



2021/2254(INI)

17.6.2022

OPINION

of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

for the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

on a long-term vision for the EU's rural areas – towards stronger, connected,
resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040
(2021/2254(INI))

Rapporteur for the opinion : Christine Schneider

PA_NonLeg

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality calls on the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- A. whereas gender equality is a core value of the European Union and its Member States, as enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, and whereas its promotion is one of the EU's principal objectives; whereas gender equality is also recognised in the Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union; whereas Article 8 TFEU lays down the principle of gender mainstreaming; whereas achieving gender equality is key to reducing local, regional, economic and social disparities, as well as to ensuring the long-term competitiveness and fair, inclusive and sustainable development of the EU's rural areas;
- B. whereas women play a multilevel role in rural development, namely as workers, farmers and business owners, but also by carrying the disproportionate burden of responsibility for the welfare of their family members, work that has historically been undervalued because of traditional gender stereotypes, such as the expectation that women act as primary caregivers for children and adult dependants; whereas women are therefore more likely than men to work in the informal economy and their vital role and importance in rural areas and its economy are overlooked;
- C. whereas the gender employment gap is 3 % higher in rural areas than in urban areas and whereas many women have precarious contracts or play an 'invisible role' in rural societies, which can leave them in vulnerable situations, such as having no access to social protection or maternity benefits; whereas women in rural areas are more vulnerable to poverty and financial dependence on their partner, which represent strong barriers to their empowerment; whereas social protection for women working in agriculture is an essential element of modern and sustainable rural development; whereas women face many challenges in gaining full access to the labour market; whereas the gender employment gap in rural areas stands at 13 %, rising to 20 % in certain Member States¹; whereas women farmers have a significant presence in family farming, which is a characteristic feature of European agriculture since around 90 % of the 22 million employees in agriculture are family members, and whereas women farms are therefore particularly in need of fair remuneration;
- D. whereas the EU economy and society face multiple challenges regarding demographic change, the digitalisation of the economy and society, increasing European and global integration and the transition to a CO₂-neutral economy, lifestyles and work patterns by 2050; whereas rural areas are often particularly affected by these challenges and by a reduction in their populations owing to displacement to urban areas; whereas young women are more likely to leave rural regions than young men; whereas this demographic trend, when coupled with a lack of connectivity and infrastructure, productivity challenges and a lack of public services, including education and care, or limited access to them, which deprive women of numerous opportunities, can contribute

¹ Casares Guillen, B., *Women in Rural Development: Integrating a gender dimension into policies for rural areas in Europe*, European Evaluation Society, Rotterdam, 2021.

to the lower attractiveness of rural areas as places to live and work; whereas rural areas can be an attractive environment for individuals, partnerships, families in all their diversity and children, where relevant;

- E. whereas the right to work is an essential precondition if women are to enjoy effective equal rights, economic independence and professional fulfilment; whereas precarious employment should therefore be eradicated through the mandatory application of the principle that for every existing job, another permanent post should be created, and by recognising and enhancing the right to jobs with rights;
- F. whereas migrant women are at major risk of labour exploitation, discrimination, a lack of access to social services and legal protection and physical, psychological, economic and sexual abuse;
- G. whereas rural areas are a place of residence and work for many people and are also the location of enterprises from all sectors of the economy, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises; whereas they are the place of production of agriculture and forestry but also perform important ecological functions and provide space for leisure and recreation;
- H. whereas the right to housing should be safeguarded in practice by guaranteeing that individuals and families have housing which meets their needs and ensures their well-being, privacy and quality of life, thereby helping to achieve social justice and cohesion and tackle social exclusion and poverty;
- I. whereas undocumented workers or those living somewhere illegally are often employed under less favourable working conditions than other workers and whereas some employers therefore recruit from the abovementioned categories in order to gain an unfair competitive advantage; whereas EU migration policies are adding to the vulnerability of and failing to protect undocumented migrant women who are victims of violence, and, for the most part, do not seek help;
- J. whereas owing to existing gender norms and stereotypes, women undertake more than one responsibility in the context of their private and professional lives; whereas in taking on the abovementioned multitude of roles, women also make a significant contribution to progress and innovation at all levels of society and to an increase in quality of life, especially in rural areas; whereas opportunities emerging from the green and digital transitions, together with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increase in remote working, have brought renewed attention to rural areas and opened up new possibilities for a more gender-balanced working environment that empowers women; whereas the consequences of the pandemic will further widen gender inequalities, underlining the need for the economic recovery response and the Europe's green and digital transformations to be gender-sensitive; whereas women in rural areas are drivers and powerful agents of change in this transition to a greener society and economy;
- K. whereas young people are one of the social groups most affected by the current deterioration in the labour market, being more exposed to unemployment, precarious employment and low wages, even though they have higher levels of education than previous generations;

- L. whereas the number of women in farming has been slowly increasing in recent years; whereas only 30 % of farms across the EU are managed by women and whereas these farms tend to be smaller than those managed by men, with lower incomes and less access to financial support; whereas this number hides significant differences in the representation of women in farming among Member States; whereas women, at least at the level of farm leadership or management, receive proportionately less support from either pillar of the CAP than men (pillar 1 provides direct income support and pillar 2 focuses on rural development support); whereas this is due to women tending to manage smaller farm businesses, owning less land and having less access to formal and specialised education²; whereas there is regrettably a lack of women in farming, in turn affording them fewer opportunities to engage in the rural economy, such as through SMEs, which are predominant in rural areas;
- M. whereas women living in rural areas experience barriers in accessing adequate and affordable healthcare, including at clinics and hospitals and from sexual reproductive health, family planning and counselling services, and in receiving support when they are victims of gender-based violence; whereas these difficulties include affordability, limited options for movement and a lack of access to transport or means of contacting transport³ and care services in rural areas; whereas they also include financial deficits in local health services and long waiting times to see certain specialists; whereas cross-border healthcare services can offer a better option to patients in situations where the most appropriate treatment or the nearest hospital is in another Member State; whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women and girls, resulting in an increase in gender-based violence and the discontinuation of services related to sexual and reproductive health;
- N. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdown measures have had a significant impact on rural areas and whereas there is evidence of rising inequalities⁴; whereas preliminary studies suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities between men and women, especially in terms of an increase in unpaid care work and work-life imbalance;
- O. whereas it is essential that the CAP guarantees more sustainable and democratic models of production and consumption, enhancing the role of small and medium-sized holdings and family farms;
- P. whereas women represent a significant driving force for prosperity and social inclusion in rural areas, notably through entrepreneurship; whereas in rural areas, the share of women in self-employment is 38 % and whereas women are over-represented in precarious types of self-employment⁵; whereas the role of women entrepreneurs and self-employed women in the economy should be recognised as a catalyst for economic growth, job creation and innovation potential; whereas women do not have sufficient

² Casares Guillen, B., Women in Rural Development: Integrating a gender dimension into policies for rural areas in Europe, European Evaluation Society, Rotterdam, 2021.

³ Women Watch webpage entitled 'Overview: Health', accessed on 20 June 2022.

⁴ Department of Economic and Social Affairs Social Inclusion article of 2 June 2021 entitled 'Reducing poverty and inequality in rural areas: key to inclusive development'.

⁵ Study by the Policy Department for Citizen's Rights and Constitutional Affairs of Parliament's Directorate-General for Internal Policies of 13 June 2019 entitled 'The professional status of rural women in the EU'.

access to public and private funds to develop their businesses;

- Q. whereas cuts in public budgets resulting from the European Union's macro-structural economic policies, in particular the implementation of the measures contained in 'economic governance' and financial adjustment programmes, are causing and will continue to cause increasing gender inequalities and female unemployment since women are in the majority in the public sector and are the principal beneficiaries of social policies, and will consequently increase the feminisation of poverty; whereas a change in policy is therefore required;
- R. whereas public services of general interest play an important role in rural areas and in achieving the objective of territorial cohesion; whereas it is important to promote mobility and public transport in rural areas that is widely available, efficient and affordable, taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals; whereas connectivity within rural areas is not developed enough, making movement of people and especially women in these areas difficult; whereas women in rural areas are less likely to have a driving licence or access to a car than men, but also travel more than men to carry out the care tasks that they often perform⁶; whereas women are more likely to use public transportation than men; whereas women more often fall victim to sexual harassment on public transport and whereas such cases are often underreported;
- S. whereas the standard of living is generally lower in rural than in urban areas, affecting in a disproportional way the most vulnerable groups such as migrant women, women from minority groups and women with disabilities, who continue to face intersectional discrimination in key areas such as education, employment and health; whereas the number of migrant women moving into rural areas will greatly increase in the next few months owing to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia;
- T. whereas it is necessary to advance the digital agenda in rural areas and develop comprehensive broadband infrastructure and sustainable jobs in order to maintain and strengthen competitiveness and digital participation and ensure people have equal living conditions and a better work-life balance; whereas crèches, care homes, healthcare, care for people with disabilities and other needs, a social security system and flexible work patterns, at the request of women, are essential to achieving this;
- U. whereas in the EU, the proportion of rural inhabitants with at least basic digital skills in 2019 is 14 % lower than that of urban residents (48 % vs 62 %); whereas rural women face more obstacles in accessing education than men⁷; whereas it is crucial to promote and advocate for more rural women to have full access to all levels of education, including but not limited to STEM subjects;
- V. whereas women in rural areas are often under-represented in decision-making bodies such as agricultural cooperatives, trade unions and municipal governments; whereas increasing women's representation in such bodies is highly important;

⁶ Study by the Policy Department for Citizen's Rights and Constitutional Affairs of Parliament's Directorate-General for Internal Policies of 16 December 2021 entitled 'Women and transport'.

⁷ Department of Economic and Social Affairs Social Inclusion article of 2 June 2021 entitled 'Reducing poverty and inequality in rural areas: key to inclusive development'.

- W. whereas small and medium-sized farms and family farms suffer discrimination in the distribution of CAP aid, which particularly affects women farmers;
- X. whereas in recent months, women farmers have also been the target of speculation in the prices of factors of production (e.g. seeds, pesticides, fertilisers, fuel, energy and machinery);
1. Stresses the importance of ensuring gender mainstreaming in rural development policy, as well as a holistic approach that goes beyond agriculture development and puts people's support at its centre; underlines the diversity of rural actors and their importance for the sustainability of rural areas; calls for best practices to be exchanged between Member States; calls for the farm work done by women, especially work done to assist spouses and partners, to be taken into account to ensure greater legal recognition of their work and rights;
 2. Stresses the need for women working on farms to have access to social security rights such as maternity leave and pension rights; stresses that women carry out important tasks to continually support family farms, even if proportionally the number of women working in agriculture in the EU is a lot lower than their percentage share of the total professionally active population (35.1 % compared with 45.9 %); also points out, in this context, that only one third of farm managers are women;
 3. Regrets the unequal access of women to farmland ownership and calls on the Member States to ensure women have ownership rights;
 4. Emphasises the need for a policy to regulate markets, particularly for the dairy and wine sectors, and to ensure preferential support for small and medium-sized farms, through the adaptation and capping of aid, to promote the production and consumption of food as locally as possible and to promote the most sustainable production systems;
 5. Calls for positive discrimination measures to be introduced for women farmers, encouraging them to remain in rural areas; calls, in addition to support for women, for measures promoting associations that can provide technical advice and assistance to keep farms operating as tools to help the sector survive, and for young people to be encouraged to invest in agriculture and livestock for the future;
 6. Underlines that the situation of women in rural areas needs to be addressed with an intersectional approach by focusing on the particular situation of specific groups such as migrant women, LGBTIQ women, women with disabilities and older women;
 7. Recommends the creation of a public agricultural insurance scheme, financed from the EU budget, to be mobilised in the event of (increasingly frequent) extreme weather events or disaster situations, providing an adequate level of protection for all farmers, in order to prevent people from having to leave rural areas; urges the Commission to protect small and medium-sized farming and family farming, as they are normally associated with high-quality, sustainable production models that are capable of ensuring social and territorial cohesion;
 8. Calls on the Commission to regulate the prices paid to producers and, in particular, to prohibit contracts being concluded at prices that do not cover production costs and to

combat speculation in the costs of factors of production;

9. Calls for a position that enables fairer distribution of EU aid under the CAP among countries, producers and products;
10. Calls for policies to be designed in a way that takes into account the needs of women in rural areas, such as through the provision of adequate public services, and where appropriate, mobile healthcare, including itinerant medical solutions, such as equipped buses offering women living in rural areas the possibility to undergo a preventive screening test or have a consultation with a gynaecologist; stresses the need to guarantee access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for all by deploying telemedicine, developing local perinatal centres and ensuring access to information; calls for the needs of women in rural areas to be addressed through appropriate childcare, such as day nurseries, crèches and recreational activities for children, and the development of support networks for older people, thereby increasing employment rates among women and promoting their social security rights, including maternity leave or pension rights; stresses the importance of ensuring women have access to available EU funds;
11. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to collect gender-disaggregated data in order to ensure the comprehensive overview of the socioeconomic position of rural women and take the gender dimension into account when designing, implementing and evaluating policies and programmes in the field of rural development; highlights the importance of impact assessments of the design of such proposals in helping to achieve gender mainstreaming goals in rural areas; stresses that special attention should be paid to women in rural areas when designing structural social support and regional development programmes; calls on the Commission and the Member States to use digital technologies to make public social services more accessible to women in rural areas; calls on the Commission and the Member States to share good practices and take inspiring action in depopulated areas;
12. Stresses the need to develop targeted measures which will contribute to overcoming specific challenges rural women face in the labour market, such as the employment gap and participation in the informal economy; calls on the Commission and the Member States to take proper advantage of the current transition to a more digital and greener EU in order to create new job opportunities; stresses the need for the Member States to explore and promote new skills development for women, as well as their digital inclusion, by encouraging remote working possibilities in order to make it easier for those living in rural areas to find high-quality jobs;
13. Highlights the potential of rural areas to become spaces that foster the inclusion and integration of the most vulnerable groups of women with specific needs, such as women with disabilities, migrant women, including seasonal migrants, refugees and minorities, victims of gender-based violence, women with little or no training and single mothers; encourages the Member States to design and implement specific measures to promote training and employment for these groups of women and safeguard their fundamental rights; stresses the important role of local and national authorities in ensuring these women are included and integrated into society; insists, in particular, that there is a need to prepare an immediate response to the arrival of Ukrainian women with children in order to ensure they can integrate into society quickly and easily;

14. Maintains that states and employers have to assume greater responsibility for generational replacement and maternity and paternity rights, implying that women must have the right to be both mothers and workers without forfeiting their labour rights;
15. Calls on the Member States to take on responsibility for guaranteeing the right to housing for everyone, in particular by launching housing programmes for less well-off residents, providing incentives to promote subsidised housing, construct social housing, promote and finance self-build programmes, support the cooperative sector, launch effective and non-speculative credit policies and regulate a non-speculative rental market;
16. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to promote digital and hybrid education and reskilling and upskilling for women in rural areas and to further develop access to specific education programmes and quality jobs to enable these women to enhance their potential and to counteract the departure of women, mostly highly qualified women, from rural areas; calls on the Commission to continue supporting Member States' work to improve the provision of high-quality education that is accessible to all through investments from the European Social Fund Plus, the European Regional Development Fund, the InvestEU programme and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, focusing on people in vulnerable situations; stresses the need to overcome the infrastructural and practical challenges rural women face in accessing education, such as limited options for movement or inadequate digital infrastructure;
17. Points out that the situation of women in rural areas is heavily influenced by the local agricultural situation and that unfair measures under the CAP have resulted in the increasing abandonment of small and medium-sized holdings and family farms; stresses the need to increase support in order to maintain family agriculture and ensure rural development, with particular emphasis on the work of women, including women migrants who work in agriculture;
18. Calls for the multitude of opportunities in rural areas to be exploited and for the development of comprehensive broadband infrastructure to make it possible to work from home and to create quality jobs that improve work-life balance and thus ensure women have equal opportunities to participate in the rural economy and work; calls on the Member States to intensify their efforts to support lifelong learning, professional education, training, qualifications and guidance systems, better infrastructure and better quality services in rural areas, with the close involvement of regions, municipalities and other promoters of such measures, such as the private sector, including business organisations and chambers and in consultation with social partners who also continuously contribute to rural development, as this can contribute significantly to promoting gender-balanced employment in rural areas;
19. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to further promote cross-border health and care services, especially in rural areas, and to pay particular attention to this aspect in the revision of Directive 2011/24/EU⁸, thereby reducing bureaucratic and other barriers to the provision and use of cross-border health and care services and to

⁸ Directive 2011/24/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 March 2011 on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare, OJ L 88, 4.4.2011, p. 45.

establish better interaction between different healthcare systems; stresses that older people have a right to have access to quality public health services, which ensures they have a healthy ageing process and combats social exclusion, social isolation and loneliness;

20. Calls on the Member States to develop prevention and awareness-raising actions to combat gender-based violence, including in schools, to ensure access to information on facilities for helping victims, to develop shelters for victims, including for migrant and seasonal working women, and to set up preventive intervention and treatment programmes for perpetrators; stresses the need to reinforce vocational training for agents working in law enforcement and public administration and those taking care of victims of gender-based violence; calls for the economic and financial empowerment of women victims of violence to be improved through their integration into the labour market and social assistance; calls, therefore, on the Member States and regional and local governments to ensure that victims living in rural and remote areas are not deprived of equal access to support services; reiterates its call for the EU and its Member States to ratify the Istanbul Convention⁹;
21. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to design policies for rural areas to ensure that women of all generations do not have to move away and can undertake entrepreneurial initiatives and thus contribute to their area's economic revitalisation and development; calls on the Member States and the Commission to boost awareness and make it easier for women entrepreneurs and self-employed women in rural areas to access finance, including alternative forms of financing, making sure it is available and allocated to them; encourages the Member States and regional and local authorities to make use of the existing European structural and investment funds to target and promote women entrepreneurs and self-employed women; stresses the need for awareness-raising and information campaigns regarding existing and future EU funding possibilities for women entrepreneurs;
22. Notes that women are more dependent on public transport; calls, therefore, on the Commission and the Member States, in coordination with local and regional authorities, to better implement gender mainstreaming in their transport policies and to ensure that rural areas are not deprived of access to essential transport infrastructure; underlines the importance of quality, affordable and safe public means of transport; stresses the need for EU cohesion funds to support the improvement of connectivity and transport solutions in rural areas; calls on the Member States to facilitate multimodality and to provide easy and comfortable transitions from one mode of transport to another; emphasises that in order to ensure transport chains are as seamless and accessible as possible, higher-quality infrastructure must be created across the EU; reiterates that this includes infrastructure standardisation, in particular to make cross-border projects and transport possible, thereby making sure women can be more active in the labour market and helping them to search for work by enabling them to travel further;
23. Stresses the importance of making it genuinely possible to combine work, private and professional lives, which will have the positive effect of increasing the participation of all women in social and political life by encouraging an optimal environment in rural

⁹ Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

areas that will attract individuals, partnerships and families, in all their diversity, and notably women, to move to rural areas to enjoy healthy lifestyles;

24. Strongly supports an increase in institutional support to ensure political participation and power or representation for rural women; insists on the need to design training activities to encourage rural women to move into areas and sectors in which they are under-represented, as well as awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of having women in management positions; calls on the Member States to promote gender equality in their various management and representation bodies to foster equal participation in all types of agricultural organisations, associations and public institutions;
25. Urges the Member States to close the gender pay gap and the pension gap; points out that pensions should be upgraded to provide a fair income that allows people to live in dignity and should never be below the poverty line; stresses the need to defend public, solidarity-based and universal social security systems that guarantee decent pensions for all;
26. Calls for better access to high-quality public services and infrastructure, in particular digital infrastructure, and for the deployment of widely available, efficient and affordable transport options that meet the SDGs;
27. Urges the Member States to implement specific measures to tackle the risk of social exclusion and poverty, focusing on access to affordable housing, transport and energy;
28. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to design funding programmes or support measures in such a way that the bureaucratic burden is easily manageable for smaller businesses and stakeholders; calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that individuals or smaller organisations are also able to obtain an overview and apply for funding opportunities and are given assistance in doing so;
29. Urges the Member States to guarantee that women can exercise their rights in all areas of society, thereby prohibiting and penalising all forms of discrimination;
30. Highlights the valuable contribution to the promotion of gender equality in rural areas delivered by actions under the LEADER programme, co-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, which aims to engage local stakeholders in the design and delivery of strategies, decision-making and resource allocation for the development of their rural areas; calls on the Commission and the Member States to reinforce the LEADER programme by reducing the administrative burden on local authorities and simplifying access, promoting the local ownership of community-led development projects and encouraging women's participation in local action groups.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

| | |
|---|--|
| Date adopted | 16.6.2022 |
| Result of final vote | +: 24 -: 0 0: 1 |
| Members present for the final vote | Isabella Adinolfi, Annika Bruna, Maria da Graça Carvalho, Margarita de la Pisa Carrión, Lina Gálvez Muñoz, Alice Kuhnke, Karen Melchior, Andželika Anna Możdżanowska, Maria Noichl, Sandra Pereira, Pina Picierno, Evelyn Regner, Diana Riba i Giner, María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos, Christine Schneider, Sylwia Spurek |
| Substitutes present for the final vote | Michiel Hoogeveen, Ewa Kopacz, Aušra Maldeikienė, Predrag Fred Matić, Silvia Modig, Monika Vana |
| Substitutes under Rule 209(7) present for the final vote | Marek Paweł Balt, Milan Brglez, Maria Walsh |

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

| 24 | + |
|-----------|---|
| ECR | Michiel Hoogeveen, Andželika Anna Mozdżanowska |
| ID | Annika Bruna |
| PPE | Isabella Adinolfi, Maria da Graça Carvalho, Ewa Kopacz, Aušra Maldeikienė, Christine Schneider, Maria Walsh |
| RENEW | Karen Melchior, María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos |
| S&D | Marek Paweł Balt, Milan Brglez, Lina Gálvez Muñoz, Predrag Fred Matić, Maria Noichl, Pina Picierno, Evelyn Regner |
| THE LEFT | Silvia Modig, Sandra Pereira |
| VERTS/ALE | Alice Kuhnke, Diana Riba i Giner, Sylwia Spurek, Monika Vana |

| 0 | - |
|---|---|
| | |

| 1 | 0 |
|-----|------------------------------|
| ECR | Margarita de la Pisa Carrión |

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention