and the lack of employment opportunities.

7. Conclusions

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

111. 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:

- it must be specific – and address the situation of rural women as a group particularly vulnerable to socio-economic exclusion and violations of their rights;
- it must be 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.

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

113. But even once appropriate legislation is introduced, a major and daunting challenge remains. This is the changing of 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.

⁴⁶ See the report by Mr John Austin on "The urgent need to combat so called "honour crimes"", doc. 11943.

⁴⁷ World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), Violence against women in Azerbaijan, 2004, pages 18-23 and Violence against women in Georgia, 2006, page 18; United Human Rights Council, Domestic violence against women in Armenia, at <http://www.unitedhumanrights.org>.

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

ANNEX

**CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS
OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN**

Article 14

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.