

THE ECONOMIC ROLE AND SITUATION OF WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

GREEN EUROPE



THE ECONOMIC ROLE AND SITUATION OF WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

Dr. Mary Braithwaite

Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications
of the European Communities, 1994

ISSN 1012-2117

Catalogue number: CC-AK-94-001-EN-C

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Printed in Belgium

This report is a shorter version of the study on "Women in the Rural Economy", funded by DG V's "Equal opportunities" unit. It does not necessarily represent the Commission's official position.

Coordination : DG X "Relays and information networks"

FOREWORD

This issue of "Green Europe" is a first: two novelties strike you on reading the title alone. Firstly, "Green Europe", a publication up to now devoted exclusively to agriculture, is broadening its scope to cover rural society in general. Then, a second innovation - women are being featured in the pages of "Green Europe" for the first time (and certainly not the last). This double first is clearly not an accident but, on the contrary, reflects a deliberate and far from random choice.

A recent European Parliament report stated that the future of the countryside will depend very much on the role ascribed to women. This encapsulates the message of Mary Braithwaite's study, set out for us here in these pages, which is intended as a tribute to the work done by women and their great contribution to rural development. In painting a picture of the women active in rural society, the author highlights not only the fundamental place occupied by them in the economy and the local market but also the frequently difficult conditions they experience, which, unfortunately, are all too often underestimated. It is thus not rare for these women to be faced with very long working hours ("invisible work") without enjoying genuine social protection or a well-defined occupational status.

Given this situation and mindful of the principle of equal opportunities, the European Union clearly has to devise schemes targeting women in rural areas. They must be assured of a more favourable social setting, more appropriate vocational training and full participation in making and implementing decisions. It is also in the interest of rural society as a whole to take advantage of the enormous potential for change and evolution represented by women.

Providing information on women's economic role and social circumstances in Europe's varied rural contexts is another way of promoting their future and consequently that of our countryside. With this in view, I have pleasure in presenting "Green Europe" 1/94.



Colette FLESCH
Director General

CONTENTS

| | | |
|---------------------|--|-----------|
| 1 | Introduction | 3 |
| 1.1 | Aims and objectives of the study | 3 |
| 1.2 | Study methodologie | 3 |
| 1.3 | Definitions | 4 |
| 2 | Situation and trends in rural areas in the UE | 7 |
| 2.1 | Problems faced by rural areas | 7 |
| 2.2 | Changes in rural Europe | 8 |
| 2.3 | Employment in rural Europe | 9 |
| 2.4 | Prospects for the future | 10 |
| 3 | Rural Women in the European Union: the principal findings | 11 |
| 3.1 | Information on rural women | 11 |
| 3.2 | Who are rural women? | 12 |
| 3.3 | Participation in the labour market and local economy | 13 |
| 3.4 | Education and training | 22 |
| 3.5 | Contraints on economic activity | 24 |
| 3.6 | Potentials for economic activity | 26 |
| 4 | Women in the Rural Economy: the European view | 29 |
| 4.1 | EUROSTAT data | 29 |
| 4.2 | Other European information sources | 41 |
| 4.3 | European research | 43 |
| 5 | National reports | 51 |
| 5.1 | Belgium | 51 |
| 5.2 | Denmark | 52 |
| 5.3 | Germany | 53 |
| 5.4 | Spain | 55 |
| 5.5 | France | 57 |
| 5.6 | Greece | 59 |
| 5.7 | Ireland | 60 |
| 5.8 | Italy | 62 |
| 5.9 | Luxembourg | 64 |
| 5.10 | Netherlands | 65 |
| 5.11 | Portugal | 66 |
| 5.12 | United Kingdom | 67 |
| 6 | Policy recommendations | 71 |
| 6.1 | Information and data | 71 |
| 6.2 | Women and rural development | 72 |
| 6.3 | Actions in support of women in the rural economy | 73 |
| Annex 1 | | 77 |
| | Acknowledgements | 77 |
| | Study coordinator and collaborators | 77 |
| Bibliography | | 79 |

1. Introduction

1.1 Aims and objectives of the study

The principal aim of the "Women in the Rural Economy" study has been to build a clearer picture of the current situation and role of women in the economies of rural regions of the European Union. In spite of the considerable attention paid in recent years to rural diversification and development, both at regional and EU levels, very little attention has been given to the specific impact of diversification on jobs for rural women or to the need to address the different employment and training needs of women and men within rural development strategies. Given the far-reaching changes in the economies of rural areas, there is a need to identify the current and potential involvement of women in these changes. One problem facing rural development policy makers is that data and information on the situations and needs of rural women are fragmented and substantially incomplete; how therefore to define what actions (vocational training, employment creation, etc.) should be taken, when so little is known about the issue in the first place?

In order to define an equal opportunities dimension to rural development policies and programmes, a starting point must be identification of the real situations, needs and aspirations of rural women. The "Women in the Rural Economy" study has therefore a dual-fold objective: to identify and highlight the experiences of women in rural areas of the Community in terms of their productive activities, employment, occupations, unemployment, skills and training and the constraints on their participation in remunerative work and the formal economy; and, from this, to outline the policy areas that will need to be addressed in order to ensure women's more equal participation in the rural economy in the future.

The study has been undertaken within the framework of the Third Equal Opportunities Programme for Women (1991-1995), one of whose objectives is to ensure that an equal opportunities dimension and the particular problems encountered by women in the labour market are explicitly taken into account in all European policies and programmes.

1.2 Study methodology

The study has been based purely on desk-research. Effectively this has meant identifying and collecting data and information that are available, mainly in published although sometimes in unpublished form, at EU, national and regional levels, that shed light on the economic situation and role of rural women.

The research and collection of information and data has been undertaken in two phases. The first, undertaken by the study coordinator, involved systematic contact with institutions, organisations, networks and programmes operating at European level

and in fields relevant to the subject of the study: the institutions of the European Union (relevant Directorates-General, EUROSTAT, CEDEFOP, European Foundation), OECD, ILO, ETUC, COPA, CEPFAR, European Women's Lobby, LEI network, GRACE, TERN, LEADER, LEDA, SYSDM and MISEP... (information is given on the organisations and networks contacted in chapter 3). The bulk of this work was undertaken during the first half of 1993.

The second phase, undertaken between June and August 1993, involved the identification and collection of information at national and regional levels in each Member State. This was accomplished with the collaboration of a number of researchers and assistants (see Annex 1), who produced - with a time budget of only six days each - national reports on the economic situation of rural women in each country on the basis of the available information.

1.3 Definitions

The subject of the study "women in the rural economy" begs three questions; who are "rural women"?, what are "rural areas"?, and what constitutes the "economic" aspects of rural women's situation?

1.3.1 Rural women

For the purposes of this study, rural women have been taken to mean all women who live and/or work in rural areas. This does not mean exclusively farming women, although it is sometimes assumed by researchers and writers, particular on women in farming, that "rural women" and "farm women" are one and the same. Farm women do of course make up a considerable proportion of the women who live and work in agriculturally-dependent rural areas (primarily in Objective 1 regions), but the focus of this study and report is wider, addressed as it is to the issues of the integrated development and diversification of rural areas.

Of course not all "rural women" live and work in rural areas. In rural areas of mainland northern Europe, many employed women who live in rural areas work in nearby towns, and, in small but increasing numbers, some urban dwellers commute to work in the countryside. This is an important issue from the viewpoint of designing labour market integration strategies for rural women, but it has not been possible, because of the paucity and poor quality of the data, to distinguish between women who live and work in rural areas and rural dwellers who work in towns.

Rural women have also been taken to mean all rural women: those born and brought up in the area, newcomers, young women, women with children and older women... While it is important not to overlook the diversity of backgrounds and experiences of rural women, the scale of the subject of this study and the quality of the information available does not allow any systematic identification of the specific situations of particular groups of rural women (other than farm women).

1.3.2 Rural areas and rurality

One of the greatest difficulties lies in defining "rural areas", and in identifying statistical data or other information relating to such areas. It is not the place here to

state in any detail the differing classification systems, and the debates about their relative merits, but it is important to outline, as clearly as possible, the issues raised for a study such as this. Rural development is a horizontal rather than a sectoral subject. Rural areas comprise all people, land, and other resources in open country and small settlements. "Rural" is thus a territorial concept, not restricted to any particular use of land, degree of economic prosperity, or economic sector (OECD 1993). It is this which makes statistical information so difficult to collect, for "rurality" coincides exactly neither with administrative zones nor, increasingly, with a particular economic sector. Most Member States collect data on their rural areas in some form, but definitions used, areas and periods covered, and subject matter addressed, vary to such a degree that international comparison is virtually impossible.

As Bryden has noted (1992), at EC level we still lack the comparable data needed to state with any certainty what economic and social trends are occurring at below NUTS III level and often even level II regions, and both Level II and Level III regions usually contain large urban settlements. A sub-regional dimension to regional and rural data and policy-making in Europe is urgently needed.

In response to the lack of reliable, quantitative and comparative information about rural problems, potentials and policies, the OECD's Rural Development Programme launched, in 1991, the Project on Rural Indicators (PRI), which aims to collect and provide statistical information on sub-national (rural) territories which can be interpreted in a multi-national context (OECD 1993). EU institutions (DG VI and EUROSTAT) are involved in PRI. The Project on Rural Indicators is the only one within the OECD area that collects and computes indicators in a territorially-differentiated way (Richard Long, Head of OECD Rural Development Programme, pers. comm.). At the time of preparing the final study report, no relevant data were available from the PRI.

For the purposes of this study it has therefore not been possible to adopt one common definition of rural area; each country's or institution's own definition of rurality has been accepted, despite the wide variations in type of region or development problems from one (rural) area to another.

1.3.3 Women's economic role

The study focuses on the "economic" aspects of women's life in rural areas, that is on the dimensions that are directly related to, or influence, women's position vis à vis the rural labour market. Thus, the core issues being examined include: productive activities; activity rates; unemployment; employment (full-time, part-time, self-employment...); occupations and professional status; education, training and qualifications; constraints on women being employed. Where other issues, such as culture or demography, have a bearing on women's labour market position, these have been highlighted, although these have not been the direct subject of study.

The definition and identification of such "economic" aspects are highly problematic, particularly where rural women are concerned. Principally, the problems arise from official definitions and statistics, which are inadequate in assessing the value and nature of non-wage, informal economic activities and of real levels of underemployment, unemployment and activity.

The issue of assessing non-wage sectors of the economy, both informal and household sectors, has been recognised for some time in the field of development studies (UN 1989; Beneria 1992; Østergaard 1992), but is increasingly considered to be of key importance for rural gender studies in Europe. Whenever women's work is undertaken in informal sectors, shadow industries, homework and other non-wage spheres of work, it is at risk of being invisible (Baxter and Mann 1992), and therefore unaccounted for in official assessments and in strategies for development. Recognising the "hidden" dimensions of women's work experience has in recent years strongly influenced understanding of the farm labour process. "In particular, domestic labour in childcare, housework, food preparation, etc. has been established as a key foundation for those formal work activities which have been taken to constitute farm labour. This has meant extending the concept of labour to a more broadly defined "informal economy", including homeworking, subsistence activities and casual or seasonal work, not just as fractions or sub-sets of full-time paid work, but as qualitatively different kinds of work experience and labour relation" (Whatmore 1994). Such redefinitions need to be applied not just to the work of farm women, but to that of many other rural women, for whom the same labour processes (cooking, food production, laundry, childcare, etc.) may be performed either as unpaid labour for household maintenance or transformed into productive labour, albeit often petty commodity production. This is the reason for the importance of the issue for rural development, for the skills and expertise that rural women gain through such "hidden" work can often be used to develop income-generating activities, of benefit to the local economy and community.

Another problem of quantifying rural women's economic activity arises from the ways in which, in some countries, "unemployment" is defined. The "unemployed" are defined according to EUROSTAT's Labour Force Survey as all persons not in paid employment or self-employment and who are currently available for, and actively seeking, work. This definition, however, is not always that used by national government statistical services for the presentation of their own national statistics. In the UK, for example, official figures for unemployment record those who are registered as unemployed and in receipt of benefit. But generally, the extent of female unemployment is underestimated in official statistics, given that many women, particularly married or co-habiting women, are not actively seeking work because they cannot receive benefit and/or because of a perceived lack of employment opportunities. This has an impact on activity rates, since these represent the female labour force (employed + unemployed) as a proportion of the female population of working age. Indeed, it is problems such as these which have prompted some rural local authorities or development organisations to conduct their own studies of women's labour market position, on the basis that national statistics are inadequate as a means of understanding the real situations of rural women in their areas.

Note:

On final word on conventions used in this report: the continental system for presenting figures has been used throughout; i.e., for a decimal point (e.g. 2,3%) and in four or more figure numbers (e.g. 4.500).

2 Situation and Trends in Rural Areas in the EU

Rural Europe is very diverse, in terms of population change, population density and its economic and social structure and conditions. However, a broad distinction has been made (Bryden 1992) between a "rural periphery", with low population density and high dependence on agriculture for employment and as a source of identity and lifestyle for people, and a "rural core", with a higher population density, greater proximity to main markets, low dependence on agriculture and a more diversified economic base. Most of the people in the agriculturally dependent rural periphery live in Objective 1 (lagging development) regions - Spain, Portugal, Southern Italy, Greece, Ireland and Northern Scotland.

2.1 Problems faced by rural areas

Research throughout the EU has identified a number of problems facing inhabitants of rural areas of the Community: a risk of loss of cultural identity, as urban models and living standards replace traditional ways of life; a feeling of powerlessness and non-participation in public life, as decisions affecting country dwellers are taken elsewhere; imbalances in population density and in some areas such low densities that development is severely handicapped and public services become difficult to maintain; problems of protecting and managing environmental and water resources; isolation and marginalisation of young people and women, particularly in the most remote areas; high rates of unemployment and underemployment, due to a poor labour market structure, lack of local training facilities and insufficient economic dynamism; fiscal regulations for farms and businesses which do not take into account the special characteristics of rural businesses; and unequal development caused by increasing distortions in education, training, services and communications (CEPFAR 1990).

The scale and nature of the problems vary from one type of rural region to another; to understand them the Council of Europe (1988) has proposed a two-fold distinction:

- disadvantaged and declining rural areas, which can be found in mountainous areas (Alps, Pyrenees, Massif Central, southern Europe, Highlands of Scotland), in peripheral regions of western Europe (north west Spain, Brittany, Western Ireland, Cornwall, Wales and Scotland), Mediterranean areas (corresponding to the Objective 1 regions in the south) and the more remote parts of western central Europe and islands (Danish and UK islands). These areas have a number of problems:
 - outmigration of younger age groups;
 - ageing population;
 - decreasing employment in agriculture;
 - few employment opportunities, particularly for young people and women;
 - relatively low household incomes;
 - declining public and private services;
 - relatively high prices for goods and services;
 - loss of distinct cultural attributes, such as language, customs and identity.

- **rural areas under pressure from modern developments**, which can be found in rural areas close to urban conurbations and major communications routes (e.g. south-east England, within the Paris/Brussels/Bonn triangle), in lowland areas (Netherlands, eastern UK), in coastal areas (parts of Mediterranean coast, some islands) and in environmentally sensitive areas (Alps, countryside close to conurbations). These areas face a number of other problems:
 - urbanisation processes such as housing, retail, service and industrial developments;
 - "new" technology's influence on primary resources, such as the impact on the environment of new farming practices;
 - increased leisure time leading to congestion and environmental damage in some rural areas;
 - pollution from industrial and intensive agricultural processes.

Rationalisation and centralisation of services have also been one cause of demographic changes reflecting a pattern of continuing centralisation within rural regions, and a decline in rural hinterlands, modified in some cases only by inward migration of older age groups and retired people. Mobility appears to be of growing importance in some rural areas, which are witnessing strong population exchange flows; young people leaving, retired people moving in, the temporary stays of urban dwellers with second homes, and, close to urban centres, the growth in commuters and their families. However, in other areas low levels of population loss reflect the lack of opportunities for much of the population, due to relatively poor local labour markets, lack of migration opportunities, relatively low education and skill levels, and lack of capital, all of which restrict mobility.

2.2 Changes in rural Europe

Rural Europe has experienced major changes in the post-war period, which can be summarised as follows (Bell et al. 1990):

- continuing polarisation of agrarian structures, with increasing proportions of food coming from a decreasing proportion of farms, with consequent marginalisation of small farms;
- steady and sizeable decline in agricultural employment, including family employment;
- outward migration from many rural areas during the 1950s and 1960s;
- stabilisation and even growth of rural population in the 1970s and, to some extent, in the 1980s, with associated features including return migration and, in some cases, inward migration of "new rurals" from cities;
- relative and even absolute increases in rural manufacturing employment in many rural areas during the 1970s, and increases in service sector employment in the 1980s;
- continuing re-distribution of population within many rural areas, into small towns or villages, and away from open countryside;

- a marked increase in female participation rates in many, but not all, rural areas.

Between 1975 and 1985 in the Community, the share of agriculture in total employment fell from 11,2% to 8,4% (EC 1988). The loss of farmers, farm families and farm workers has been massive and continuous, and has been part of a radical restructuring of rural labour markets (Bell et al. 1990). There has been a bi-polar development of agrarian structure, with the growth of some middle-sized farms into large farms on the one hand, and a disappearance of small farms, or decline of other middle-sized farms into small farms, on the other. Small farms have survived, as a result of transfer payments or benefits and/or by members of the farming family finding work outside the farm or developing non-agricultural work on the farm, both of which count as pluriactivity.

Although many rural areas gained population in the 1970s and in many cases also in the 1980s, there are still rural zones which are losing population. Many are found in the rural hinterlands of the periphery, and in central mountainous areas or islands, but it is often not the most agriculturally-dependent regions of the south which are losing population significantly, but more the rural regions in relatively richer countries. In the south the rural fabric remains heavily dependent on agriculture and farm families and substantial agrarian populations appear to persist despite declining agricultural incomes (Bryden 1992). In all rural regions in the EC independent family businesses play an economically important role. This includes family farms, but also self-employed non-farm traders (industrialists, liberal professions, craftspeople, traders) (CEPFAR 1990).

Overall, some 9 million people work the equivalent of a full year in agriculture, although nearly 18 million still have an attachment to the land in some form or another (EC 1991). However, in 1989 agriculture contributed only 3,4% of Community GDP, compared to 5,4% in 1970, and employed under 3% in Belgium and the UK, 15% in Ireland (down from 27% in 1970) and 26% in Greece (40% in 1970). But, according to Bryden (1992), to understand the changes that are occurring in rural areas of Europe, and the differences between areas, attention must shift away from agricultural production, structure and income towards off-farm work and the role of social transfer incomes. In many agriculturally-dependent areas in Objective 1 regions, agriculture accounts for less than half of farm household income, while social transfers (e.g. pensions) and off-farm work together account for more than a quarter of farm household income, with this proportion increasing between 1987 and 1991. However, many of the non-agricultural jobs are also low paid and unskilled, often involving part-time or seasonal work.

2.3 Employment in rural Europe

In terms of employment structure in rural areas, there has generally been a significant reduction in the primary sector, but a significant increase in the secondary and tertiary sectors (CEPFAR 1990). In the 1970s, many rural areas in Europe experienced a growth in jobs in manufacturing and craft industries. In the 1980s this has persisted in some areas, while in others, especially those dependent on branch plants and low-skill labour-intensive industries such as textiles, clothing, leather and footwear and certain primary processing industries, there have been declines in industrial

employment. The concentration of manufacturing closer to population centres may continue this process (Bell et al. 1990).

In the case of services, which in general have been a growth sector (often the only growth sector) in many regions, the concentration of employment has gone alongside relative and absolute declines in the provision of many basic public and private services in rural areas. These trends have been associated with rationalisation and centralisation of public and private sector services, which has benefited larger settlements and deprived smaller villages and rural areas. They have been one cause of the centralisation of manufacturing within or around larger settlements with relatively good provision of business and public services and good communications. Small and very small enterprises often predominate in rural areas, and these have increasingly lacked access to training centres, and modern communications facilities, facing them with particular problems in adaptation (Bryden 1992).

2.4 Prospects for the future

The medium-term prospects are generally for more of the same - declining agriculture, static or declining manufacturing and some growth of low-income services. The trends towards concentration of service provision and employment, and of manufacturing, in small towns and regional centres will continue, sharpening the uneven distribution of secondary and tertiary activities in rural areas (EC 1988). These trends will damage the prospects for the improvement of the conditions of rural families, including those on small and medium-sized farms particularly in the south, because almost the only available route to higher incomes for this group is off-farm work.

The trend towards the concentration of highly skilled and highly paid employment, often providing services to other businesses and the public sector, in urban areas, with low-wage sectors, such as consumer services, transport and tourism, over-represented in rural areas will also continue. The fear in many rural areas is that the main source of employment growth in the foreseeable future will be in the low wage service sector, with improved transport and communications networks leading to an influx of "new-rurals" rather than an improvement of the employment prospects for rural dwellers (Bell et al. 1990).

3 Rural Women in the European Union: the principal findings

3.1 Information on rural women

Data and information that focus specifically on rural women in the European Union are, with some notable exceptions, poor both in quality and quantity. At EU level, information is all but absent. What information there is focuses on just two issues: farm women, and childcare in rural areas. European statistics (primarily EUROSTAT) may be used to provide a global overview of regional patterns, but, as with all official statistical sources, provide a partial and biased picture of women's economic role in rural communities, because of the invisibility of much of rural women's labour in official classifications of "activity" and "work".

At national level, the picture is mixed. For some countries, such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Luxembourg and, to a lesser extent, Germany, information on rural women is scarce. In part this appears to be due to the proximity of rural and urban areas, resulting in a close - if not dependent - relationship between rural and urban economies and labour markets, with many rural people, particularly women, working in urban centres. In these instances, "rurality" is unclearly defined, and analyses of official statistics and research do not systematically identify rural as opposed to urban zones.

In other countries, such as Italy, Portugal, Spain and Greece, "rural women" are by common definition "farm women" (a conflation which is still made in other EU countries in spite of farm women forming a minority of rural women). In remoter, agricultural areas of the South, this may be based on a certain reality, with a majority of rural women involved in some way or another with a family farm. But generally and increasingly this is not valid; in only a few areas are farm women the majority of rural women. Research and data have, however, not yet caught up with the changing reality, and information on rural women as a wider group is sparse. Of the southern Member States, only in Spain, due to the systematic disaggregation of census statistics on the basis of gender and size of settlement, is information on rural women at national level available.

Only in the UK, the Republic of Ireland and in France is it possible to construct a fuller picture of rural women in the local labour market and economy. France leads the way, in terms both of national statistics (disaggregated on the basis of gender and rural/urban communes) and studies, reflecting an intensity of interest, at national and local level, in the position of rural women that does not exist in any other Member State. Two recent reports are a case in point: one, published at the end of 1992 for the State Secretariat on Women's Rights by SEGESA, which analyses the statistical sources and studies on "Women in the Rural World" in France; and the other, published in 1993 by SEGESA and the Rural Development division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fishing as a follow-up to the 1992 report, which looks at case studies of the situation of women in three rural départements in France, the Vosges, Manche and Loire (see chapter 9 on France).

In Ireland a similar focus on rural women as opposed to farm women is developing. The 1993 report on the Second Commission on the Status of Women allocates a chapter to rural women, and, no doubt spurred by the serious decline in agricultural

employment, attention among both researchers and policy-makers appears to be switching from farm women to rural women generally, with a particular focus on their role in rural development. However, much available information in Ireland remains biased towards farm women. In the UK, no information or data are available on rural women for the whole of the UK, and even at national/regional level information sources are virtually non-existent. The main initiatives that have been taken to study the situation of rural women in the labour market and local economy have come from regional authorities (such as the Welsh Development Agency), some local authorities, certain rural development institutions (for example the Rural Development Commission) and academic researchers; the resulting information is valuable, but an incomplete patchwork.

In other words, there is currently no comparative information on the situation of women in the rural economies and labour markets of the European Union which would provide an accurate and true picture of the work and activities of rural women.

3.2 Who are rural women ?

The stereotype of a rural woman is that of a family woman, traditional and conservative, absorbed in the care of the home and the farm or garden. She has been born and brought up in the area, and is familiar with its traditions and environment. No statistics are available, but qualitative observations from local studies show that the female rural population is in fact heterogeneous; varying according to length of residence in the area, ethnic background, age, occupation...

Substantial numbers of rural women are indigenous to the area, particularly in rural areas of the South. At the same time, in these same areas and in other rural areas (for example in Ireland), there is a substantial loss of young women from rural communities, particularly of the more highly educated.

Incomers (couples or families with young children and also retired people) are more common in remoter rural areas of northern Europe (the Danish small islands, Wales and Scotland); they seek a healthier, calmer and more "green" life away from the cities. Some incomers may be from second-generation or third-generation immigrant families (for example, Italians or East Europeans) or more recent immigrants (people of Asian origin in rural areas of England, refugees who have been settled in rural areas), although people from ethnic minority groups appear, from the evidence, to represent a smaller proportion of the rural population than of many urban populations. In many cases, younger incomers appear to contribute to local enterprise, bringing an entrepreneurial approach and skills not always typical of the indigenous population. They may also be in a position to take better jobs than long-standing residents, such as is the case in the Danish islands, where the better qualified incoming women fill higher-level public sector posts, for which local residents may not be suitably qualified.

In the South, particularly in remoter areas, maintaining population is the hardest task. Even here, however, people from immigrant communities may be present. In areas of northern Greece, this is a specific and recent problem, bringing in its wake problems for the local population (for example, by immigrants from eastern and central Europe pushing down already low wages in agricultural work).

Rural areas near urban centres see an increasing mix of local people and incomers. Here the population decline, even in rural areas of Italy for example, is being slowed and often reversed by people working in towns and living in rural areas. Indeed, this is the case to such an extent in "accessible" rural regions of the north of Europe, that the definition of "rural women" becomes difficult. Do women who come to live in a rural area, but continue to work in a town count as "rural women"? There are markedly different degrees of rurality - and different degrees to which it affects women - between "accessible" and "deeply remote" rural areas.

There are also temporary residents in many rural areas; traditionally travellers and gypsies, and increasingly, in areas with a tourism industry, tourists. Neither of these are the subject of this study.

Age patterns are also distinctive among the rural female population. The age pyramid in many of the remoter rural areas, mainly as a result of the migration of men and young people, shows an under-representation of young adult women and over-representation of older and elderly women. In rural areas of Ireland, for example, there are more married, widowed and older women in rural areas than in urban centres, and women under 65 are under-represented in the rural population. In rural communes of France, many young women leave the countryside at working age, resulting in an under-representation of women of 20-39 years and an over-representation of elderly women. In Spain, fewer women than men live in the smallest settlements, but more women than men live in settlements of 50.000 or more inhabitants. In some rural areas, such as in Galicia, there is a marked reduction in women of active age and high numbers of "living widows", women whose husbands have (temporarily) migrated. However, in accessible rural areas of northern Europe this appears not to be the case. In Denmark, for example, more men live in rural areas than women.

The question of occupation will be returned to later. The only specific occupational group of rural women that is defined in any detail is "farm women", who, as will be noted throughout this report, have received the most attention from researchers. Relatively little research has been conducted on other occupational groups.

3.3 Participation in the labour market and local economy

3.3.1 Activity rates

Activity rates of rural women are everywhere lower than those of rural men, and are generally though not exclusively lower than those of urban women. In some cases, the difference between urban and rural female activity rates is marked (in Ireland in 1986, the figures were 37,5% and 28,7% respectively).

Lower female activity rates are found in rural areas of Objective 1 regions (Spain, Italy, Portugal, Greece and Ireland) than in rural regions of the European "core" (Germany, France, UK, the Netherlands), although there are some exceptions to this rule. Rural areas in Belgium and Luxembourg record relatively low female activity rates, while East Germany records very high female activity rates. In some countries, there is an indication that the more remote the rural area, the lower the activity rate; this is the case in the UK.

However, this global picture overlooks substantial local and regional variations; for instance between Galicia and Extremadura in Spain, Corsica and Limousin in France or between Anatoliki Macedonia and the Pelopenees in Greece. What is noticeable is that there is a greater degree of variation in female activity rates between one rural region and another, than between one urban region and another. This seems to be a phenomenon not only associated with rurality but also with gender, suggesting both that the structures of rural labour markets and economies show greater variation than urban economies and labour markets and that cultural or social factors (such as support for or prejudice against working women) are also stronger in rural than in urban areas. The absence of employment opportunities in rural areas means that many rural women do not register as unemployed, even though they may wish and need to work, further reducing the recorded female activity rates in rural areas.

Age too can be a factor. In west Germany, for example, overall female activity rates are similar in urban and rural regions, but are noticeably higher among younger women under 30 years in rural areas than in urban, reflecting the longer time urban women spend in training before entering the labour force. On the other hand, elderly and retired women are over-represented in many rural communities, compared to urban areas; this is the case in France, for example, where at working age women tend to leave the countryside for the towns, and lower education and training levels in rural areas also contribute to a less economically active rural population.

The general trend appears to be towards higher female activity rates in rural areas; this is the case in France, for instance, with rural regions which had previously shown relatively low female activity rates catching up with other regions where rates have been higher. However, "activity" is measured in relation to the formal labour market, and, as we shall see in this report, many rural women are highly active in productive work, but, because of the nature and context of their activities, are not registered as "active" in official figures. Increases in activity rates may therefore reflect a change in the context of activity and/or a desire by increasing numbers of rural women to be part of the formal labour force, rather than any real increase in the levels of activity by women.

3.3.2 Unemployment

With some exceptions, unemployment rates in both rural and urban regions are considerably higher among women than among men. In some rural regions - the Alentejo in Portugal, Basilicata and Molise in Italy, Corsica in France, Aragon in Spain, Luxembourg in Belgium - women's unemployment rates are more than double those of men. In rural areas of Portugal, women are more than 71% of all unemployed. Taking into account the numbers of rural women who would like to work and would do so if suitable employment became available (but are not actively seeking work because of its scarcity and therefore do not register in the figures), the differences between female and male rural unemployment are underestimated in official statistics. Where there is a tradition of employment outside the home and of women being part of the labour market (for example in South Armagh in northern Ireland) more women are likely to register as being unemployed rather than as inactive. Even so, the figure of 36,8% female unemployment in South Armagh in 1986 also underestimates the true levels.

In just a few rural regions - all in the UK - are unemployment rates among men higher than those of women, reflecting the growth of (low-paid, often part-time) service sector employment which has favoured women.

Regional variations in female unemployment rates are more pronounced for rural areas than urban areas, again reflecting a combination of local labour market and social/cultural factors, which appear to vary more between different rural areas than between different urban areas. In Greece, female unemployment rates are lowest in areas with strong tourist industries, but are as high in urbanised areas as in remote mountainous regions. In Denmark, there is a marked difference in female unemployment rates between North Jutland and West Jutland, due to the presence of industries in West Jutland which provide jobs for women (such as textiles) and the absence of women's jobs in industries in North Jutland.

In some countries, for example in Ireland, France, the Netherlands and west Germany, the unemployment figures show fewer unemployed women in rural areas than in urban areas. In others, such as Denmark, the pattern appears to be reversed. In West Germany between 1983 and 1988, women's unemployment in urban agglomerations increased, but declined in rural areas. However, the lower activity rates and higher levels of "hidden" unemployment in rural areas make it difficult to evaluate rural/urban differences in female unemployment, and EUROSTAT figures show a mixed picture. As is pointed out for Germany, the unemployment figures conflict with the widely held view that employment opportunities are worse for women in rural areas, and this is the explanation for higher female unemployment in Danish rural areas (women's employment is in the service sector, and these jobs are in urban centres not in rural areas).

If women's unemployment rates in many rural areas are high, those in the new Länder of Germany have rocketed since 1989. In certain rural areas, women's proportion of all employed has dropped to less than 20% (the employment rate for women in East Germany in 1989 was 91,2%). Only 20% of women formerly working in the agricultural industries were still employed in this sector in 1991. By 1992, women formed 60% of all unemployed in east Germany.

There may also be age variations in female rural unemployment. In France, levels of unemployment among women of less than 30 years are higher in rural areas than in urban areas, although overall levels of female unemployment are lower in rural communes than in urban zones.

3.3.3 Women's share of employment

Women's overall share of employment is similar in rural and urban regions. National differences are more pronounced than regional, with Greece, Spain and Italy showing lower figures (generally under 40%) than the UK, France and Germany (over 40%), regardless of type of region.

In many but not all regions, women's employment increased during the 1980s; in almost all cases the service sector was the main source of growth. In regions where it declined a number of reasons appear to apply: a substantial decline in employment in agriculture in Crete and Galicia, and in other areas a decline across all the sectors.

Women in rural areas in Germany appear to have been more sharply affected by employment changes in different economic sectors than other groups in the country. Jobs have been lost in textiles and clothing (traditionally "female" industries), and this has hit rural areas harder. On the other hand, more women in rural areas have profited from the general increase of employment in the trade sector.

The structural changes in East Germany since 1989, which have led to a massive fall in employment overall, have altered the balance of employment between women and men. Women's share of employment in the agricultural sector for example has fallen dramatically; in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern only 8.000 of the formerly 100.000 women working in this sector were still employed in 1991; in Brandenburg, 16.000 out of 65.000 former female agricultural workers remained in 1991.

3.3.4 Sectors

Women's share of employment in the three main activity sectors - agriculture, industry and services - shows the familiar pattern of high levels of feminisation in services and lower levels in industry, which, with some exceptions, are broadly similar in both rural and urban regions. The greatest regional variation in women's share of employment is in the agricultural sector, varying from over 50% of the agricultural workforce in specific areas (Galicia in Spain, Molise in Italy, Niederbayern in Germany, Central Region of Portugal...) to under 10% in others. Type and size of farm, degree of mechanisation, extent of farm diversification and cultural traditions all appear to be factors in this regional variation. In some areas, feminisation levels in agriculture have increased in recent years. In Portugal, women's share of agricultural employment has increased, although the trend of overall employment in farming is down. And in Italy, the numbers of female heads of farms is increasing.

In most rural areas, particularly in the core EU countries, the service sector is the main employer of women, although agriculture remains an important (and in some specific instances the principal) employer in rural areas of the South and Ireland. In rural areas of Spain with fewer than 2.000 inhabitants, for example, the structure of the female workforce is: agriculture 42%; industry 17%; services 39%; construction and others 2%. In rural areas with higher populations, the proportion of women's employment in agriculture falls substantially, replaced by industry and, particularly, services. In rural Ireland, agriculture employs well under 10% of the female workforce, although - as in most rural areas - most women working in family farming do not appear in the employment figures. Manufacturing is strongly represented in rural and urban areas of Ireland (around 20% of rural female employment), as are the professions (around 30%) and commerce and insurance. In Greece, the three main sectors of rural women's work were agriculture (78%), tourism and trade (10%) and industry (7%). Apart from agriculture, the main occupations of rural women are in tourism, agro-industries, clothing and the service sector (trades, personal services, etc.). The services sector in Greece employs a greater proportion of the male workforce than of the female workforce.

By way of contrast, in 1990 in the province of Luxembourg in Belgium, nearly 60% of manual female workers and nearly 70% of female intellectual workers were employed in one sector "other services", and a further proportion (6,5% of manual and 17% of intellectual workers) in wholesale and retail distribution. Agriculture

employs less than 1% of the female workforce. In rural England, female employment is predominantly in clerical and service sector jobs, with a scarcity of manufacturing employment. Most rural women in Denmark obtain employment within different kinds of public services, since farming and related industries primarily offer jobs for men. And in France, half of all employed rural women work in services, which has seen strong employment growth in all branches in most but not all rural areas. Industry, building and transport employ few rural women, and agriculture has shown a relative decline as a proportion of female rural employment.

The growth in service sector employment is not evenly spread throughout rural areas. In the UK for example, it has tended to be concentrated in tourist areas and close to urban settlements, and this pattern is repeated throughout the EU.

The structure of the female labour force varies according to age. In small rural settlements in Spain, for instance, the principal sector for women in the 25-29 age group is services, followed by professional and technical occupations, industry and, then, family work. For the 45-49 age group, the principal occupation is family work, with the service, industrial, professional and technical occupations representing a far smaller proportion of women. Agriculture becomes more important with age.

However, all of the above information concerns the officially recorded workforce. National figures for rural women's occupations and activities depend on the legal status available to and adopted by women and on how such categories as "assisting spouse" or "assisting relative" (common for many rural and farm women) are taken into account in censuses and surveys. The calculation of women's work is straightforward for women who are employers, employed or self-employed in one of the professions, but many rural women who are involved on the family farm or in a family business either do not have the right to a status in their own right or, even where these are available (as in France), do not always choose to adopt a particular legal status. Related to this is the issue of what counts as "work", and the exclusion of much of the work that rural women do, both within the home (whether or not it is for home consumption) and outside, from official calculations. In Italy, for example, much of rural women's work is in the informal economy and is highly multi-functional. Indeed, the extent of women's "hidden work", referred to in almost all the national chapters, is of such a scale in rural areas that the structure of the employed workforce cannot be taken to reflect the sectoral breakdown of women's work in its totality. The discrepancies are particularly marked in agriculture.

In Spain, most farm women are counted officially as "housewives" and not recorded as part of the workforce. In the 1981 Population Census in Ireland, many women described themselves as engaged in "home duties". According to the EU farm structure survey (which gives much higher figures than Ireland's own Census), there are 24.500 female farm owners and 14.000 "assisting relatives"; yet in 1990 there were 111.000 farm wives in Ireland, most of whom were making an input, at least part-time, into farm activities. In France, at the end of the 1980s there were 150.000 female heads of farms, but around 800.000 undertaking farm work without recognised status. In Italy, around 46% of the total female rural population live and/or work on farms; while some have jobs outside the farm, many work in some capacity or another in the family farm enterprise.

A similar situation applies to fishermen's wives and women assisting (i.e. working but without status and unpaid) in family businesses, such as restaurants and small hotels, bars, souvenir shops in tourist areas, shops, bakeries, hairdressers, etc. In addition in Greece, homeworking is not uncommon, often associated with the textile industry; the nature of this work is such that it rarely figures in official statistics.

While the real nature of women's work in rural areas, and its sectoral breakdown, cannot be quantified from available data, it is clear that the true picture will be somewhat different - and far more complex and varied - than is currently revealed through official figures.

3.3.5 Occupational levels

Rural women are heavily concentrated in low-skilled and unskilled occupations, in rural areas both of the South and the North. In rural England, the scarcity of professional and skilled manual employment available to women means their concentration in unskilled sectors of the labour force. In northern Ireland, most of the jobs available to women outside the home and farm are in manual service employment, such as domestic work, catering, etc. In Baden-Württemberg in Germany, 40% of women in rural areas with a higher qualification have to work in lower positions, compared to 29% in urban areas. More rural women work in the lowest levels of firms than urban women, and few rural women reach middle-level positions. In the province of Trento in northern Italy, women's jobs are the "traditionally feminine jobs", mainly personal services (housemaids, cooks, waitresses, nurses, teachers, helpers...), and even in white collar jobs women occupy the lower grades. In areas of France which have seen growth in tourism, the majority of jobs that have been created are mainly for women - jobs that, almost by definition, are in low-skilled occupations. In all sectors, rural women in France work in less-qualified socio-professional positions than urban women, although the rural/urban gap appears to be closing over time. 43,5% of rural women in employment are employees, 15,5% are in intermediary professions (teachers and in health and social work) and only 3,8% are managers and in the intellectual professions. Rural areas of Denmark are no different; there are relatively more unskilled female workers and fewer skilled female workers and salaried employees than in urban areas. Where there are higher skilled professional jobs, these are often taken by female incomers, who have higher level qualifications and training.

The situation in farming is little different, with women usually taking responsibility for manual tasks and men usually responsible for work requiring technical skills or the use of engines and machinery. In Spain and Greece, mechanisation is associated with masculinisation, pushing women into labour-intensive production. Out of 414.900 active farm women in Greece, 413.500 (99,66%) are registered as dealing with farming, animal husbandry, fisheries and forestry, while only 600 are scientists or professionals, 400 are artisans or employed in other sectors, 300 are office clerks and 200 are employed in services. In the Central Region in Portugal in 1979, nearly 68% of non-qualified farm assistants were women, while 82% of technical specialists and nearly 95% of technical assistants were men.

This concentration in unskilled and low skilled employment means that in many areas, particularly in northern Europe, rural women are over-qualified for the work that they

do. In one rural area of England, 28% of full-time employees and 40% of part-time employees did not make use of their training and qualifications in their current job. This seems to apply particularly to older women. In Spain many fewer women in the 45-49 age group in small rural settlements were in professional and technical occupations than women in the 25-29 age group.

The reasons for this marked concentration of rural female employment in low skilled and unskilled occupations appears to be due, in some areas and in part, to low qualifications among rural women, but the main reason appears to be a combination of the nature of the local labour markets (available employment is mainly in sectors which employ predominantly unskilled and low skilled workers) and cultural attitudes towards women, leading to sexual discrimination.

3.3.6 Status of rural women

The proportion of active rural women in paid employment varies widely from one region to another, from under 10% to over 80% of active rural women, but in most rural areas the proportion is steadily growing. In "core" rural areas, such as in the UK, the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium, most rural women in work have the status of employee. In rural areas of France, the proportion of the active female population in waged employment (permanent and temporary) is well over 60% (for example, 81% in rural communes of the Vosges and 76% in Loire, but dropping to 64% in the more agricultural département of Manche). Overall in France, the proportion of waged female rural workers compared to the active rural female population increased from just under 68% in 1982 to just over 77% in 1990.

Generally, the more important family farming is in an area, the lower the levels of salaried employment among active women. In Manche in France, the proportion of unwaged female workers is 36%, split between independents and employers (19,2%) and family assistants (16,8%), but this drops to 19% and 24% in the Vosges and Loire respectively. In Greece, the proportion of rural women who are "assistants and unpaid members of the family" is much higher; over 71% of rural women, for example, are characterised as such, and only 3% are salaried employees (0,7% are employers and 25% are self-employed).

Many rural women, particularly farm women but also women in other small family businesses, have no recognised independent status at all. The statuses available to women on family farms or in family businesses vary substantially from one country to another. In France, laws passed in the 1980s offer farm women and women working with their husbands in a craft or trade business a number of choices. But many rural women are not registered in a professional capacity. For example, around 800.000 women are involved in agriculture but do not choose to exercise this with a recognised status. And among French rural women working in family (mainly their spouses') crafts and commerce enterprises, 4/5 had made no choice between the three statuses available to them. Even where laws exist, attitudes appear to change more slowly, and many, mainly older, rural women appear satisfied with an entirely dependent status, defined purely in relation to their husband and his occupation.

In Belgium and Luxembourg, the status of women who work on a farm is principally that of "related assistant". In Belgium, farm women have the possibility of a status

offering them greater rights and protection, but it is little used because of the costs to the employing spouse. In Ireland, a minority of farm women have a status other than "farm wife". The majority of farm women in Spain fall into the category of family assistant, and most of these are housewives. Their work is considered support work because it is unplanned, non-specialised and non-mechanised; the work may include food processing, harvesting, craft manufacture, catering and financial administration and may be virtually full-time, but, because of the gender of the person doing the work and the integration of these tasks with domestic activities, no status is attached to the work.

However, choice of a legal status may depend not so much on the type of work being done by a rural women, as on the benefits accruing from a particular status. On small farms in Greece, women may be registered as head of the farmholding because her father or husband has a full-time job in other sector or activity and in order to benefit from subsidies and loans, although they are not in practice in charge of the farm unit. And although the legal environment for rural women has improved in Greece in the last decade, its impact on the lives and positions of rural women is slow to arrive. On small farms in Italy, a similar trend has occurred, with rural women identifying themselves as farm workers in order to obtain benefits or becoming farm heads because their husband has obtained a salaried job; this trend gives a partial explanation for the recent rise in numbers of female heads of farms. Nonetheless the majority of farm women are classified as "spouses" or "other relatives" on the farm, although in many areas there are genuine trends towards more women choosing to become farm entrepreneurs, even if they are often heads of small, and in some cases unviable, farms.

Levels of self-employment are not easy to determine and may in some cases vary from one survey to another, even for the same region. However, in some countries there seems to be a pattern of higher levels of female self-employment in rural areas than in urban areas. In rural Wales, the proportion of economically active women who were, according to the population census, self-employed in 1981 varied from 6,3% to 12,5%, compared to 6% for Wales as a whole. Another survey shows an even higher proportion for rural Wales, at 14%. In other rural areas of the UK, female self-employment appears to reach even higher levels, ranging from 29% to 34% in the south-west of England. In Ireland, the proportion of active women who are entrepreneurs or self-employed is higher in rural areas (8,8% in 1986) than in urban areas (2,8%). In Italy, there is a trend towards higher levels of female entrepreneurship on farms. In the absence of employment opportunities for women in many rural areas, self-employment and entrepreneurship have a potentially larger role to play, and are, in some areas, being positively encouraged by development associations and authorities.

Some women too, particularly in remoter rural areas of the South, are day labourers, working with no contract and with no legal controls, and often seasonally.

3.3.7 Working hours and working patterns

Generally it is impossible, given the hidden, unquantified and multifunctional nature of much of the work of rural women, to provide accurate estimates of working time. What evidence there is suggests longer working hours for rural women than urban

women, and, when "domestic" work is counted, longer hours than rural men. In Greece, rural women work 10-20% longer hours than rural men, both in peak seasons and in normal periods. In France, active rural men spend more time in "professional work and training" than active rural women, but active rural women spend (considerably) more time in "domestic" work than active rural men; when the two types of work are added together active non-farm rural women do 1.5 hours more work per day than active non-farm rural men, and have correspondingly less free time. Interestingly, active non-farm rural women appear to spend more time per day both in professional work and in work overall.

Among farm women, long hours are typical, although the breakdown of her time between "farm work" and "domestic work" is not easy, and different definitions apply. In the Netherlands, farm women spend on average 50 hours per week doing household and family work and 22 hours per week on farm labour (about 20% of the labour necessary for the farm). In Catalonia in Spain, farm women work on average 77 hours per week. In the UK in 1970, farm wives did on average 17 hours of farm work per week, and wives on farms without other hired or family workers worked considerably longer hours than this. In Ireland in 1990, farm women spent on average 38 hours in farm work per week.

Among rural women in paid employment, part-time employment is everywhere high, particularly in northern countries. In the UK, for example, which has the highest proportion of all employees in part-time work in the EU, part-time work is a marked feature of rural women's employment, with levels slightly higher than in urban areas. In rural Wales, well over 40% of female employment was part-time in 1989, and in 1988 in South Armagh in northern Ireland over 31% of employed women worked less than 21 hours per week (20,5% being employed for less than 16 hours per week, below the limit for many employment rights). In countries of the south (Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal), evidence suggests that women's share of part-time employment is lower in rural regions than in urban areas. The prevalence of part-time employment in agriculture, where many men are employed, may explain this pattern.

Women who are day labourers, and work seasonally in agriculture, tourism and agro-food industries, also work exceptionally long hours.

Rural women's working patterns are strongly influenced by age and family status, and this appears to be true for all regions. Rural women often leave paid employment on marriage or when starting a family, and return later, although often in a different - and lower - position in the labour market. Many rural women in the Marche in Italy, for example, are marginal workers, and tend to exit from the labour market as soon as they are mothers, a pattern seen throughout rural Italy. In rural Spain, the ages when women are the most economically active are 25-29 years and 45-49 years, before and after raising a family. In the Netherlands, most rural women had a paid job in the past, but stopped working when they got married and had children. Later on, the majority of them try to find some kind of waged work. This pattern is not only due to cultural attitudes, but also to the extreme difficulties of combining employment and caring for a family in areas where access to services (childcare, school transport...) is extremely poor and where commuting is impossible (access to a car, combining care of children with standard working hours...).

3.3.8 Remuneration

The levels of remuneration of economically active rural women are virtually impossible to evaluate, given the dearth of information. For many rural women, primarily those in family businesses or on family farms, there is no financial remuneration at all related to the hours and nature of their work, with women seeing their work as a contribution to the family. In Greece, many rural women have to "ask" for money from their husbands or fathers, even though in practice they are entitled to a substantial share of the income of the farm or family business as remuneration for their work. In Central Region of Portugal in 1979, over 71% of women working in farming were not paid, compared to just under 19% of men.

Where wages are paid, earnings are generally very low, compared both to urban women and rural men, reflecting in the main the fact that most rural work for women is low-status, unskilled or semi-skilled and in low-paying sectors (tourism, hotel and catering, public and domestic services...). 77% of women in rural areas in England, for example, have low-paid jobs, compared to 65% nationally. On the isles of Lesbos and Lefkas in Greece, women's earnings in agriculture were just 58% of those of men in the late 1970s; in many other regions 60-70% is common. Hourly rates are often also lower; among agricultural workers in France women's gross hourly wage was less than that of men, although in Belgium female hourly rates appear to be slightly higher than male rates among farm workers.

3.4 Education and training

With some exceptions, rural women's education seems generally to be pursued to a lower level than that of urban women, and in some cases lower than that of rural men. Better educated young women are less likely to return to their rural home areas, a "creaming" process which reduces the overall education levels of women remaining in rural areas. Indeed, in some rural areas education is consciously pursued by young women as a route out of the rural world and to a modern urban life. However, the available information is extremely sparse and lacking in adequate detail.

In Spain, young rural people generally have a lower level of training and education than their urban counterparts, although the difference appears to be becoming less marked through time. Among 20-24 year olds, few gender differences exist, and education is not an explanation of women's marginalisation in the economy. At higher and university level education gender differences exist, with rural women faring the worst. The desire to pursue education is stronger among rural young women than men of the same age; young rural women have a keen desire to become assimilated into an urban way of life and education is a route to achieving this.

The situation appears worst in Greece, where illiteracy levels remain high; among rural women they are nearly 29%, most belonging to the 45-64 age group. Over the years, rural women's education has improved, although it is still low compared to that of men. There is still a tendency among rural families in Greece to regard a daughter's education as a waste of money and time, since their ambition for her is to get married and raise a family. Just over 67% of rural women have completed primary school, but only 2,3% have completed high school, and the situation is even worse for higher and university education.

In Ireland, education levels of girls are slightly lower in rural areas than in urban areas, and the proportion of girls who complete education at the age of 16 years and under is higher in rural areas. In Denmark too, people have higher formal education in urban areas than in rural areas, matching the higher percentage of unskilled workers in rural areas. The same is true for rural communes of France; in addition women represent only 28% of apprentices, the majority in traditional "feminine" sectors. Young women with higher levels of education generally remain in the town or city, discouraged from returning to a rural life because of lack of facilities and services, including higher education or training institutions.

In contrast, in some UK rural areas, girls appear more likely than boys to have formal qualifications and are more likely to enter higher or further education, although this apparent advantage does not translate into equal or better career prospects for women.

Rural women's participation in vocational training and continuing education is low everywhere, apparently not because of demand (many rural women express a need and desire for training), but because of the difficulties of access to courses (distance, mobility, childcare, replacement services...). When women do attend courses, they are generally shorter courses, to lower levels and in traditional "feminine" subjects.

In Ireland, the participation of rural women in training and continuing education has improved slightly in recent years, but remains very low. Only 17% of trainees on short courses run in 1991 by Teagasc on aspects of agriculture and rural development were women. In France, there have also been net increases in women undertaking agricultural training, although the majority follow short courses at lower levels than men, and are concentrated in particular subjects (domestic and rural economy, marketing). And women form only 1/3 of all trainees in vocational training courses in Portugal; some evidence suggests that this may be even lower in rural areas.

Opportunities for Greek rural women to obtain or improve their qualifications are few, aggravated by women's lack of mobility and overload of family and work responsibilities. When women do attend courses, they focus on traditional such as clothing, handicrafts, rural home economics, food processing and agrotourism; in contrast, in subjects such as animal husbandry, arboriculture, horticulture and agricultural machinery women are well under 20% of trainees. Adult women in rural areas in France find it difficult to pursue continuous training, although they strongly desire to, because of problems of distance and access, the difficulty of taking time away from work and the family (and the absence of replacement services) and the paucity of childcare.

In west Germany, rural women enter the labour force at a younger age than urban women, reflecting the longer time spent in higher education and training. Increases in women's participation in vocational training have been higher in urban areas than in rural areas, and the proportion of female trainees is lower in rural areas than urban areas. In rural areas of Baden-Württemberg, for example, the proportion of women who have only low level qualifications is higher in rural areas than in urban areas, while the proportion with higher level qualifications is lower.

Demand for training is high among rural women in the UK, particularly among unemployed women. In some areas, such as rural areas of northern Ireland, this

reflects the low level of existing education and the recognition that training would increase the chances of finding work. In other areas it appears to reflect a lack of confidence among women who have been out of the labour market for some time and who, despite having higher qualifications, recognise that their skills may be out-of-date.

3.5 Constraints on economic activity

The principal constraints in most rural areas of the Community on women entering the labour market and becoming (more) active in the formal economy can be summed up as: insufficient jobs; distance and difficulties of transport; inadequate support services and facilities (childcare, care services for the elderly, replacement services, training, information and advice...); unequal distribution of responsibility for domestic and family tasks; and cultural attitudes.

In general, many - that is substantial numbers of - rural women who are currently not in employment or engaged in an economic activity would like to find work, particularly outside the home. However, jobs are extremely scarce in rural areas (not just in areas of the South but also in the North), particularly jobs which are accessible, in terms of distance from where women live, and which are flexible enough to allow women to combine their family work, in particular caring for children, with work outside the home. Jobs are insufficient in quantity and in quality (note the numbers of higher-qualified rural women in lower-status jobs). The gap between demand and supply cannot be under-estimated, and appears to be worsening not improving. In rural areas of the new Länder of Germany, the position of women since 1989 is critical, with a massive need and demand for employment, but with few employment alternatives being developed. In Denmark, the prognosis for the future is towards further concentration of public and private service sector employment in the bigger towns, leaving low-qualified industrial work in rural areas; only a decentralised public service system would provide the kind of work that rural women need. In Italy, young rural women would prefer to have a salaried job outside the home, but jobs are in short supply and unemployment amongst men is also high. Even in rural areas where female employment has grown, such as in the UK, there is a scarcity of jobs, and many of the new jobs are part-time, insecure and poorly-paid.

Distance and difficulties of transport are mentioned consistently as a constraint on rural women. Public transport provision has in many rural areas been reduced not improved in recent decades, and, although the proportion of rural households who have a car has increased, many rural women do not have regular access to a car. This makes commuting to jobs in local towns impossible or difficult, and adds to the burden of domestic tasks (taking elderly relatives or children to a hospital or clinic, shopping, transporting children to and from school...), reducing the time available for productive activities.

Nor is the provision of public and private services improving in rural areas. Even in northern countries, distances to services are increasing; in the Netherlands, for example, the trend is towards regional rather than local availability of facilities and services. In France, local shops and services are disappearing, and distances to public facilities have not reduced in recent years. In order to acquire higher education and training, young people have to leave their rural community, a step which may be positively sought by some, but which has an economic and cultural impact on rural

communities. And the dearth of local vocational training provision prevents many rural women who would like to acquire and improve their skills from doing so.

Women with children face a number of additional problems. The complaint about lack of childcare facilities can be heard in all rural areas of the Community. In some countries, such as the UK where levels of provision are pathetic, childcare is the major constraint on women working outside the home. In one rural region of northern Scotland, only 162 daycare places are available for 3.000 under-fives. In France, only 28% of rural communes have a nursery school, and creches and childcare services are rare. But the problem is not just experienced by women with young children; the absence of school transport or out-of-school facilities restricts women with older children too. Few rural employers offer childcare support, other than some flexibility in women's working timetable. Frequently, women make their own informal arrangements, with family and neighbours, or sometimes by providing community facilities on a voluntary basis.

The provision of relief services is a specific constraint on farm women, making it difficult for them to attend training courses or take even short breaks from the farm. In some countries, such as in Germany, France, and Denmark, subsidies or support is provided, but in others, for example in Ireland, such provision is available only to those who can afford it, which is not the case for most farm women who are in low-income households.

Poor or expensive access to information and advice is also a constraint; information about available jobs, advice on setting up a business or on developing a skill or resource into an income-generating activity.

Family and domestic responsibilities also impose greater constraints on rural women than on urban women. In part because of the difficulties of access to services, rural women have a greater burden of domestic and family work than urban women, although this may also be due to the less time rural men spend on domestic activities. In France, active rural women spend on average 1 hour and 10 minutes more per day than active urban women on domestic work, while farm women spend 1 hour and 35 minutes more. In contrast, active urban men spend 40 minutes longer per day than active non-farm rural men on domestic work, and 2 hours longer than active farm men.

Discrimination and cultural traditions are constraints on rural women. Conservative attitudes about women working outside the home are still prevalent in some rural areas of the European Union. In rural areas of Greece, traditional views are such that when a married woman works outside the home it is assumed to be because her husband cannot support her, and this is a stigma for the man. And in Portugal and Spain the traditional role of rural women as home and family-based remains strong, and there is prejudice against women working outside the home. The low levels of take-up of professional statuses by women working on family farms or in family businesses in France is due in part to a resistance by the women themselves to adopting an independent, professional identity. And everywhere there is discrimination against women in vocational training and employment, particularly against women wishing to enter traditional male areas of work or to reach higher level positions.

3.6 Potentials for economic activity

Possibilities for rural women to enter or re-enter the labour market or become active in the formal economy arise in two ways:

- external changes: changes in the local economic structure (employment growth, development of new and expanding sectors) which offer women job opportunities as employees;
- self-generated changes: with rural women themselves using their skills and resources to develop income-generating activities, in the form of businesses, community enterprises, self-employment, cooperatives...

In recent years, where employment growth has occurred in rural areas it has primarily come, as we have seen, from the services sector, particularly in tourism, but also in clerical and service sector jobs. This study has not examined predictions of future trends, but information suggests that the trend of the 1980s, of growth of female employment in the public service sector, will not continue, as privatisation is pushed forward in some regions and centralisation of public services occurs in others. The economic base of many rural areas remains relatively narrow, and the main growth is likely to continue to come from tourism and leisure industries, which in many rural areas are seen as the main hope in the near future. These branches are also major employers of women. Yet, not all rural areas have the natural resources or accessibility to develop a substantial tourism sector. And those that can develop a strong tourism industry have to face the problems of seasonality, low-pay, low-skills and poor working conditions, all of which particularly affect women. Outside of the tourism sector, modernisation and the demand for a "flexible" labour force by rural industries is making women's employment more insecure. If women's employment needs are to be addressed by regional and local development strategies for rural areas, emphasis will need to be placed on economic sectors and branches which favour not just rural women's employment, but also better quality employment, such as decentralised public services.

One response to problems of insufficient and inadequate employment for rural women by some rural associations is to support initiatives aimed at encouraging and enabling rural women to create their own employment: through the production and marketing of both traditional crafts and hand-crafted products for modern, urban markets, as in Portugal; agrotourism and rural tourism, as in Greece and Ireland; personal and community services; cultural activities; new information and communication technologies...

Agrotourism offers some potential, through farm accommodation and products, small agro-food enterprises and catering and hostelry. In Ireland, farm-based tourism has been the most developed, and has been an activity predominantly undertaken and managed by women. In Greece, women's agrotourism cooperatives have provided models of good practice, and there is considerable room for growth of the agrotourism sector. Agrotourism in France currently involves only a tiny percentage of farms, and is also seen as having greater potential. A far bigger proportion of French farms produce and sell farm products, and this everywhere holds potential, if suitable products and markets can be developed.

In France, the development of childcare services and intercommunal educational facilities are seen as providing employment for rural women: as nursery teachers, bus drivers for school collection services... In many rural areas, women are already providing community and social services, but on an unpaid voluntary basis (in some countries rural women do more voluntary work of community benefit than urban women); such activities could be developed to provide paid work. In rural areas of northern Ireland, rural women would like to work in the caring services; given the need and demand for such services, initiatives which bridge these two current gaps (insufficient work on the one hand and inadequate public or community services on the other) could be developed.

Rural women have a number of strengths and advantages which can be developed to the benefit both of rural women themselves and of the local economy and labour market:

- a wide range of skills and competences, which, while often used in a domestic or informal economic context, can also be exploited within the formal economy (e.g. domestic and household management skills which can be developed in the context of agrotourism and rural tourism, food processing skills which can be used for artisanal food and beverage production, caring skills which can be used to provide local services, such as childcare, care of the elderly....)
- vocational qualifications and skills which currently lie unused, or are out-of-date, but which nonetheless form an untapped resource.
- considerable flexibility of skills (for example, farm women can and do undertake a wider number of tasks than their male spouses or partners - women will if necessary undertake tasks otherwise done by men, but rarely vice versa).
- a capacity for hard work (rural women spend more hours undertaking paid and unpaid work than men) and for combining and managing a number of different tasks simultaneously.
- an awareness and knowledge of local needs (e.g. for community services) which may be met by local employment initiatives.
- good communication skills (important, for instance, in tourism initiatives) and team-working qualities (key to successful cooperative and community initiatives).

4 Women in the Rural Economy: the Community view

National views of the economic situation of women in rural areas of the European Union are presented in chapter 5. In this chapter we focus on the (few) sources of information and data available at EU level. This includes an analysis of regional data from EUROSTAT and a look at the two dimensions which have received some attention at European level; childcare and farming women. The chapter is divided into three sections: EUROSTAT data; other European information sources; and European research.

Generally, the economic role and position of rural women has not been studied at European level, and comparative information and data are virtually non-existent.

4.1 EUROSTAT data

4.1.1 Regional patterns and trends: EUROSTAT data

This section uses regional data from EUROSTAT to look at some of the broad differences and trends in relation to women in rural labour markets in the EU. Some comparisons are made between urban and rural regions, and some simple conclusions are drawn about urban-rural differences and regional variations in women's situation in the labour markets of rural regions. However, the limitations of using official data must be born in mind when interpreting the figures.

EUROSTAT is the key source of comparative statistics on the economic situation of women and men at European level and it is thus an invaluable source of information. However, for identifying statistics relating to rural women many difficulties arise. The first is the difficulty of identifying "rural", as opposed to urban, areas. NUTS II regions are geographically large, and even those covering the more remote parts of the Community will include towns or urban areas; they relate in fact to administrative entities rather than geographical regions. NUTS III regions are sub-divisions of NUTS II regions, and potentially offer more scope for identifying truly rural areas; however, EUROSTAT data is incomplete at NUTS III level, both for certain periods and for certain regions. Moreover, as we move to NUTS III level, the statistical reliability of certain data on a gender basis becomes less, because of the sizes of the population samples (Eric Sterckz, EUROSTAT, pers. comm.).

Despite such difficulties, it is useful to see what information EUROSTAT can potentially provide for a study on women in the economy and labour market of rural areas of the EU. Within the limits of this study, it has been possible to conduct some very simple and basic analyses of key statistics from EUROSTAT at NUTS II level. Given the size of the regions, and therefore the diversity within each region, it must be stressed that these do not give either a sophisticated or an unflawed picture of differences between rural and urban areas in terms of the labour market situation of women. Some regions defined here as rural include substantial urban areas, while a few of the urban regions (such as Lisboa and its neighbouring Vale of Tejo) contain extensive stretches of countryside. Nonetheless, a broad and useful overview of certain trends can be drawn, and some pointers given to the potential usefulness of further studies using EUROSTAT data. Analysis of data at NUTS III, or at even more local level, would without doubt provide a sharper view of rural-urban contrasts.

In order to be able to make a comparison between particular dimensions of women's situation in "rural" and "urban" regions in the EU, certain NUTS II and some NUTS I (urban) regions within nine Member States have been selected. Three parameters were used for this selection, the intention being to identify those NUTS II regions in each Member State which are relatively the most rural, and those which are the most urbanised. The three parameters are density of population, percentage of employment in agriculture (NACE 00) and whether the region is classified, either wholly or in part, as Objective 1 (where development is lagging behind) or 5b (priority rural zone). Since Denmark and Ireland (and also Luxembourg) are counted in their entirety as NUTS II regions, data from these three countries are not included. Equally, some city areas, such as Berlin and Brussels, count as NUTS I regions.

In total, 25 regions with strong "rural" characteristics (low population density and/or high levels of employment in agriculture, plus existence of Objective 1 or 5b zone), and 12 regions with a high level of urbanisation (very high population density and comprising or containing major cities) have been selected:

Urban or strongly urbanised regions:

| | | |
|----|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | Brussel (B) | Capital city |
| 4 | Berlin (D) | Capital city |
| 5 | Hamburg (D) | Major city |
| 9 | Attiki (GR) | Capital city region (Obj. 1) |
| 13 | Madrid (ESP) | Capital city |
| 17 | Ile de France | Capital city region |
| 22 | Liguria (I) | Urban seaboard |
| 23 | Campania | Urban seaboard (Obj. 1) |
| 26 | Zuid-Holland | Highly urbanised |
| 29 | Lisboa e Vale do Tejo (P) | Capital city region (Obj. 1) |
| 33 | Greater London (UK) | Capital city region |
| 34 | West Midlands county (UK) | Highly urbanised |

Rural or predominantly rural regions:

| | | |
|----|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2 | Luxembourg (B) | Rural region (Obj. 5b) |
| 3 | West-Vlaanderen (B) | Mixed urban-rural |
| 6 | Niederbayern (D) | Rural region (Obj. 5b) |
| 7 | Lueneburg (D) | Rural region (Obj. 5b) |
| 8 | Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (D) | Predominantly rural (Obj. 1) |
| 10 | Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki (GR) | Rural region (Obj. 1) |
| 11 | Peloponnisos (GR) | Rural region (Obj. 1) |
| 12 | Kriti (GR) | Rural region (Obj. 1) |
| 14 | Galicia (E) | Rural region (Obj. 1) |
| 15 | Aragon (E) | Rural region (Obj. 5b) |
| 16 | Extremadura (E) | Rural region (Obj. 1) |
| 18 | Poitou-Charentes (F) | Rural region (Obj. 5b) |
| 19 | Limousin (F) | Rural region (Obj. 5b) |
| 20 | Auvergne (F) | Rural region (Obj. 5b) |
| 21 | Corse (F) | Rural region (Obj. 1) |

| | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 24 | Molise (I) | Rural region (Obj. 1) |
| 25 | Basilicata (I) | Rural region (Obj. 1) |
| 27 | Flevoland (NL) | Rural region |
| 28 | Friesland | Rural region (Obj. 5b) |
| 30 | Centro (P) | Rural region (Obj. 1) |
| 31 | Alentejo (P) | Rural region (Obj. 1) |
| 32 | Acores (P) | Rural region (Obj. 1) |
| 35 | Cumbria (UK) | Predominantly rural region |
| 36 | Clwyd, Dyfed, Gwynedd, Powys (UK) | Rural region (Obj. 5b) |
| 37 | Highlands, Islands (UK) | Rural region (Obj. 1) |

A number of aspects of women's labour market position in rural and urban regions have been covered in selection of the data: activity rates; unemployment rates; share of part-time employment; share and distribution of employment, both overall and in the three main sectors; and recent changes in women's employment.

4.1.2 Activity rates

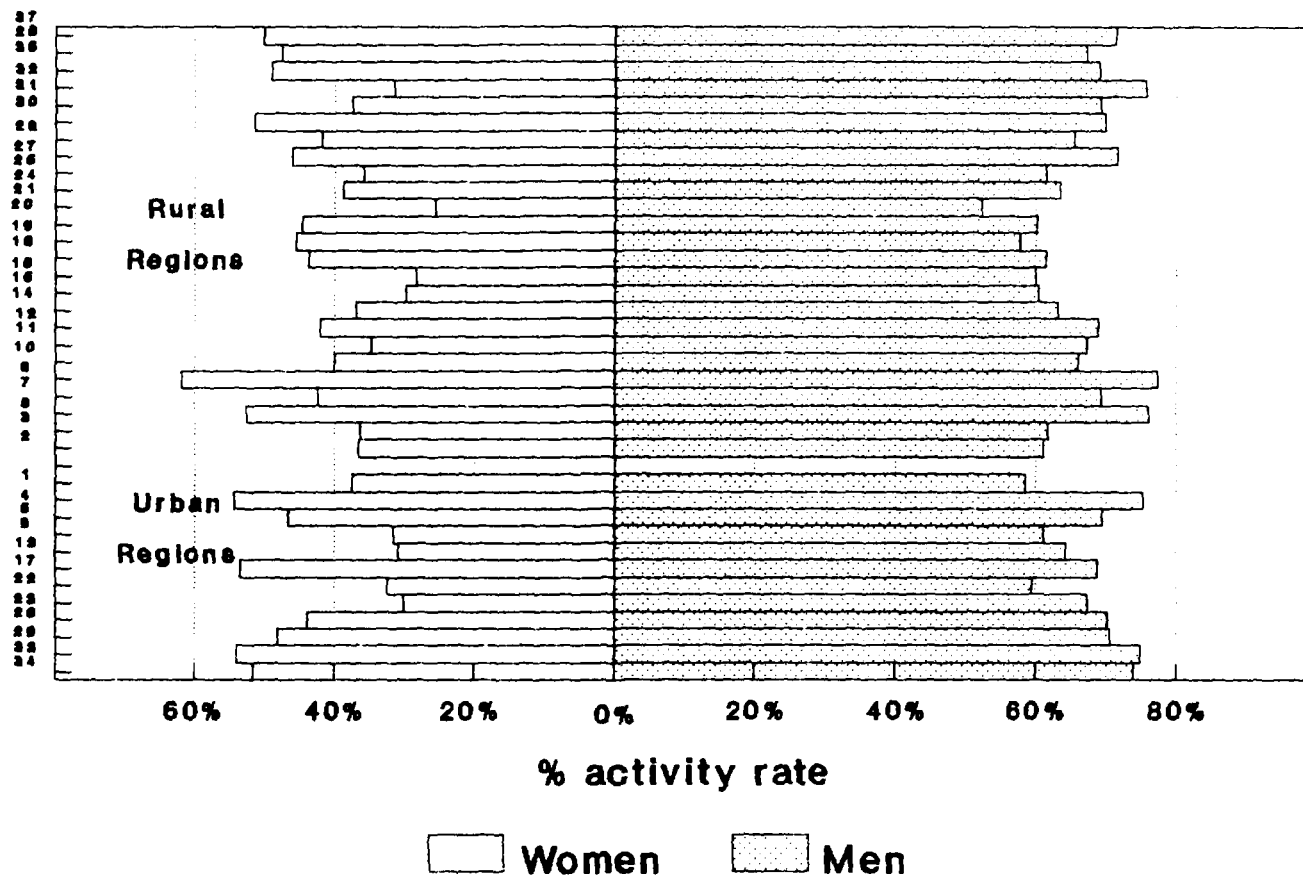
Activity rates represent the labour force as a percentage of the population of working age (14 years and above). The labour force comprises people in employment and unemployed persons. Employed people include those who are in paid employment, in self-employment or engaged in work for profit or family gain (in cash or kind). Also included are people with an enterprise, such as a farm or offering a service, but who were temporarily not at work during the reference period of the labour force survey. Unemployed people comprise those without work, but who are currently available for and seeking work. Not included therefore are people, such as many rural women, who would like to work and are available for work, but are not currently actively seeking a job, because of the near impossibility of finding suitable employment.

Fig. 4.1 presents the 1991 female and activity rates for the 37 selected regions. A first observation about the activity rates of women is that, regardless of type of region, women's activity rates are substantially lower than those of men; for the 37 selected regions the average female activity rate is 41,8%, compared to 66,6% for men. A second observation is that women's activity rates show greater regional variation than those of men. However, the degree of variation is also greater in rural regions than in urban regions. It seems to be the case that the greatest regional variation in activity rates is experienced by rural women, and the lowest by urban men (see Fig.4.2 below).

Thus, one conclusion may be that rural women are the most susceptible to specific local labour market factors and/or to differences in social or cultural attitudes that support or discourage working women. Variations are in some cases strong even between rural regions in the same country, for example in Spain the female activity rate in Galicia is 37% while only 28% in Extremadura.

Fig.4.1 Activity rates of women and men in 1991

Region



Source: EUROSTAT

Fig.4.2 Difference between lowest and highest activity rates for women and men in rural and urban regions

| | Women | Men |
|-------|-------|-------|
| Urban | 24,2% | 16,6% |
| Rural | 33,6% | 25,1% |

4.1.3 Unemployment rates

Unemployment rates in almost all the 37 regions, rural and urban, are considerably higher for women than for men (Fig.4.3). In some cases - the Alentejo region in Portugal, the regions of Basilicata and Molise in Italy, Corsica in France, Aragon in Spain and Luxembourg in Belgium - women's unemployment rates are more than double those of men in the same regions. If one takes into account the fact that many women who would currently like to work and would do so if suitable employment became available do not count in these unemployment figures, then these figures actually underestimate the extent of the difference between female and male unemployment.

Just a few regions - the two German urban regions of Hamburg and Berlin and two urban and two rural regions in the UK (Greater London, West Midlands county, Cumbria and Clwyd, Dyfed, Gwynedd and Powys) - show slightly higher levels of unemployment among men. This may be the result of the growth, especially in Britain, of low-paid, often part-time, service-sector employment, which has particularly favoured women. The predominant picture is nonetheless one of substantially higher female unemployment than male unemployment in rural regions.

Like activity rates, regional variations in unemployment rates appear to be more pronounced for women than for men, and particularly so for rural women. Among our 37 selected regions, the two highest female unemployment rates in 1992 are in rural regions; Extremadura in Spain (37,8%) and Basilicata in Italy (35,1%). But equally, the two lowest female unemployment rates are also in rural regions; in Central Region of Portugal (3,3%) and Niederbayern in Germany (3,9%). Fig.4.4 shows the degree of variation in unemployment rates for women and men in rural and urban areas. The difference is greatest for rural women and lowest for urban men.

Women in rural areas appear also to have experienced the most fluctuation in changes in unemployment. Among the 37 regions, the two highest increases between 1986 and 1992 in unemployment rate are those for women in Basilicata in Italy (+9,7%) and for women in Galicia in Spain (+7,7%), and the highest decrease is also for women, in the Luxembourg region of Belgium (-8,3%); all of these are rural regions. Generally, the change in unemployment rate has been greater for women than for men; out of the 37 regions, in only 3 regions is the change in unemployment rate greater for men than for women. These patterns suggest that women in rural areas - compared both to rural men and to men and women in urban areas - are the most susceptible to local labour market or social and cultural factors in terms of the chances of their being unemployed, and in terms of changes in rates of unemployment.

Fig.4.3 Unemployment rates of women and men in 1992

Region



34

Source: EUROSTAT

Fig.4.4 **Difference between lowest and highest unemployment rates for women and men in rural and urban regions**

| | Women | Men |
|-------|-------|-------|
| Urban | 27,3% | 11,9% |
| Rural | 34,5% | 19,3% |

4.1.4 Women's employment

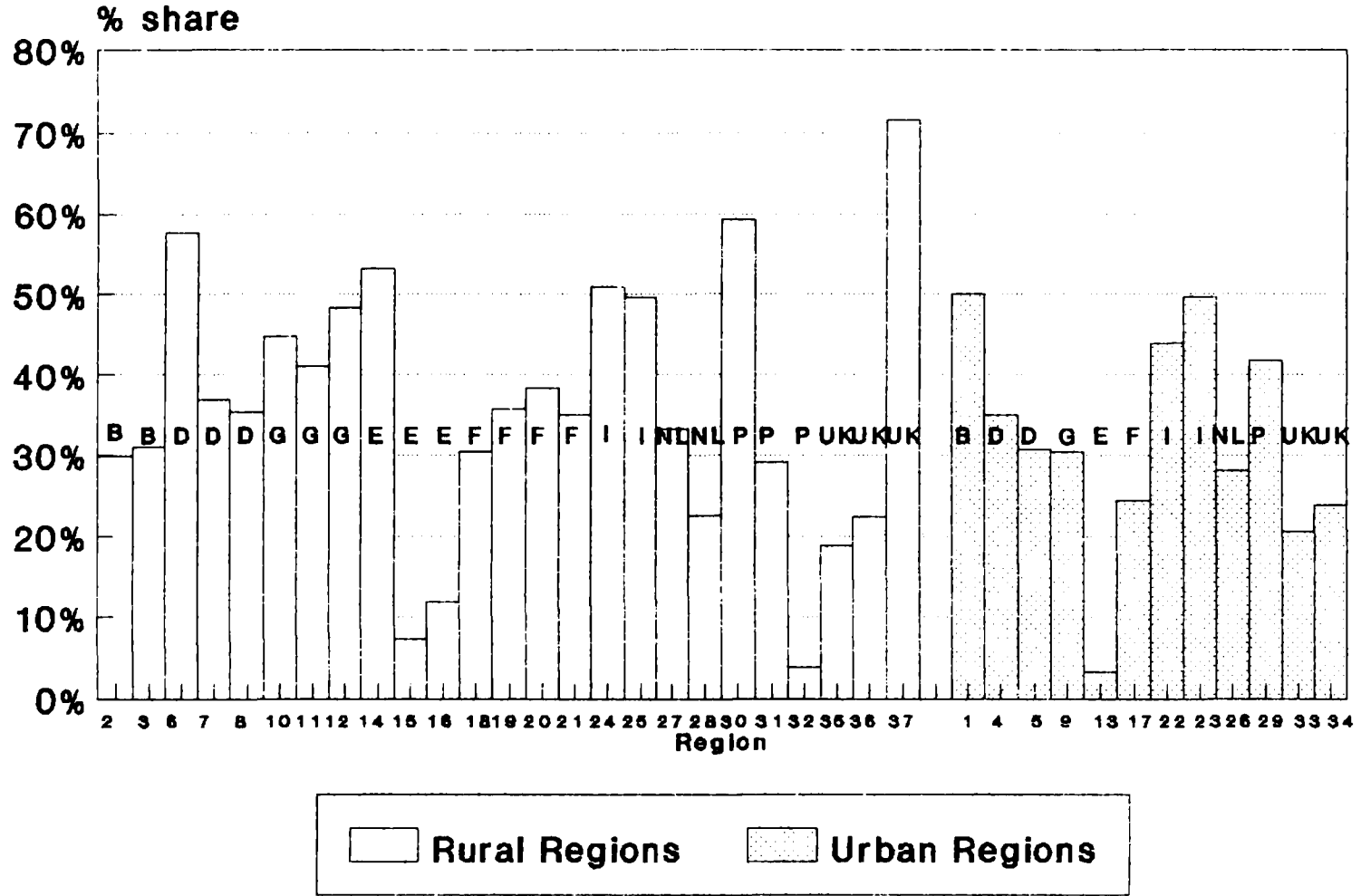
Women's overall share of employment is similar in rural and urban regions, varying, among the 37 regions, from 28,6% in Extremadura (Spain) and the Azores (Portugal) to 46% in the Ile de France region around Paris). National differences are more pronounced than regional, with both urban and rural regions of Greece, Spain and Italy showing lower figures for women's share of employment than, for example, rural and urban regions of the UK, France and Germany. The North-South dimension is more noticeable here than a rural-urban contrast.

Women's share of part-time employment is everywhere high, particularly in northern countries, where there appears to be little difference between rural and urban levels. In countries of the south (Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal), evidence suggests that women's share of part-time employment is lower in rural regions than in urban areas. The prevalence of part-time employment in agriculture, where many men are employed, may explain this feature.

Women's share of employment in the three main sectors in 1991 - agriculture, industry and services - shows the familiar pattern of higher levels of feminisation in the services sector and low levels of feminisation in industry. This pattern is similar in both rural and urban regions, and the degree of regional variation is slight (varying from 28,5% to 58,8% in services and from 7,3% to 29,4% in industry). The greatest regional variation in women's share of employment is in the agricultural sector (Fig.4.5); in 1991 the highest feminisation levels in farming were in Central Region of Portugal (59,3%), Niederbayern in Germany (57,7%), Galicia in Spain (53,2%) and Molise in Italy (51%). The lowest levels were in the Madrid and Aragon regions of Spain (3,2% and 7,3% respectively) and the Azores of Portugal (3,8%). The reasons for this variation in the feminisation of agriculture are not possible to discern from the EUROSTAT data alone, but, from other evidence, factors such as type of farm (small family farm or large estate), degree of agricultural mechanisation, extent of farm diversification and cultural traditions about women's role in farming may all play a role here.

These levels of feminisation of the main activity sectors must be put in the overall context of the distribution of all employment across the three sectors. Needless to say, in all 12 urban areas the service sector is by far the biggest employer. Yet, in all except three of the 25 rural regions, a similar pattern holds true. The three exceptions are the three Greek rural regions - Anatoliki Macedonia-Thrace, the Peloponnese and Crete - where, in 1991, agriculture remained the largest employer, employing between 43% and 45,5% of the workforce. In one further region, Central Region of Portugal,

Fig.4.5 Women's share (%) of employment - Agriculture 1991



Source: EUROSTAT

there was in 1991 a fairly even balance of employment between the three sectors; 31,3% in agriculture, 33,4% in industry and 35,3% in services. But for all other rural regions in our sample, the services sector is the main employer. The northern rural regions, in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK, have particularly low levels of employment in agriculture, rarely employing more than 10% of the workforce and sometimes employing as little as 2% or 3%. In southern rural regions, of Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece, levels are higher, often 20% or 30%, while levels in France fall between the northern and southern levels, at around 13%.

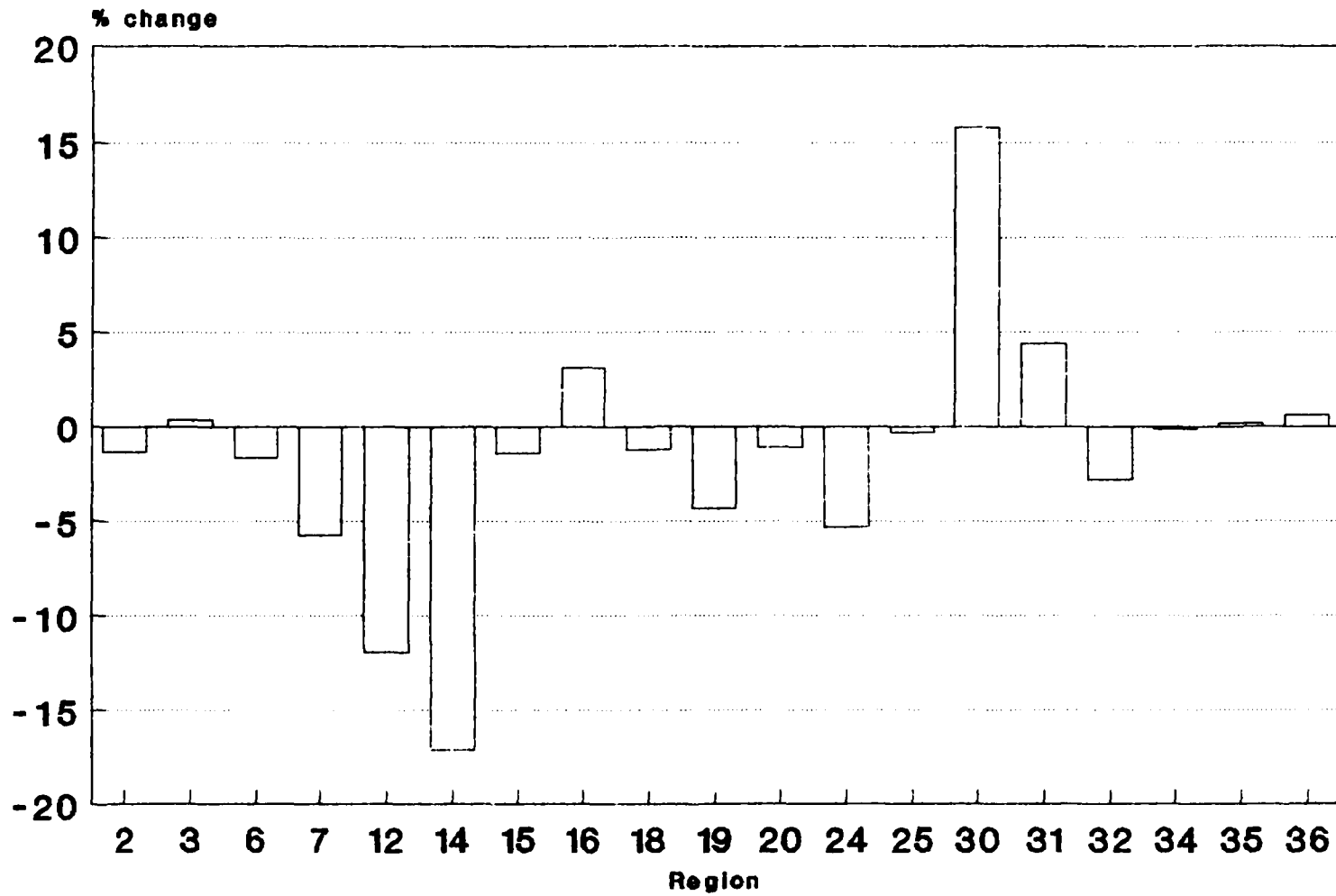
If this is the pattern of distribution of all employment, female and male, across the main activity sectors, what is the pattern for women, and specifically for rural women? One familiar pattern is the generally lesser significance of industry as an employer of women, in both rural and urban regions. Nonetheless, in some rural regions (West Flanders in Belgium, Niederbayern in Germany, Aragon in Spain, Central Region in Portugal) industry is a not insignificant employer of women, involving just over 20% of the female workforce. The services sector is again the principal employer, even more so for women than for the workforce as a whole. In urban areas this may be expected, but in almost all rural regions too, the services sector employs well over 65% of the female workforce, and in some rural regions (particularly in the Netherlands and the UK) over 80%.

Only in the three rural regions of Greece, in Central Region of Portugal and in Galicia in Spain is agriculture the principal employer of women. In these five regions agriculture employs a considerably higher percentage of the female workforce than of the male workforce. In only three additional rural regions, in Niederbayern in Germany and in Molise and Basilicata in Italy, does agriculture employ a higher percentage of the female workforce than either that of the workforce as a whole or of working men.

This contrasts with industry, where the percentage of the female workforce employed in the sector is, in all rural regions, substantially lower than that of the workforce as a whole. Commensurate with the pattern in the three Greek rural regions of agriculture being the main employer of women, in these same three regions the services sector employs a slightly greater proportion of the male workforce than of the female workforce, reversing the otherwise universal trend in the other rural regions of the service sector employing a greater percentage of working women than of working men.

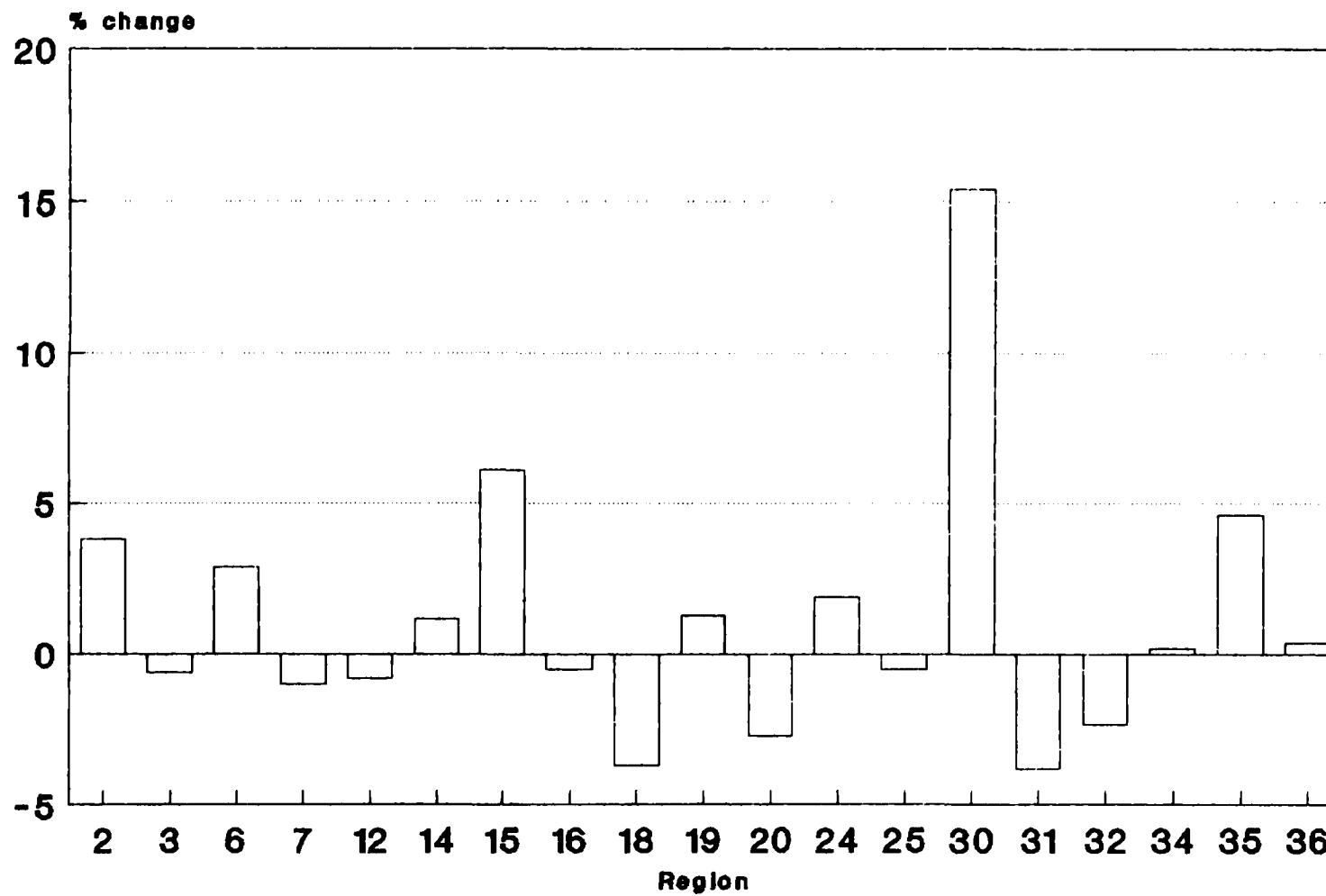
In terms of changes in female employment in rural regions between 1986 and 1991, the patterns are relatively consistent across the 25 regions (Figs. 4.6-4.8). In the majority of rural regions, women's employment increased between 1986 and 1991, although in a number of regions it declined (notably in Crete in Greece, Poitou-Charentes in France and the Alentejo in Portugal). In every rural region where employment increased, services provided the main source of growth. In regions where employment declined, the reasons are mixed (a substantial decline in employment in agriculture in Crete and in Galicia, a decline in all sectors but especially in services in Poitou-Charentes, and a substantial decline in services in the Alentejo).

**Fig.4.6 Change (%) in AGRICULTURAL
female employment 1986-1991, rural areas**



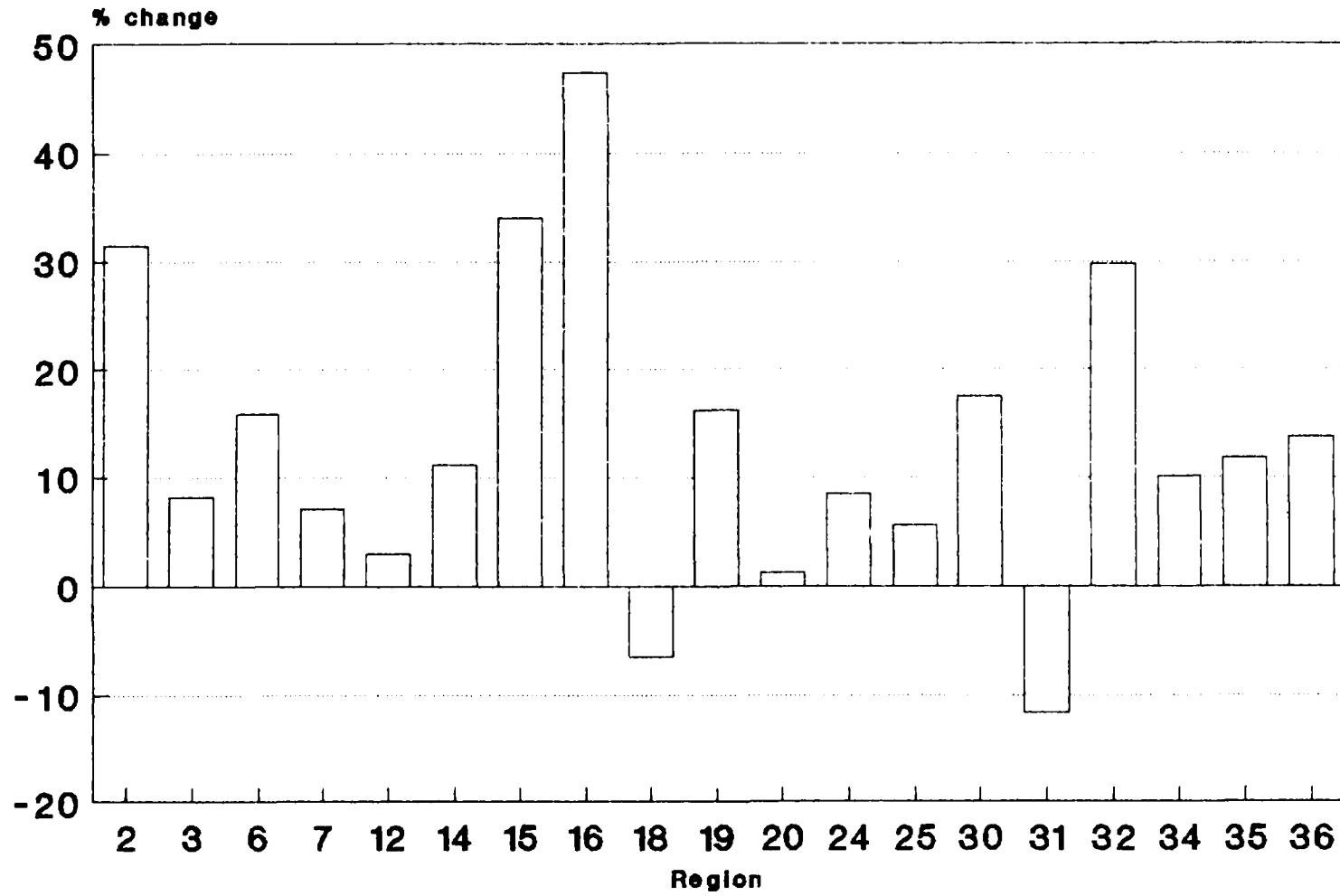
source: EUROSTAT

**Fig.4.7 Change (%) in female INDUSTRY
employment 1986-1991 in rural regions**



source: EUROSTAT

Fig.4.8 Change (%) in female SERVICE employment 1986-1991 in rural regions



Source: EUROSTAT

4.1.5 Conclusions

While such patterns and differences in terms of women's share of employment and the distribution and change of women's employment across the main activity sectors may be influenced to a considerable degree by the structure of the local labour market, specifically regional and cultural factors relating to gender would appear to play a role. Contrast for example the situation in Galicia with that of Aragon or Extremadura in Spain. The figures indicate a complex interplay between the economy, culture and gender in women's participation in the rural labour market, an interplay that can only be understood by moving beyond the statistics to understand the processes at work at a local and regional level.

"Rurality", nonetheless, appears to bring greater uncertainty and variation in the position of women in the labour market, with women's chances of being active or employed or unemployed fluctuating more between one rural region and another, than between one urban region and another. It seems, in fact, to be easier to portray a common urban labour market profile for women in the Community than it is to define common features of the women's position in the rural labour market. This chapter has attempted, on the basis of EUROSTAT data, to draw the outlines of women's participation in the rural labour market throughout the European Union. The national chapters will provide a complementary, and in some cases closer, view of women's position in the rural economy, and in doing so will provide an understanding of some of the regional and national differences noted in this chapter.

4.2 Other European information sources

In addition to EUROSTAT, a number of other principal sources of information at European level were investigated in the course of the study; European programmes; EU information services and networks; and European institutions.

4.2.1 European Union programmes and information services

In short, no European Union programme has recognised the specific role and position of women in the rural labour market or economy, and no information or data on rural women are contained in publications produced within these programmes.

The important Commission document on "The future of rural society", published in 1988, which laid the basis for European policy on agriculture and rural development since then, makes no reference at all to gender differences. The assumption appears to be that rural men and women, or other social groups within the rural world (the elderly and young, immigrants and residents), are affected similarly by the developments sweeping the rural world and experience in similar ways the problems and opportunities of the rural economy and labour market. O'Hara (1993) argues that EC policies towards rural development have "inherited the same gender bias" as that of approaches to agriculture, and are based on "implicit assumptions about how rural economies operate and unitary notions of the farm family".

"The future of rural society" laid the basis for recent reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy, and also for the launch of the EU's LEADER programme, which, in its current first phase, supports 217 locally-based rural development initiatives

throughout the European Union. No equal opportunities policy has been built into the LEADER programme by the Commission; "the Local Action Groups design their own programmes to meet the specific needs of their community" (F. Dusausoy, DG V/F.I.1, pers. comm.). Only 18 LEADER groups, out of 217, are recorded in the LEADER coordinating unit's data-base as planning, in their strategy programmes, to undertake special training programmes for women (source: AEIDL), indicating that most Local Action Groups are neither identifying nor meeting the needs of women in their areas. This interpretation is supported by analysis of the strategy documents for the 16 Irish LEADER groups and 13 UK LEADER groups, which also indicate the (low) degree of awareness of gender issues and of women's needs and experiences. This gap in awareness and strategy development has not been remedied by the LEADER programme globally: no published material produced by the LEADER coordinating group for the LEADER local action groups focuses on a gender dimension to rural development or on the specific needs of rural women, and no activities (exchange-visits or seminars) have taken place on this theme.

The European Commission's Local Employment Development Action Programme (LEDA), managed by DG V, has also focused on issues of local development in rural areas. LEDA addresses employment problems in 33 pilot areas throughout the European Union, including less developed rural areas and mixed rural/urban areas. A number of reports have been published by LEDA on issues of rural economic and employment development (LEDA 1990; LEDA 1991a; LEDA 1991b; LEDA 1992), but without any attention to gender segregation in the rural labour market or to differences in the experiences of rural men and women in terms of employment or training. The LEDA unit confirms that, in terms of documentation, "there is nothing specific on the issue of women in the rural economy" (H. Judge, pers. comm.).

Two other EU information sources on employment and labour market trends and policies are SYSDem and MISEP, part of the Employment Observatory created by DG V. MISEP, which covers employment policies in the Member States, was not able to provide information relevant to this study. The Information Unit of SYSDem, which monitors employment and labour market trends, provided a printout of published material held by them on women and employment, but no references related specifically to either rural or farming women.

DG X, the Directorate-General Audiovisual, Information, Communication and Culture, has taken some interest in women in agriculture, with two reports on the subject: one published in 1988 by the Women's Information Service (EC 1988) and now regarded as substantially out of date; the other to be published later in 1993 by the Agricultural Information Service (EC 1993b).

Some of the European Initiatives (NOW, FORCE...) may prove useful in the future as sources of information on rural or farm women and vocational training and the labour market, once transnational projects are completed and final reports, where produced, are available. It has not been possible, within the limits of this study, to systematically contact all relevant projects, funded within the context of the European Initiatives, in order to obtain information on their activities. Nor has it been possible (for time and budgetary reasons - information is not available free) to identify and contact any members of the IRIS network on women's training who are active in rural areas.

4.2.2 European institutions and networks

Neither of the two other relevant European Union research institutions, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions and CEDEFOP (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training), have focused on the target group of women in rural areas.

The European Foundation, given its research focus on living and working conditions, could potentially be an important source of information. However, no particular area of its work programme has been "devoted to women's issues and no specific attention...drawn to the need to take account of the gender dimension" (Barry and Kelleher 1992). Nor has the Foundation focused much on living and working conditions in rural areas; where there has been a specific geographical focus this been urban. To date, therefore, the subject of rural women's working conditions has not been dealt with in The Foundation's work (Wendy O'Conghaile, The European Foundation, pers. comm.).

Until recently, the Work Programme of CEDEFOP included equal opportunities between women and men in the field of vocational training. Publications arising from the work include national and sectoral surveys; none include information which helps shed light on vocational training and rural or farm women. The bibliography on women and vocational training, published by CEDEFOP at the end of its equal opportunities programme of work, contains no references to European studies on vocational training and rural women. One aspect of CEDEFOP's 1992 work programme is the evaluation of the impact of vocational training in a regional context, and certain of the regions covered are rural (e.g. rural Wales, Basilicata); unfortunately these have no specific gender dimension and do not specifically address the impact of vocational training on rural women.

Two other rural networks funded by the European Commission, TERN (Trans European Rural Network) and the Carrefours (a network of regional information centres on rural development), were contacted, and, while individual members provided useful information, neither network had focused on rural women.

4.3 European research

Of research that has been conducted at an EU-wide level on issues relating to rural areas and development, the two subjects which have received any attention are childcare and farm women.

The European Commission's Childcare Network has paid special attention to rural childcare needs, recognising that rural families face particular difficulties in accessing childcare and child support services.

The other area is farm women; in this context the work of The Arkleton Trust on farm structures and pluriactivity (a five-year research programme, supported by the European Commission, which was completed at the end of 1992) is the most significant. While not focusing specifically on gender patterns and issues, the research nonetheless has a strong gender dimension. Moreover, the research, which was undertaken in 20 EU and 4 non-EU study areas (reflecting the different agro-

environmental, economic, social and policy conditions found in Western Europe), includes both studies of the changing economic, social and policy contexts in the study areas and longitudinal studies of a sample of farm households in each of the 24 areas.

Below, we summarise the information available from the Arkleton farm structures and pluriactivity research on farm women, together with other studies on women in agriculture. But firstly, we focus briefly on the trends in the rural labour market as identified in the context studies and then on the issue of rural childcare.

4.3.1 Women in the rural labour market

Changes in the structure of rural employment have altered the relative demand for women in the labour market; equally, demographic and social changes (falling birth rates and family sizes, changing values and lifestyles, rising activity rates...) have altered the supply of female labour in rural areas. The particular combination of supply and demand has led to changes in female employment rates in most rural regions. It is not only local labour market conditions that affect women. Migration of males plays a major part in some areas of southern Europe. Transport facilities may also have an impact. In some regions, weekly (or even longer-term) commuting by males has given new opportunities to, but also placed new constraints on, the female workforce.

In many regions, women's employment rates in rural areas have increased during the last two decades, although this has not been true in all areas. For example, in many parts of southern Europe female employment rates have grown only slowly, or have even declined between 1971 and 1981. In one of the Arkleton research's study areas of Sila Greca, in Calabria (Italy), the female employment rate fell from 27% to 20% between 1971 and 1981. In Fthiotis in Greece the increase in female employment rates of 20-64 year olds was only from 29% to 31%.

Gender differentiation in the labour market is strong in all areas, although local variations in the structure of female employment can, in some countries, be quite marked, even between areas in the same region. An example is the region of South Lazio in Italy. In the Frosinone sub-area, the rate of female participation in the total labour force has remained constant, but the rate of female participation in the agricultural sector is high, reflecting the "feminisation" of agriculture in southern Italy resulting from the increased participation of women and the migration of men; women account for 53% of the agricultural labour force in this area. In Latina province, employment generally as well as female participation in employment have increased. Here the female share of the agricultural labour force is 35,5%, largely accounted for by the more dynamic and intensified nature of the industry. A high rate of female participation in the services sector is typical of most rural areas, as is the relatively lower participation of women in manufacturing.

In many rural areas of northern Europe, the proportion of female employees tends to be highest in personal services, administration and finance, transport, telecommunications and other services, other tertiary sector activities, consumption goods and distribution. Within industry, high rates of female participation are to be found in textiles, leather and leather goods, footwear and clothing. Within service sectors, the highest rates of female participation are to be found in insurance, hotels

and catering, retail distribution, banking and finance, medical services, auxiliary banking and insurance and other business services. Centralisation of many of these services (retail and medical services and banking, insurance and finance) in urban centres within rural regions and in urban regions has affected the spatial character of female labour markets in rural areas.

4.3.2 Childcare needs in rural areas

In most rural areas, childcare is identified as a key constraint on women entering, and playing a full role in, the local labour market. Areas where family and neighbours provide sufficient informal support to enable women to take part in training or employment still exist, such as in regions of Greece and Portugal, but are increasingly rare. The general picture is that reported on by the European Commission's Childcare Network (1988): "The evidence points to childcare services in rural areas being at lower levels than those in urban areas, and especially in cities... The issue of parental employment and what childcare services are needed and wanted in rural areas, the problems faced by families wishing to use them and how best to provide services needs urgent attention".

In a subsequent report, of a 1990 seminar on "Childcare Needs of Rural Families", the Childcare Network noted, in the context of an increasingly diversified rural economy, the "importance of local services, including childcare, if women are to participate fully in this diversification process. For example, without such services women (will) be less able to benefit from training and good quality employment opportunities". A paper presented at the seminar pointed to the fact that a "lack of effective local service provision...leads to a situation in which rural people and in particular rural women are restricted to less skilled or part-time employment" (Bell et al. 1990).

One of the most significant problems in many of the more marginalised rural areas is the continued out-migration of inhabitants, and in particular the loss of young parents and their children, which has consequences for the current and future development of these areas. Such out-migration can only be slowed if rural families feel that, in addition to the healthier physical and social environment offered by rural areas for raising children, the opportunities for employment and the quality of services and infrastructure are adequate. At present this is not the case in many rural areas, as a study on childcare in a remote rural area of Greece showed (EC Childcare Network 1992). Here, 77% of parents thought that living in the villages was adversely affecting their children's career. Childcare provision is an increasingly important part of the rural infrastructure.

One problem relating to childcare in rural areas in the EU is that, because of the lower incomes in rural areas, childcare is likely to be more expensive relative to family income than in urban areas. The increased transport costs also result in rural childcare often being more costly to the parent than in urban areas. Also, it is frequently of poorer quality due to lack of access to information and to an absence of vocational training facilities for childcare workers (EC Childcare Network 1992).

4.3.3 Farm women and their role in the rural economy

Agriculture and the rural world are inextricably linked, and farming continues to have an important, though not necessarily pre-eminent, place in the rural economy. The study of women in agriculture is, to a great extent, a far easier task than the study of women in other sectors or in the rural economy generally, since statistics on agriculture, as one of the three main activity sectors, are collected and published systematically at national and EU levels. However, statistics do not give a complete picture, and indeed may even give a distorted picture of women's labour in agriculture due to the ways in which, in some cases, answers are given to questions about ownership and labour and to the invisibility of women within conventional categories of work, activity and occupations in farming. Indeed, as will be seen below, in order to fully take into account women's contribution to agricultural activities, particularly on family farms, it is necessary to reformulate definitions and measures of farm labour and economic activity, in terms of hours worked, tasks performed and involvement in farm decision-making. What can be done here is to look at some of the principal published statistics on women in farming, and then at the results of recent, closer examinations of the role and activities of women on family farms.

4.3.4 Women in agriculture

In 1990, 35,3% of all people employed in agriculture in the twelve Member States were women, a feminisation rate higher than in industry (23,6%) but lower than in services (48,4%) (EC 1993a). This overall figure hides both variations between countries (see Fig.4.3 overleaf), and also regional variations, as we shall see later in chapter 4. The feminisation of agriculture is relatively high, with levels over 40% in Germany, Greece and Portugal; the lowest rate is in Ireland (10,4%).

Agriculture is significant at national level as an employer of women only in Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal; in other EU countries it employs only a tiny minority of employed women. Agricultural employment has been, and still is, declining steadily (see Fig.4.4 below), which has a particularly serious impact on women's employment in those countries where agriculture remains a significant employer. The figures below are, however, only part of the story. Not included in the figures below is the spectacular loss of women's jobs in agriculture in East Germany since 1989. And, as Maruani points out, precise figures for the decline in the number of women working in agriculture are difficult to determine as the hardships of farming in some countries and regions have pushed women towards economic inactivity, non-employment and under-employment (EC 1992). It may be assumed, particularly in countries of the south, that the loss of female employment in agriculture has been worse than the recorded figures indicate.

4.3.5 Women on family farms

During the 1980s, rural studies in Europe saw a growth of research interest in the position of women in family farming. Prior to this, women were all but invisible in research and policy accounts of the farming industry in Europe, as the concepts of work and the treatment of "the family" discounted the presence and contribution of women (Whatmore 1994). Since then, the research has seen some significant shifts of approach and emphasis.

Fig.4.3 Women's % share of employment in agriculture (1990)¹ % share of agriculture in total female employment (1987)²

| | | |
|-------------|------|------|
| Belgium | 26,0 | 2,5 |
| Denmark | 23,1 | 3,2 |
| Germany | 43,9 | 5,4 |
| Greece | 44,5 | 35,4 |
| Spain | 27,1 | 13,0 |
| France | 34,4 | 6,3 |
| Ireland | 10,4 | 4,9 |
| Italy | 35,4 | 10,6 |
| Luxembourg | 33,3 | 3,1 |
| Netherlands | 27,3 | 3,6 |
| Portugal | 49,7 | 27,3 |
| UK | 22,7 | 1,2 |
| Eur12 | 35,3 | 7,3 |

¹ Source: Bulletin on Women and Employment in the EC No.2 April 1993, DG V

² Source: Women in the European Community 1992, EUROSTAT

Fig.4.4 Women in agriculture 1983-1989¹

Growth rate of women's employment
in agriculture 1983-1989

| | |
|-------------|-------|
| Belgium | -3,0 |
| Denmark | -16,7 |
| W Germany | -36,4 |
| E Germany | -4,1 |
| Greece | -9,0 |
| Spain | -24,6 |
| France | -19,1 |
| Ireland | -38,5 |
| Italy | -25,1 |
| Luxembourg | 0,0 |
| Netherlands | +29,6 |
| Portugal | -15,5 |
| UK | -4,2 |

¹ Source: The Position of Women on the Labour Market (EC 1992)

As Sarah Whatmore argues, in her keynote lecture at the European seminar on "Women on Family Farms" at Wageningen Agricultural University in March 1993, research has gradually shifted from its early task of "trying to make women visible within the established categories and measures of labour and economic activity on the farm, in terms of hours worked, tasks performed and involvement in farm decision-making" to approaches which have, of necessity, begun to redefine farming and rural life in ways which admit women's experiences and perspectives. Other approaches

have stressed the importance of understanding power relations within the farm family (Endeveld 1993). In particular, in these new approaches, domestic labour in childcare, housework, food preparation, etc. has been established as a key foundation for those formal work activities which have been taken to constitute farm labour. "This has meant extending the concept of labour to a more broadly defined "informal economy", including homeworking, subsistence activities and casual or seasonal work, not just as fractions or sub-sets of full-time paid work, but as qualitatively different kinds of work experience and labour relation" (Whatmore 1994). The focus has shifted too to the importance of gender relations and identities in understanding women's role and position within the farming family and on the family farm.

In spite of the research during the 1980s, there are still no comparative national data on the basic characteristics of family-household structures, the gender composition of the ownership of farm capital and land, or of the family and waged agricultural workforce. The process and pattern of agricultural restructuring and rural development is regionally varied; it follows that women's experiences of rural and agricultural restructuring will also vary regionally. Very little research has been undertaken which enables us to understand the interplay between changes in farm structures and the position of farming women in rural Europe.

The sole comparative European study, which contains useful information on the nature of farming women's work, is the five-year research project undertaken by The Arkleton Trust, with finance from the European Commission, on farm structures and pluriactivity (Arkleton Trust 1992). Although gender was not the foremost dimension of the study, gender disaggregated data were collected in the course of the study and these have provided the basis for a number of - from our point of view important - published articles (Blanc and MacKinnon 1989; Bell et al. 1990) and for future research on farm women (Dr. Joanna Gilliatt, pers. comm.). The following section is based on the Arkleton Trust work (Arkleton Trust 1992; Bell et al. 1990), which studied a sample of 300 farm households in each of 20 EU study areas (plus 4 non-EU areas).

Out of the total sample of farm households studied, 38% of farms were monoactive, 37% were pluriactive, 21% were retirement household and 3% fell into a residual category. Higher levels of monoactivity exist on larger farms in areas of intermediate or low dependence on agriculture with good agricultural structures, and higher levels of pluriactivity in peripheral agriculturally-dependent areas (all in Objective 1 regions) and in areas of low or intermediate dependence on agriculture with poor agricultural structures. Whether farm households depend purely on agriculture (monoactive types) or on non-agricultural as well as agricultural activities (pluriactive types) is related to size of farm, characteristics of the farm household (size, composition, education levels, attitudes) and in the nature of labour markets outwith agriculture (opportunities for off-farm work or on-farm diversification). Pluriactivity has an important place in EU farming policy, and is widely seen as key to the survival and maintenance of family farms and farming communities in rural areas of the EU.

The role of women in agricultural work is crucial. Women's participation depends strongly on the social context. For example, there is a greater tendency for a woman to be involved in agriculture if she is from a farm background. And in some regions of the south it is traditional for women to tend the farm while their husbands take off-

farm work in the local village or abroad. 62% of female spouses, 46% of daughters and 80% of female farmers are involved in regular working in an economic activity.

Overall, 12,8% of farm operators were, in the formal legal sense, women. In terms of farm size, female farmers were present on 22% of small farms, 11% of medium-sized farms and 5% of large farms. However, considerable regional variation was noted; from the Agueda area in Portugal, where female farmers were 41% of the total, and Udine in Italy with 39%, to 2% in the area of Catalunya. These overall figures for female farmers - and the particularly high percentages in some regions - should challenge the persistent, conventional notion of "male farmer" and "female spouse".

33% of farm households in 1991 engaged in para-agricultural activities (on-farm transformation of agricultural crops and livestock products, use of farm machinery and contracting of farm labour on other farms, tourism activities), although only 7% of households were involved in such work on a regular basis. Despite its prominence in policy terms, para-agricultural work does not yet appear to provide alternative sources of income which compensate for falling agricultural incomes, although they absorb a considerable level of farm household labour: 19% of the men and 12% of the women in the central farming couple were involved in such work, which is mostly of an irregular nature. Only 5% of men and 4% of women were involved in regular full-time or part-time para-agricultural activity.

Female spouses spend more working time on the farm than daughters, who are more active in the off-farm sector. In the case of spouses, most regular work is self-employment on the farm, while off-farm work is more prevalent among other categories of farm women. In addition to these regular work commitments, many farm women undertake casual or seasonal work, both on and off the farm. Farm women in southern Europe are more likely to work on-farm than off-farm; where they do work off-farm they are more likely to be in low skilled, low paid jobs than women elsewhere.

Farm size and structure appear to be a less important influence on the off-farm employment chances of female spouses, sons and daughters than the type of area (degree of disadvantage and type of labour market conditions); while the state of the local labour market appears to affect farmers less than farm size and level of advantage of the area. In Objective 1 regions of southern Europe and Ireland, participation rates are generally lower than average for spouses and daughters for both on-farm and off-farm jobs. Lower participation in off-farm activities will be influenced by lack of work opportunities, although cultural factors are also likely to contribute to their lower participation in on-farm (and off-farm) work.

In terms of off-farm work, 48% of farm households in 1991 had off-farm work (41% of households being involved in such work on a regular basis). 17,5% of households had women with off-farm work, 10% in regular full-time, 4% in part-time and 3% in casual employment. Most off-farm jobs for farmers, spouses, sons and daughters are full-time. Sons and daughters in particular have low participation rates in part-time, seasonal and casual work. With the exception of daughters, participation in full-time off-farm employment drops as farm size increases.

The majority of men with regular off-farm work tended to be in production and construction industries (40%) with 28% as clerical/sales workers. Women with off-farm work were more likely to be in jobs with professional (30%) or clerical status (47%). Over 50% of daughters' jobs are in the trades and manufacturing sector, with a high concentration in clerical jobs and very low levels of administrative/managerial jobs. Irregular work is less professional in nature, 25% of irregular work is clerical and sales, but the majority (55%) is agriculture related. Professional status work for women, and men, is found in rural areas with low dependence on agriculture, mainly in the European "core". Clerical and sales work for any household member tends to be concentrated in areas with more diversified economies, such as Savoie and Euskirchen. Agricultural and production related work is more common in the peripheral and agriculturally dependent societies, such as in Greece, Ireland and Spain.

Off-farm work by women is sometimes although not necessarily connected with the need to earn income for the farm family. In Picardie, for example, it is quite usual for women on relatively large farms to work outside the farm, often in professional status jobs, although their income is not needed for the farm to survive. Their reasons for working may be to do with financial independence, career satisfaction or to have social links outside the farm. On the other hand, for example in Ireland, women may work outside the farm (often in local towns) to provide essential income for the family and extra capital for the farm which the man still operates. In other cases, women from smaller farms may not work, even though they would like to and their potential income is needed, because they feel themselves too old or unskilled or lack confidence to get a job. Well-educated young or middle-aged women are five times as likely to take off-farm work as less educated women. Where both the man and the woman work off-farm, farm size is much smaller, succession expectations are low and households are often preparing to exit from agriculture altogether.

One interesting dimension of the study is that the presence of children in a farm household appears only slightly to influence the activity levels of female spouses. "The presence of children under five appears to make no difference to the involvement on a regular basis of female farmers on the farm and as regards off-farm employment the participation of female spouses is higher for those with small children than for those with no children...The fact that over half of the women in farm households with children work regularly indicates that cultural constraints to women/mothers working are not so important generally, although it could be so in specific areas, and can certainly influence the type or intensity of work chosen... Nevertheless, the bulk of spouses who do have a job work regularly on the farm and this is generally presumed to allow the flexibility required for childcare" (Bell et al. 1990). Household social support may also be sufficient on family farms, with older women or older children in the family and/or the proximity of family and neighbours providing some of the child supervision resources necessary to enable spouses and female farmers to work regularly.

The relationship between training and on- or off-farm employment is as expected. Farmers and sons have considerably higher levels of agricultural training than spouses or daughters, while spouses and daughters have higher levels of non-agricultural training. The participation levels in regular off-farm work of these trained groups of farm women is lower than their male counterparts.

5 Women in the rural economy: national reports

5.1 Belgium

In terms of lifestyle it is not easy to identify a specific "rural world" in Belgium. The country is small in area and relatively densely populated (327 inhabitants/km², compared to 104 inhab/km² for France and 147 inhab/km² for Luxembourg). According to the National Statistics Institute's classification of communes, around 2,4 million people (around 25% of the population) live in rural areas, which cover 51% of the Belgian territory. However, this simple statement does not reflect the more complex reality and may be an overestimate. Each commune is generally dominated by a major town and distances between the less-urbanised rural areas and towns are small. The rural population is strongly influenced by urban life not only because of its proximity to urban areas but because of the numbers of citydwellers who retire to the countryside and the increasing numbers of rural dwellers who work in urban centres; this daily commuting has given rise to a new category of inhabitant "les ruraux urbains" (rural urbanite).

In terms of the linguistic division of regions in Belgium, Flanders is more urbanised than Wallonia and Flemish rural areas are more influenced (and placed under pressure) by urban development. Only part of one NUTS III region in Flanders (the eastern part of Leuven) falls within Objective 5b of the Structural Funds. Wallonia has more extensive rural areas, some of which are Objective 5b areas (the NUTS III regions of Bastogne, Marche-en-Famenne and Dinant in the south-east of Belgium).

Overall in Belgium, agriculture employs 3,3% of the working population, although in rural areas farming employs nearly 15% of the workforce. More numerous are workers employed in large enterprises of more than 100 people (35% of the workforce in rural Wallonia). Cottage industries and small businesses predominate. Many people working in rural areas have more than one job. Unemployment levels in rural areas are generally not high, and seem to be lower than in other types of region. For women in rural areas, unemployment levels are higher than those of men, but female unemployment levels too are lower in rural areas than in other types of region.

If the structure of female employment in the province of Luxembourg is typical of the more rural areas of Belgium, rural female employment is predominantly in the services sector. Over 85% of women in paid intellectual employment are engaged in just two sectors: other services (public administration, health, education, etc.) and in wholesale and retail distribution. For manual female workers, over 71% are engaged in other services and in hotels and catering. Under 0,5% of female waged employees are in agriculture.

Because of the general lack of clear distinction between rural and urban areas in Belgium and because of the absence of independent rural zones, it is difficult to isolate rural women as a specific group. Moreover, the focus of studies is predominantly on women in farming. Indeed, "rural woman" is synonymous in Belgium with "farm woman", despite the small role played by agriculture in the local economies (and in female employment) of even the most rural areas in the country.

Around 25% of the agricultural workforce is now female, compared to 16% in 1975, although overall employment in agriculture has declined steadily. In 1991, 12,4% of permanent heads of farms were women. In contrast, out of the 12.286 people classified as permanent "conjoint(e) aidant le chef d'exploitation", 96,5% were women. A status of "conjointe salariée" exists in law and would confer greater rights and protection of farming women, but is little used because of the costs to the employing spouse. Just over a third of farming women work permanently as "conjointe aidante", a third work occasionally on the farm and just under a third undertake no farming activity at all. Farm women who come themselves from a farm background are more integrated into farm activities than those who come from a non-agricultural background.

Around 24% of farmers' wives work outside the farm. Farm women with higher levels of education are more likely to work outside the farm than those who have completed only secondary school education. Most women work as employees and professionals, very few as manual workers or independents. Rural and farm women may also work seasonally, often in businesses associated with agriculture (such as food processing following the harvest). Such seasonal work is predominantly undertaken by women, generally during summer school holidays. Childcare is one of the positive actions that has been identified as enabling more women to enter the labour market.

5.2 Denmark

Denmark is a densely populated country, and life in rural districts is very dependent on distance to towns. Two main types of rural area can be distinguished:

1. Rural districts with problems of depopulation, high unemployment (particularly for women) and a long distance from towns. The most extreme case is Denmark's many small islands.
2. Rural districts with good transport services to towns, where a variety of different jobs are available to women, in both public and private services.

In both types of rural area there is the problem of insufficient local jobs and a need for economic development. But while in the first type of rural district depopulation is the consequence of weak or nonexistent economic development, districts falling into the second type survive largely as dwelling areas with the majority of the population working in jobs in nearby towns. More men live in rural areas than women, while more women than men live in towns.

Only 5% of the total population is occupied within agriculture. Farming and related industries primarily offer jobs for men, while most women obtain employment within different kinds of public service. The gender segregated labour market means that there are more jobs for men in the rural districts than jobs for women, because the public sector is situated in the towns. This again results in more unemployed women than men in the rural districts, and more women who are dependent on easy access to jobs in towns. High female unemployment is particularly a feature of rural areas, while in Copenhagen there are more unemployed men than women. Activity rates for women - and men - are similar in urban and rural areas.

In farming, most women are assisting spouses, while a few are agricultural workers or own a farm in their own right. Since the 1970s some women have pursued a strategy of "women into men's jobs", which can now be seen in agricultural training, where more and more women attend courses, and to a very small extent in certain jobs in industry. The gender segregation of the jobs market has implications for local and regional development policy; based on farming and machine industries it is a strategy for men's jobs, based on a decentralised (public) service, it offers greater job possibilities for rural women.

Women in rural districts are in general less well educated than urban women. Generally, women have a higher basic education than men, while more men have longer vocational education. Despite the higher levels of education, women have less success in the competition for jobs, indicating that educational and training programmes should not be the only public policy to fight women's unemployment. Women are more eager than men to attend leisure-time education, but employers offer women employees fewer courses in connection with their jobs than they offer to male employees. Among women who live in rural districts there are more unskilled female workers and fewer women in salaried work in the public sector. Many jobs in the public and the growing tourism sectors are part-time.

5.3 Germany

Characterising rural areas in Germany is not easy, for considerable diversity can be found - in terms of landscape and the economy - between one rural area and another. This diversity has increased even more since reunification, with rural regions of the new Länder experiencing catastrophic changes and very different agricultural and economic structures.

From an economic point of view, rural areas can be subdivided into four types. The first type includes rural areas containing major urban and industrial centres; these are relatively well-off economically. The second group covers agricultural regions located on the boundaries of densely populated areas; for these the urgent problems are high population density and environmental damage. A third group comprises rural areas at a distance from major economic centres; these regions are facing more and more serious unemployment problems, lack of vocational training, falling birth rates, declining numbers of active farmholdings and an exodus from the land (CEPFAR 1990). According to one regional classification "regions with major urban agglomerations" cover about 27% of the whole of west Germany and contain about 56% of the population, while the "rurally structured regions" cover about 34% of west Germany with about 16% of the population.

A fourth group could be said to include rural areas in the former East Germany, now the new Länder, which, although diverse in themselves, face similar structural problems: a massive change from a planned economic system, where economic sectors were closely linked together and were organised and owned by either a "Kollektiv" or the state, to a private economy; modernisation or closing of firms leading to a breakdown of formerly important economic sectors and to an enormous increase in the numbers of unemployed people; massive losses of jobs in the agricultural industries (between 1989 and 1991 the numbers employed in this sector fell from 850.000 to

300.000), which have particularly affected women; and a breakdown of previously good social services, such as childcare (Lasch, Panzig, Schobin and Fuhr 1992).

In rural areas in west Germany, women's position in the labour market is in some respects better than that of urban women, and in some cases worse. Between 1983 and 1988 the employment growth rate of women was generally higher in agricultural regions (+11,1%) than in high density regions (+8,3%). The proportion of women among the employed has also been rising, in all regions by 1-2%, and in rural areas is now 41,3%, above the average for the whole of west Germany. 23% of employed women work in part-time jobs, an increase of 18,3% between 1983 and 1988; no differences appear to exist between rural and urban regions. In general, women's labour force participation is similar in rural (60%) and urban (59%) areas, although the labour force participation of younger women, under 30 years, is noticeably higher in rural areas than high density areas, perhaps due to the longer time spent by urban women in vocational training before entering the labour force.

Increases in women's participation in vocational training have been higher in urban areas than rural areas, and the proportion of female trainees is lower in rural areas than both the national average and that for urban areas. There are clear differences in terms of qualifications between women in rural areas and those in urban areas. In rural areas of Baden-Württemberg, for example, the proportion of women who have only low level qualifications is higher in rural areas (44% compared to 30% in high density areas), while the proportion with higher level qualifications is lower (3% compared to 7% in high density areas).

Moreover, rural women have fewer chances of using their qualifications in employment than urban women. In Baden-Württemberg, 40% of women in rural areas with a higher qualification have to work in lower positions, compared to 29% in urban areas. More rural women work in the lowest levels of firms than urban women, and fewer rural women reach middle-level positions. These differences also mean different incomes and different social positions.

Women in rural areas appear to have been affected more sharply by changes in employment in different economic sectors. In textiles and clothing, traditionally "female" industries, jobs have been lost, and this has hit rural areas harder, given the higher proportion of women employed in these two sectors in rural areas compared with the proportion nationally. On the other hand, more women in rural areas have profited from the general increase of employment in the trade sector.

In a number of sectors, the proportion of women in employment in rural areas is higher than that in urban areas. For example, in hotel and catering 65,6% of those employed are women, compared to 59,2% in urban areas, and in processing industries the figure is 32,3%, compared to 26,4% for urban areas.

In unemployment too, rural women seem to have fared better, although the figures must be approached with caution. Despite an increase of unemployment among women in areas with urban agglomerations (+10,8% between 1983 and 1988), in rural areas women's unemployment declined (-7,9%). There are relatively fewer unemployed women in rural areas than in urban areas. Yet, these figures conflict with the widely held view that employment opportunities are worse for women in rural areas, and one

explanation is that many unemployed women form part of a "hidden reserve" (Stille Reserve) and do not appear in official statistics.

Common problems faced by rural women are: continued discrimination against women in vocational training and in working life; lack of mobility; and limited childcare services.

Additional - and very serious - problems face rural women in the new Länder. In 1989, the employment rate of women was 91,2%; in 1990, 78% of employed women had lost their jobs. By 1992, women formed 60% of all the unemployed in the new Länder. In certain rural areas, the situation of women is even worse than this, with women's proportion of all employed falling to under 20%. The agricultural sector (which included processing, production and service jobs) has suffered greatly. Despite relatively high qualification levels of women in this sector (92% having completed vocational training), only 25% of women formerly working in the agricultural sector are still employed. The high levels of unemployment, and particularly female unemployment, will continue in the foreseeable future, as employment alternatives have not been developed. As if this were not enough, the breakdown of the formerly good childcare system in the DDR will also have negative effects on women.

5.4 Spain

Spain's rural areas are diverse, with a number of distinct problems. In the hinterland of central Spain, population density is low and steadily declining, making any kind of development difficult. In Galicia, the Duero region, non-Mediterranean Andalusia and the sub-Pyrenean region, there is moderate population growth and GDP close to the national average. The developing areas are concentrated on the islands, along the coast and in the Ebro Valley and Madrid. Generally, the problems facing rural Spain are: an unequal distribution of population and depopulation in central regions; a very high unemployment rate; a mismatch between the educational system and the needs of the labour market; an inadequate communications infrastructure; deterioration of the environment in some areas, from tourism and industrial activity; shortage of water and fertile soil; and insufficient technological research (CEPFAR 1990).

The principal activities in rural areas of Spain are arable farming, stock farming, fishing and forestry (31% of the country is forested). Two major trends can be identified in farming: a drop in the active agricultural population and a steady decline in agriculture's share of GDP. Only one-third of farmers have farming as their principal occupation, the others either have a principle professional occupation outside farming or are retired people.

In settlements with fewer than 10.000 inhabitants the average population density is 31 inhabitants/km². In 1981, 20,1% of the population lived in settlements with fewer than 2.000 inhabitants, and 37,2% in settlements of under 10.000 inhabitants. Since then there has been a loss of population in small settlements. Of the female population, 55% live in areas with fewer than 50.000 inhabitants and 37,2% in areas with fewer than 10.000. Slightly fewer women than men live in settlements of fewer than 2.000 inhabitants, and slightly more women than men in large settlements.

Rural women are traditionally undervalued, with their contribution to economic activities restricted to the role of fill-in and secondary worker. In recent years, there have been significant changes with young women entering the labour market, especially outside agriculture. Working-age farm women are leaving farming at twice the rate as men. Women's marginalised role has been attributed to educational disadvantages, but only at higher and university levels of education do gender differences appear. Young rural people generally have a lower level of training than their urban counterparts. The desire to pursue training and education is stronger among young rural women than among men of the same age; young women wish to leave the countryside and acquire an urban style of life.

Statistics on women's participation in work are poor estimations of the reality. Women's informal role in family farms and businesses or outside are not recorded. For example, the 1991 economically inactive population records just over 4.4 million men but nearly 10.5 million women. The economic value of productive-domestic tasks destined for family consumption has declined as market relations and the formal labour market have become universal.

In areas with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants, recorded female employment is dominated by agriculture (agriculture 42%; industry 17%; services 39%; construction and others 2%). In intermediate settlements the proportion of women's employment in agriculture falls substantially, replaced by industry and, particularly, services.

Age strongly affects women's professional occupations in rural areas. In the 25-29 age group in small rural settlements, the principal sector is services, followed by professional and technical occupations, industry and, fourthly, family work. In the 45-49 age group, the principal occupation by far is family work, with service sector, industrial, professional and technical occupations representing a much smaller number of women. Agriculture increases as a proportion among this older age group, as does the status of entrepreneur.

Most farm women fall into the category of housewife. Their average age is relatively advanced. The frontier between domestic and farm/family work is imprecise, and the farm work that women do includes: non-mechanised agricultural tasks; transformation and manufacture of products (for own consumption and sale in local markets); housing and feeding of permanent and seasonal workers; answering the telephone; management of orders and supplies; financial transactions, etc. This work is considered support work, because it is unplanned, non-specialised and non-mechanised. The association between mechanisation and masculinisation of tasks is very pronounced in Spanish farming. Although the hours that women work on the family farm qualify their work for full-time status, it is regarded only as part-time. In Catalonia, farm women work on average 77 hours a week.

Women are also sometimes day labourers in agriculture, working seasonally, for long hours and with poor working conditions and wages. This work is a particular feature in Andalusia, Extremadura and Castilla-La-Mancha, or, where seasonal migration takes place, in La Rioja, Navarra, Aragon and the tourist areas of the Mediterranean.

Depending on criteria adopted, women are either 10%, 14% or 20% of farm heads or entrepreneurs. This national average overlooks significant regional differences, with

higher levels in Galicia, the Canaries, Asturias, Valencia and in the Balearics, and low percentages in La Rioja, Aragon and Catalonia. Many female farm entrepreneurs are heads of small, economically unviable farms. The larger the farm, the less likely is a woman to be running it. 77% of female farm heads spend less than 50% of their time on the farm and 87% have no other income-generating activity. 63% are more than 55 years old, reflecting the fact that they have generally acquired responsibility for the farm through inheritance or widowhood.

The differences in aspirations between older rural women and younger rural women are marked. There is still pride among older women in the capacity to be self-sufficient, although there is appreciation of the impact that technological developments in the home and on the farm have made to their lives. Young rural women desire to leave the countryside for the towns, acquire education and training and find a paid job, albeit still desiring a "good marriage" like their mothers. Young women value consumption rather than self-sufficiency, seeing consumption as a way to acquire social status.

5.5 France

Of all EU countries, France has perhaps elaborated the concept "rural area" the most clearly. The National Statistics Institute defines two types of commune, urban and rural, and makes a further distinction between rural communes which are close to urban areas or communication axes, called ZPIUs, and those which are "deeply rural". Rural areas in France represent around 27% of the population and 85% of national territory, but the contrast between the two types of rural area is strong. 80% of the rural population lives in ZPIUs, which cover 20% of rural territory. Deeply rural communes cover the greatest amount of rural territory, but population density is extremely low (15 inhabitants/km²) and is falling. Farming families predominate in these deeply rural communes, and the average age is high, causing serious problems of population renewal and for economic activities, in particular for the self-employed. In contrast, the problems faced by ZPIUs are of land use, housing shortages, farming and the environment.

Agriculture remains a major economic activity in rural areas of France, although farm households have fallen dramatically as a percentage of the rural population (from 47% in 1962 to 27% in 1982, and even lower today). The majority of rural dwellers do not work in agriculture, but instead in manual work (43%), in offices (21%), in intermediary occupations (17%), upper management and liberal professions (5%) and as traders and craftspeople (15%). The main development has been a drop in agricultural employment, slight increase in manual workers and a substantial increase in office and management jobs. Nonetheless, even now there is a far greater equilibrium across the three main economic activity sectors than is the case nationally or in urban areas.

Economically inactive inhabitants are over-represented in many rural communities: the elderly and retired, who represent one fifth of the population in remoter rural areas, women who are not part of the labourforce and temporary residents, including weekend or holiday residents. The maintenance of an economically active rural population is not helped by the lower education and training levels in rural areas: the

school failure rate is higher and distances from higher education establishments are often considerable.

7,3 million women live in rural communes; one in four of all women in France. Among these women, 2,6 million are classified as active. Young women are more numerous in rural communes than urban, but at working age women tend to leave the countryside for the towns, leading to an under-representation of women of 20-39 years. Elderly women are over-represented in rural communes, compared to urban women and rural men in the same age group.

The foremost problems facing rural women, both at national and local levels, in France are their economic integration - employment and training and their position in companies and enterprises - and their conditions of life, notably the isolation and its consequences in terms of access to facilities and services necessary for daily life (Toutain and Velard 1993). The following are the principal themes concerning the situation of rural women: employment, training, services, pluriactivity (notably agrotourism), health, access to facilities, quality of the environment, older people, the active participation of women in local economic life, and transport.

Levels of education for girls are lower in rural communes than in urban areas, and women represent only 28% of apprentices, the majority in traditional "feminine" sectors (hairdressing...). There have been net increases in women undertaking agricultural training, although women are still a minority of technical trainees in this sector. The majority of women follow short courses to lower levels than men, and are concentrated in particular subjects (domestic and rural economy, marketing). Young women with higher levels of education generally remain in the town or city; lack of facilities and services, few higher education and training institutions, limited job opportunities and less independence, all discourage young women from remaining in the countryside. For adult women who remain, continuous training is difficult to pursue - for reasons of distance, taking time away from work and the family, paucity of childcare - although the needs and desires of rural women to follow training are strong.

Activity rates of rural women are increasing, but access to employment is far from easy and rates remain lower than for urban women. In 1990 unemployment rates among young women (less than 30 years) were higher in rural communes than in urban (22,6% compared to 21,5%) and much higher than those among rural men (9,6%). For all age groups of rural women, however, unemployment levels were lower (13,5%) in rural areas than in urban zones (15%). More than half of rural people seeking work are women.

Waged work has increased proportionately among active rural women. However, many rural women are not registered in a professional capacity, despite a range of legal statuses for women who work in family businesses or on family farms. For example, around 800.000 women are involved in agriculture, but do not choose to exercise this with a recognised status. 4/5 of women in crafts and commerce also make no choice of recognised legal status. As a result they are treated officially as non-remunerated and have few rights or social protection.

Over 2,2 million rural women were in employment in 1990, half of whom work in

the services sector, which has seen strong employment growth in all branches. Industry, building and transport employ few rural women, and agriculture has shown a relative decline as a proportion of all female rural employment. Generally, rural women work in less-qualified socio-professional positions than urban women.

Although farming women are no longer a majority of active rural women, their role remains important in rural life and on the farm. Farm women are more likely to be employed than previously and part-time employment is common. Increasing numbers of farm women work outside the farm in non-agricultural employment, and many on-farm activities (agrotourism, farm markets) have been initiated by women.

Women who live in rural areas find it more difficult than their urban counterparts to reconcile professional activity with domestic work. Time spent in family and household tasks is higher in the countryside, particularly for farm women, for whom domestic and farm work is closely interwoven. Of all groups, that with the smallest amount of free time daily is farm women. In spite of increases in the number of households with at least one car, women have access to a car less often than men, greatly complicating the daily life of women with children. The isolation of life in the countryside is particularly marked in terms of cultural and leisure facilities. And the lack of child support services (nurseries, crèches, out-of-school facilities) adds to the difficulties of life for families. Nonetheless, rural women are often the initiators of local services, often on a voluntary basis (collection systems for school children, crèches run by parents, cultural activities and environmental improvement projects).

5.6 Greece

Greece is a country of islands and territories which are topographically, as well as economically and culturally, compartmentalised. The six large cities absorb a substantial proportion of the population, although nearly half lives outside cities of more than 100.000 inhabitants. The geography - a mountainous mainland and scatter of more than 50 islands - means that outside of the main urban areas the population is fragmented by poor roads, traditions, activities and different administrative structures.

Agriculture remains important. Greece has the highest percentage of population employed in agriculture in the EU (21,6% in 1991), and the agricultural sector contributes 16,3% (1991) to the country's GDP. Because of the terrain, only 29,7% of land is cultivated, and of this only 30,6% is irrigated. The main structural problems in agriculture are highly fragmented land and the small size of the farmholdings, the latter resulting from traditional inheritance practices. Agricultural rationalisation has been slow and productivity rates remain very low.

The total active population in agriculture in 1989 was almost one million farmers, 44,6% of whom were women (ESYE). 71,7% of women employed in agriculture are characterised as "assistants/non-paid family members", compared to 15,3% of men. Despite the sector's importance as a source of employment for women, the total number of rural women employed in agriculture is declining, since most young rural women try to leave rural areas for a job outside agriculture or to study.

Greek rural women, living in what is still a predominantly patriarchal society, experience discrimination from early stages in life. Educational opportunities are deemed a waste of family resources, since marriage is the main aim. When, later, there are opportunities for training, it is usually in the traditional feminine professions (clothing, sewing, food processing, home economics), which they are guided to follow as "more appropriate".

Illiteracy among rural women is as high as 28,5%. 67,1% of rural women have completed primary school, but only 2,3% have completed high school, compared to 4,5% among rural men. The situation is worse in higher education (0,07%) and in universities (0,14%), compared to that of men (0,56% and 0,44% respectively).

Rural women are usually overburdened with housework, care of children and parents, care of the market garden etc. They also work in the fields in agriculture, and very often when family income is not enough to live on, they are obliged to work in other seasonal jobs. The non-agricultural occupations of rural women - usually characterised as unskilled and low-paid - are in tourism, agro-industries (processing/packaging of fruit, vegetables, fish, etc.), clothing and the service sector (trades, nursing, etc.). Homeworking, on a subcontracting or piecework basis and frequently in the clothing sector, is common in certain areas and for women who cannot leave home because of small children or dependent parents. Very few rural women work in public services, in transport and communications, or even in banking and insurance, and those who do are usually young and relatively well educated.

Although Greek women gained the right to vote in 1952, only in 1983 did they gain equality with men in all aspects of individual and family rights. A series of laws were voted through between 1982 and 1985, which enabled rural women to join agricultural cooperatives or professional agricultural associations, to obtain loans from the agricultural bank and to join equally in activities and decision-making, all of which had previously been the sole privilege of men. Rural women also gained maternity benefit and an individual pension, although at very low levels. The rural environment is still very traditional and the modernisation of the legal system concerning equal rights appears to have brought more work and more responsibilities for rural women, but without payments or reward. The earnings of women in paid agricultural employment remain well below those of men.

5.7 Ireland

Different definitions of "rurality" can be found in Ireland, and this must be born in mind in interpreting any information.

43% of the total population of 3,5 million live in rural areas, with 35,6% living in just 5 large towns and cities, which still continue to attract rural dwellers, particularly the young. 26% of the population lives in just one urban area - greater Dublin. According to EUROSTAT, in 1990 the overall population density was the lowest of any EC Member State, at 51 inhabitants/km² compared to the EC average of 153 inhabitants/km². Following continuous decline of the rural population, the population in rural areas increased during the 1980s, due largely to city dwellers moving to neighbouring rural areas to live while working in the nearest urban centre.

The main economic activities of Ireland's rural regions are farming, agricultural industries, fishing and forestry. Agriculture is Ireland's largest single industry. In 1989 it accounted for 10,5% of GDP and 14,5% of employment. Agriculture and the food processing sector together account for around a third of all employment. Farming also contributes importantly to foreign exchange earnings. Exports of agricultural and food products and beverages accounted for 25% of total exports in 1988, while their contribution to net foreign exchange earnings was of the order of 40% (Department of Agriculture and Food 1991). Despite this, the average farm family income is less than 70% of the EU average and direct employment in farming continues to decline steadily. Underemployment and unemployment (at 18,8% for women and 17,0% for men in 1992, according to EUROSTAT) are at very high levels.

The entire agricultural sector is suffering from serious structural difficulties with low farm incomes and high levels of underemployment on farms. Non-agricultural employment is insufficient, with industrial and commercial activities concentrated in the main towns and cities, and tourism and agrotourism, which have grown substantially, providing seasonal, low-skilled, low-paid work.

In 1986, more than half a million women lived in rural areas, around 41% of all women in Ireland. Women under the age of 65 are under-represented in the rural population. Of rural women, 30% were single, 55% married and 13,4% widowed. Proportionately, there are more married, widowed and older women in rural areas than in urban areas.

Rural women are classified in official statistics as farmers and farmers' wives, industrial workers, employees in public and private services, homeworkers, fishermen's wives, self-employed, relatives assisting on farms and in family businesses... Many married women fall into the category of "helper spouse". They are not associates or partners, but regularly share in the activities of their self-employed husband and perform similar or complementary tasks. They rarely have a legal professional status, rarely have title to or jointly own the farm or property and are not eligible for social insurance cover, receiving only derived benefits.

The combination of the lack of recognised status and the definition of economic work means that much of the work undertaken by rural and farm women is hidden, leading to a major underestimation of women's contribution to GDP and to the economic functions carried out within family farms and businesses. This contributes to women's marginalisation within rural development policies and strategies. Official statistics record primary activity, which if defined as housework doubly under-estimates women's contribution; neither her domestic work nor her secondary economic activities (which may amount to 30 hours or more of work per week) are recorded. Official statistics on women's activity rates, employment and economic occupations are therefore highly biased.

According to the 1986 Population Census, female activity rates in urban areas were 37,5%, but only 28,7% in rural areas. Unemployment rates among women were 15,1% in urban areas and 14,1% in rural areas, a corollary of the lower activity rates and higher levels of "hidden" unemployment. Among women in paid employment, there are higher proportions of working women who are employers, self-employed and assisting relatives in rural areas than in urban areas. Apart from the obvious exception

of farming, the employment structure appears to differ little between urban and rural areas. In both, manufacturing is strongly represented (18,3% of female employment in urban areas, 20,3% in other areas), as are the professions (28,9% urban, 30,1% other areas) and commerce and insurance (25,1% urban, 21,0% other areas). Agriculture employed 7,1% of the female workforce in non-urban regions in 1981, but, given the under-representation of female work, this cannot be taken as an indication of the relative importance of agriculture in rural women's economic activities.

In addition to 111.000 farm wives in 1990, there were, according to the EC, 24.500 women in ownership of farms and 14.000 in the "assisting relatives" category. Most women enter farming as an occupation by marrying a farmer, and will have been in a non-farm occupation before marriage. A survey of farm wives showed that just over half have young children, nearly a third are on farms where the husband has an off-farm job, and around 20% of the women, mostly younger women, are engaged in off-farm work. Farm women choose off-farm employment as a means to increase their financial independence, status and personal identity, which are not possible within the sphere of farm work. But the opportunities for off-farm employment in many rural areas are extremely few and far between, and the large size of farm families makes working outside the farm difficult. According to another survey, 62% of farm wives did manual farm work. On average farm wives spend 38 hours a week on farm work, including office work, administration and decision-making. In spite of the importance of their contribution, for 60% of farm wives the work was seen as a family contribution and 17% received no payment at all.

Education levels of girls are slightly lower in rural areas than urban areas, and the proportion of females who complete education at 16 years and under is higher in rural areas. The participation of rural women in training and continuing education has improved slightly in recent years, but remains very low.

One of the most consistent problems for rural women in Ireland is access to services and facilities, and the resulting isolation and loneliness. Public transport has been reduced dramatically in the last two decades, placing considerable burdens on women, particularly those who live in low-income households and care for elderly relatives. Although many rural households own a car, women's access to the family car is restricted. Other problems include lack of childcare, lack of affordable relief services for farm women (during maternity or to attend training) and poor (or expensive) access to information and advice.

5.8 Italy

Outside of the main urban zones, Italy can be divided roughly into three geographical types of area: peri-urban areas, with scattered industrial establishments, rich agriculture, an influx of "new country dwellers" fleeing the cities, and urban models of life which have replaced traditional lifestyles; rural tourism areas (plains, hills, mountains, coasts) where agriculture is losing its importance, traditional activities are altered during holiday periods and urban lifestyles and infrastructure are increasingly being adopted; and internal and marginal areas, principally in the south and on the islands, marked by a still significant rural and agricultural exodus, traditional

lifestyles, ageing of the population, very low incomes and lack of basic services. This contrast between the different types of non-urban area is becoming more marked, with the more developed rural areas becoming more so and the poorer and marginal regions dropping to increasingly lower levels (CEPFAR 1990).

In recent decades, some traditionally rural and agricultural areas of Italy have seen an extraordinary expansion of small rural enterprises (62% of non-agricultural employment created between 1971 and 1981 was in rural areas; in the traditionally agricultural region of the March in 1981 74% of manufacturing employment was in rural or semi-rural areas). The last decade has seen extensive development of the service sector, both public and private. However, cutbacks in public expenditure are likely to have a negative impact on public sector employment in the future, which will particularly affect women.

Women in rural areas in Italy play an important and complex role, in the family and in paid and un-paid work. Their economic role is flexible, with many rural women, particularly in tourist areas, carrying out different tasks according to the different seasons. Activity rates for women are lower than those of men; in the South, where marginal rural areas predominate, female activity rates are half the level of those of men. However, official statistics tell only a partial story since much of women's work in rural areas is in the informal economy. In the formal economy in rural areas, women tend to have insecure and limited job opportunities. In many areas a substantial proportion of women's employment is carried out within the family business. Many rural women tend to exit from the labour market as soon as they become mothers. Rural women have a heavy burden of domestic work: over 87% of women say that their husband does not help with the housework. Many rural women express a need for "replacement" and supporting services.

Most young rural women would like to have a salaried job outside the home and farm, but they encounter many difficulties: for economic reasons (rural unemployment rates are high for both men and women and jobs are scarce), for cultural reasons (there is still prejudice against married women working outside the home) and because of lack of services which would enable them to match paid employment with school timetables. Nor can rural women commute to work, since this is generally already done by their husbands, limiting their job prospects even further.

Around 46% of the total female rural population live and/or work on farms; of these 43% are spouses, 19% are heads of farms, 37% are daughters or relatives. Women's presence in farming has increased over recent years, although official figures may record higher levels than is the case in reality: women may be registered as heads of farms because their husbands have obtained a salaried job or they may be registered as farm workers in order to obtain benefits. Nonetheless, women's contribution to agriculture is substantial and their presence in agricultural employment in percentage terms is growing.

Women represent 36% of agricultural employment, with higher levels in the South and Central Italy. Between 1988 and 1990 farms run by women increased by 10%, from 22% to 26% of the total, although women generally manage the smaller farms. Factors preventing (more) women from becoming farm entrepreneurs are: lack of education (education levels of farm women are lower than those of men); lower

mobility and less access to credit. When a farm is run by a woman, different patterns of work within the family-run business prevail. The women receive very little help from their husbands (compared to the reverse situation when the farm is run by a man), and the main help they get within the family is from their parents or sisters. Nonetheless, a positive sign for the future is the increasing numbers of women who have higher educational achievements and who are deliberately choosing to run a farm as a profession. Another positive trend is that women farm owners show a greater attention to environmental conservation and to developing new production opportunities (for example, agrotourism and flower growing) than farm men.

5.9 Luxembourg

Just under 75% of the land area of Luxembourg is classified as rural, and just over 40% of the population can be counted as rural inhabitants. Having said this, within the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg there is neither a precise concept of "rurality", nor a satisfactory definition. A 1977 decision by the government concerning regional development defines the rural world as space which is not considered urban. This is not as simple as it seems. Luxembourg is composed of towns and localities, with rural areas within urbanised regions and urban centres within rural areas.

Agriculture, crafts and small and medium-sized businesses provide the cultural and economic base of rural areas, and it is agriculture and forestry which dominate the rural environment. Only since 1989 has rural development been recognised by the State, when a department with responsibility for this was created within the Ministry of Agriculture.

The imprecision of the concept rural is not merely due to geographical considerations and the country's small size, but also to social and economic factors. Farmers represent only 2% of the population of Luxembourg and agriculture employs just under 8% of the total workforce. No commune is located more than 30 kilometres from a town of more than 30.000 inhabitants; because of this many rural dwellers work in towns. Equally, increasing numbers of businesses are establishing themselves in the countryside.

The situation of rural women as a specific group in Luxembourg cannot be defined. In fact, to speak of "rural women" in Luxembourg is to speak of "farming women". The majority of women who live in rural areas and who do not work on a farm are either housewives, unemployed women or women who work outside agriculture in the villages and towns. The lives of non-farming women in Luxembourg differ little between rural and urban localities, particularly in terms of economic activities and labour market position. We can therefore identify only the situation of farming women.

The status of farming women is predominantly that of "assistant", implying the provision of labour without remuneration. Just under 20% of heads of farms are women, and of those working full-time in agriculture around 2/3 are men and 1/3 women. While farming men have one function, most farm women have three: the home, the family and farm work. Increasingly, farm women are engaged in activities outside the farm, and farm women are taking on new tasks, such as the farm accounts and administration.

5.10 The Netherlands

Rural regions in the Netherlands are still characterised by agricultural activities. 2 million hectares out of a total area of 3.7 million consist of arable land. The number of farms in 1992 was 120.936 (CBS/LEI 1993). The active agricultural population represents 5% of the total labour force in the Netherlands. The export of agricultural products is important for the agricultural sector and for the economy of the country as a whole. 2/3 of agricultural products are exported, which represents 25% of all exported products. Farmers produce about 5% of the GDP (LEI 1991).

Apart from agriculture, land in rural areas is used for recreation, nature, infrastructure, forestry, working and living. The Netherlands is a densely populated country. Land is scarce and becoming more and more so. The available space has to be distributed between various functions, causing friction between different groups of potential land users. At the moment, for instance, there are clearly conflicting interests regarding land use between farmers and farming organisations and conservationists. The need for an extensive system of land and country planning in the Netherlands is obvious. At national, provincial/regional and local authority levels plans are developed for a politically acceptable distribution of land. Local authorities have a high degree of autonomy within the system. Their (land use or land development) plans on this level are the most specific. This town and country planning system is closely related to rural development policies and therefore very important for rural development (CEPFAR 1990).

In rural areas as in the rest of the Netherlands women have the primary responsibility for household labour and the care of children and other family members. Men are in most cases the breadwinner and their job interests have priority when it comes to deciding on a place of residence. Most rural women had a paid job in the past, but stopped working when they got married and had children. When their children are young they stay at home. Later on the majority of them try to find some kind of waged work.

There are few opportunities for women to find a paid job in rural areas, particularly a part-time job in the immediate vicinity of their home. If there are opportunities for employment they are primarily found in the agricultural sector; on farms or in industries or in services related to agriculture. Although in a minority, some rural women live and work on the family farm, most of them married to a farmer. Opportunities for work in other sectors of the labour market, such as administrative work or in health care, are very limited. Many rural women would like to do some kind of training or education. Most of them have a low level of education and they are keen to improve their job prospects.

Rural women do a considerable amount of (unpaid) voluntary work in the communities where they live. This work makes an enormous contribution to the viability of rural areas, and is becoming more and more important as the viability of living in rural areas for women is diminishing. Already they have problems in combining their household and caring responsibilities with work and education, because job opportunities and training facilities in the neighbourhood are not available. This situation is becoming worse not better, now that rural planning is directed more towards regional

accessibility of facilities and services than to availability at a local level.

5.11 Portugal

In terms of land area, Portugal is almost entirely rural. Three-quarters of the population live along the coasts, where most of the large towns and cities are located and where industry is growing. The interior is rural, dominated by agriculture, far less densely-populated and predominantly village-based. Portuguese rural areas show great regional differences, between north and south, and between coastal and inland regions. The predominant activities are agriculture, stock-farming and forestry. Along the coast, trade, tourism and industry are very common. Regional differences are also reflected in values towards women and their participation in social and economic life.

The Algarve has traditionally been linked with tourism and contacts with both the Mediterranean cultures and the northern European tourists; the Alentejo is well known for its vast farmlands and low population density; Lisboa is generally recognised as the centre of government, industry and information; the Centre and North have a reputation for small landholdings, a conservative mindset, a large percentage of out-migration, and small, isolated villages.

Portugal's economy is currently in recession, and is characterised by high unemployment, desertification of the rural interior of the country, continuation of subsistence agricultural practices, a thriving informal sector and a crisis in education. Agriculture still defines life in much of rural Portugal, providing not only employment (in farming itself and in up- and down-stream activities), but a strong sense of cultural identity, both for women and men. For the many women who have migrated to the towns and cities, home remains the rural village from where she comes. Although agriculture is declining in importance, women's share of employment in the farming sector has increased. In northern Portugal in particular, women are the backbone of agriculture, with men working in other sectors. In the south, the majority of women who work in agriculture receive salaries. Nonetheless, the significance of farming as a source of income and employment for rural women should not be overemphasised, and many rural women are involved in other sectors.

In rural areas of Portugal generally, women hold more tertiary jobs than men and have access to employment which is poorly remunerated and of low professional status. Many rural women have multiple occupations, working on their farms, looking after their homes and families and also working in local firms. Rural women experience higher unemployment, both compared to men and to urban women. Unemployment levels are particularly high out of the farming season.

Women in rural areas have particular difficulties when seeking employment outside the home, because of a serious lack of support structures, such as childcare and care centres for the elderly. The traditional role of Portuguese rural women as home and family-based still remains strong. Lack of employment opportunities in rural areas is, nonetheless, the principal constraint on women entering the labour market, a problem which has led in some cases to women creating their own small enterprises, often based on traditional skills and crafts.

5.12 The United Kingdom

The UK has experienced significant changes in the size and social composition of rural communities over the past two to three decades, with the rural population increasing as that of cities and large towns declines. In common with other European countries, rural areas in Britain are far from homogeneous, with distinct variations in topography, economic structure and in degree of remoteness from urban centres. Although agriculture in 1990 accounted for just 2,2% of total national employment in the UK, this figure significantly underestimates its continuing importance in the rural economy (CEPFAR 1990a). Official estimates indicate that agriculture, despite declining farm incomes and agricultural employment, directly provides some 15% of jobs in rural areas in the UK, not counting the indirect, upstream and downstream, employment. Even so, the economic structure of rural areas in the UK is diverse, varying in part according to the geography of the area (Errington 1990). To some extent rural areas of a given region in Britain may have more in common with neighbouring towns than they do with rural areas in another part of the country. Nonetheless, research in areas of England shows some distinctive features of rural employment other than agriculture (Errington 1990). Among the service sectors, certain industries account for a higher proportion of the workforce in rural than in urban areas: hotels and catering; road transport; repair of consumer goods and vehicles; and domestic services. Industries which tend to account for a lower proportion of the workforce in rural areas are: wholesale and retail distribution; banking and finance; business services; medical, health and veterinary services; and personal services.

Research in a variety of locations in the UK shows significantly lower activity rates of women in rural areas compared both to the national average and to activity rates of women in urban areas, although the differences are more marked in some rural regions than others, with some indication that the more remote the rural region, the lower the activity rate (McLaughlin 1986). The economic base of different areas may also be a factor. Given the gender segregation generally in the labour market, those areas with male-oriented labour market structures may have lower female activity rates than areas where, for instance, food processing and tourism are significant sectors. But cultural factors, in particular attitudes to women in waged work, also play a role.

Women living in rural areas have fewer choices in relation to job opportunities than urban women. The relatively narrow economic base of many rural areas leads to a concentration of employment opportunities within a limited number of sectors, such as in hotel, catering and domestic services. Female rural employment in England outside agriculture is predominantly in clerical and service sector jobs, with a scarcity of manufacturing jobs.

This lack of occupational choice also affects the level at which rural women are employed. There is a scarcity of professional and skilled manual employment available to women, who are consequently concentrated within unskilled sectors of the labour force. As a result, many rural women are over-qualified for the work which they currently do. Research in rural Hampshire, for example, showed that 28% of full-time female employees and 40% of part-time female employees did not make use of their qualifications and training in their current jobs (Collins and Little 1989).

In some rural areas of Britain, changes in the rural economy over the past decade appear to have favoured women. These are predominantly areas which have seen a growth in the service sector, in particular in tourism and public services. In rural Wales, for example, the changes in female employment by industrial sector include substantial increases in jobs in distribution, hotels and catering and in public administration, education and health services, but, as in other rural areas, falls in female employment in agriculture.

In other more marginalised areas, economic changes have not even brought benefits in terms of increased job opportunities for women. In such areas, prospects for employment for a higher skilled workforce are limited and changes in the economy offer little hope to women. Poverty among women in rural areas of northern Ireland, for instance, is considerable, made worse by a declining agricultural sector. Rural women still act as unpaid labour not only in the house but also on the land. Some women find paid work in the traditionally low-paid areas of domestic work and school meals. For most, however, unemployment is real problem.

Women's involvement in the UK labour force generally is characterised by a high dependence on part-time work. There is clear evidence that the proportion of women employed part-time in rural areas is higher than that in urban areas, and frequently higher than the national average.

Statistical information on female self-employment is not always consistent. In rural Wales, data from the 1981 Population Census recorded percentages of self-employed women compared to economically active women as varying from 6,3% to 12,3% and 12,5%, compared to 6% for Wales as a whole. However, a survey showed a higher proportion of self-employed women, at 14% of all employed respondents. In some other rural areas, self-employment among women appears to reach even higher levels (34% in Wiltshire and 29% in Cornwall) although this may represent a broader definition of self-employment being used by the women themselves. However, few of these self-employed women actually employed other people or were involved in a business with the potential to expand. The main activities being undertaken by rural businesswomen were: ceramics; textiles; crafts; care of the elderly and disabled; village shops; and tourism, including accommodation, catering, leisure activities (Wilson 1988).

77% of women in rural areas in England have low paid jobs, compared to 65% nationally (Collins 1988). Low wages are particularly experienced by women working in the hotel and catering sector, but low pay is associated with jobs in sectors traditionally occupied by women - clerical and related work, selling, cleaning and other personal services, packaging and repetitive assembly work.

Registered unemployment for women in the UK is a poor representation of the numbers who would like to work, since figures record only those who are registered as unemployed and claiming benefit, thus excluding many women, for example married women, who are not eligible for income support. Official unemployment levels for women vary substantially from one rural area to another. In South Armagh in Northern Ireland, 22,9% of women were registered as unemployed in 1981; by 1986 this had risen by 36,8%, the high level being explained in part by the tradition of industrial employment for women in the area and thus the acceptance by women

that if they are not in paid work they are therefore unemployed. In other areas, many women, particularly those caring for a family, who are not in paid work do not necessarily regard themselves as unemployed, even though they would take work if a suitable opportunity arose. In the Nottinghamshire Rural Development Area, for example, registered female unemployment was 5,8% in October 1992, but all agree that this reflects only part of the unemployment picture.

In some rural areas of Britain, girls appear more likely than boys to have formal qualifications and are more likely to enter higher or further education. This does not, of course, appear to translate into equal or better career prospects for women, and one much-noted feature of women's rural employment is that many women are over-qualified for the jobs that they currently do, or at least that women's qualifications are inappropriate for their current posts.

Demand for training among rural women is very high, particularly among unemployed women. In some areas, such as South Armagh, this reflects the low level of existing education and the recognition that training would increase the chances of finding work. In other areas this appears to reflect a lack of confidence among women who have been out of the labour market for some time and who, despite having higher qualifications, recognise that their skills may be out-of-date.

In addition to insufficient jobs, the two constraints on rural women working which emerge from study after study are childcare and transport. Given the very limited public transport network in most rural areas of Britain, access to a car is a critical influence both on women's ability to participate in employment and on the extent of their employment opportunities. Accessibility to, and cost of, transport were both key factors influencing women's employment options. Childcare constitutes, in all rural areas of Britain, the most important constraint. In Ross and Cromarty, a not untypical situation, only 162 daycare places are available for 3.000 under-fives. Employed women with children cope with their dual responsibilities by using informal childcare support (by family or friends), taking on part-time employment, working from home or taking children into work during holidays. Few employers offer childcare support other than some flexibility in women's working timetable.

6 Policy recommendations

This report has been able to sketch an outline of the economic role and activities of women in rural areas. The picture is far from complete, because of the gaps and biases in existing data and information, but a number of conclusions can be drawn in terms of policy.

The following policy recommendations fall into three groups: the first concerns the quality of information and data; the second concerns women and gender in rural development; and the third focuses on actions required in order to support women's participation in the economy and labour market in rural areas.

However, one principal conclusion of the study needs to be stated at the outset. This is that key aspects of the experiences, needs and skills of women in rural areas in relation to economic activity and the labour market are distinct both from those of rural men and from those of urban women. This is not to say that all the experiences and needs of women in rural areas are different from those of urban women, nor that there are no common experiences and needs between men and women in rural areas. But it is clear that women in rural areas (particularly the more marginal areas - the new Länder of Germany, the north of Scotland, south of Italy, Ireland, Greece, Portugal, Spain, rural zones of France...) face distinct sets of problems and constraints and have distinct sets of resources and skills compared both to urban women and to rural men. As a consequence, policies and strategies relating to rural development and to women's participation in the labour market and economy need to recognise the two issues of rurality and gender. Without such recognition, actions and approaches will neither effectively meet the needs, nor capitalise on the resources and skills, of rural women, who constitute a quarter of the European Union's population.

The following policy recommendations aim to draw attention to areas of intervention that need to be addressed in order to promote the labour force and economic participation of women in rural areas of the European Union.

6.1 Information and data

Policy recommendations always require up-to-date, accurate and detailed knowledge and information. This applies no less to the promotion of women's participation in the rural economy.

We have seen in this report just how much remains to be done in recording, analysing and understanding the economic situation and potential of women in rural areas, the constraints on their participation in the formal economy and labour market, the inter-relationships between different factors and the differences locally and regionally in the European Union. Better information - in terms of its quality, comprehensiveness, comparability, accessibility and regularity - is imperative. Some of the key requirements are for:

- more accurate and comparative statistical data at EU and national levels. This will require crucially that data are systematically disaggregated on the basis of gender and rurality. This requires that a common definition of rurality is applied (the OECD's

Rural Indicators Project is important in this respect). In addition, new definitions of "work" and "activity", which take into full account the economic activities of rural women (both those within and those outside the formal economy and labour market), will need to be adopted;

- comparative research and surveys, in order to complete the gaps and weaknesses in the statistical record. Comparative information at EU level on the respective economic roles and situations of women and men in rural areas is effectively non-existent, severely handicapping policy-making directed at achieving gender equality within rural development. Areas of particular priority for comparative research studies include:

- the ways in which changes in the rural economy and employment are differentially affecting women and men;
- the possibilities and conditions of access of rural women to formal employment;
- the skills and competencies of rural women that can be developed to the benefit of the local economy;
- the potential of growth sectors of the rural economy (tourism, information technology and teleworking, agricultural diversification, environment) in relation to women's employment and enterprise;
- the needs and experiences of specific categories of women (for example, spouses in family businesses, female school-leavers and young women, migrant and ethnic minority women);
- the constraints on and possibilities of women's participation in rural development as local actors and decision-makers.

6.2 Women and rural development

Although detail about women's participation in the rural economy may be lacking, one dimension is clear: the issue of gender is not currently integrated into mainstream research and policy initiatives in the field of rural development, in spite of marked differences in the roles and positions of women and men in rural employment and economic activities. Given such differences, development policies and strategies which are effectively "gender-blind" (i.e. pay no systematic attention to the differences of role, position, experiences, needs and motivations between men and women) cannot assure that men and women will benefit on equal terms from development operations.

The EC's Third Medium-Term Equal Opportunities Programme supports the policy of "mainstreaming", which aims to ensure that mainstream operations include the needs of women, rather than addressing (and marginalising) these through separate initiatives. The Lomé IV Convention, which provides the current framework for the European Community's development cooperation with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, also stipulates the need for both men and women to participate in and benefit on equal terms from development operations. Lomé IV also underlines the important economic role of women. In terms of rural development, such a policy of mainstreaming is important not just on the moral grounds of equality, but also because the integration of women (half the rural population, contributing a substantial share of labour and with skills in demand in growth sectors) is vital to the chances of economic success and sustainable development.

The following are among the key policy recommendations in relation to women and rural development:

- awareness-raising is needed among decision-makers (local associations, local and regional authorities, national and EU institutions) about the experiences and needs of women in rural areas, the importance of recognising gender in rural development planning, and the role of women as actors in rural development;
- gender must be taken into account in audits and analyses of rural areas (human resources, constraints on formal economic activity, skills needs, entrepreneurial capacities, cultural factors...);
- methodologies need to be developed for integrating gender and the needs of women into the various phases of project and programme management: identification, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- good practice methodologies in the integration of gender and women in rural development should be widely disseminated and promoted, to encourage their adoption;
- opportunities should be made available for the sharing of information and experience amongst women in rural areas, so that their needs and experiences can be heard and can be fed into policy-making at EU, national and regional levels;
- encouragement should be given to dialogue and the building of links between local women's associations and networks and rural development organisations and authorities.

6.3 Actions in support of rural women's participation in the economy and labour market

Many of the studies and surveys mentioned in this report identify policy conclusions about the needs of rural women within the labour market, about women's participation in economic activities and the types of support that could be given by authorities and decision-makers. These policy conclusions are remarkably consistent throughout the European Union. Much stress is placed on the importance of addressing connected needs simultaneously (for example, new employment opportunities in rural areas will not benefit women unless services such as childcare, care of the elderly and transport are improved or unless work is sufficiently flexible and accessible; encouragement for self-enterprise among women requires that issues of independent legal status and access to financial credit by married women are addressed, as well as the conventional support measures of business training, advice etc.). Emphasis is also placed on building on the skills and experiences that women in rural areas already have; for example, supporting the transformation of informal economic activities into initiatives that contribute to greater economic independence for rural women and to the local economy or enabling women to establish initiatives which provide services of community benefit (e.g. childcare).

The following highlight the areas of intervention that must be tackled in order for women to participate more fully and equally in the rural labour market and economy:

- improved access to employment
 - better access to existing job opportunities (through flexible working hours, opportunities for promotion to make better use of women's skills);
 - access to new job opportunities (through support for pluriactivity, for economic sectors which employ women, such as public services and tourism, and for new forms of work, such as teleworking, women's cooperatives etc.);
 - encouragement for self-employment and small business creation by women (through equal access to existing support measures, including financial credit, and by the provision of targeted support, such as small business workshops for women, mutual-support groups and networks, start-up grants and loans for women's enterprises);
 - equality of opportunity for women in employment (tackling the prejudice and discrimination against women at work and the barriers women face in terms of promotion, etc.);
 - equality of earnings between men and women (equal pay for work of equal value);
 - improving the legal and social position of rural women (enabling women to adopt an independent professional status, improving the status and rights of family assistants and co-workers, informing rural women of the statuses available to them and encouraging their take-up). The revision of EC Directive 86/613 on equal treatment between women and men engaged in self-employment, including agriculture, is important here;
 - improved access to information about job and employment opportunities for rural women.

- improved access to vocational education and training
 - the provision of continuing education and training in skills and qualifications that are relevant to the changing rural economy (pluriactivity, growth sectors) and that are needed by rural employers;
 - ensuring equality of access to existing provision and providing targeted courses;
 - ensuring that training and education delivery is flexible (e.g. part-time) and is accessible (local training centres or distance-learning);
 - providing childcare and/or replacement services, relevant to the needs of farm and rural women;
 - improved access to information and guidance about training and continuing education opportunities;
 - the provision of training to encourage self-confidence, independence and increased participation in public life and decision-making.

- supporting services
 - facilities for children (creches, small-scale childcare services, multi-functional community centres, school transport) and for the elderly (day care centres), to enable women to have access to employment under the same conditions as men. Such services need to be flexible, affordable and of good quality;

- encouragement of better sharing of domestic and family responsibilities between women and men;
- provision of local services, such as health services, information and library facilities, shops, banks, etc.;
- transport services (in particular, innovative and collective solutions which do not place too great a demand on public resources).

Policy recommendations are important, but actions on policy are essential. Turning recommendations into reality requires commitment to equal opportunities within rural development, a commitment which, with rare exceptions, does not currently exist within the European Union. Awareness-raising about the issues, lobbying to promote political support, and formulation of concrete policy proposals are all required if women's contribution to the development of Europe's rural areas is to be maximised.

Annex 1

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank all the people who contributed time, ideas and information to this study. Many people contributed material for the national reports; they are too numerous to mention by name here, but their contributions are acknowledged in the full study report. Particular thanks must also be given to: staff of the Equal Opportunities Unit, especially Agnès Hubert (Head of the Unit), Nathalie Wuiame (formerly of the Unit) and Marie Jouffe, for recognising the importance of the issue and supporting the project; Moira Stone, for many good ideas; and Alastair Thomson for technical support. Last but not least, my biggest debt is to the study collaborators (listed below) in the different Member States, who provided much support and inspiration during the study and who gave generously of their time, far beyond that for which they were paid. The following collaborators prepared complete national reports for the study: Cathy Bayer (Portugal); Bodil Bjerring (Denmark); Rosario Cañavate (Spain); Marina Endevelde (Netherlands); Renate Fries (Germany); Vassilis Papaioannou (Greece); and Paola Terzoli (Italy). In addition, Mary Owens and Maureen Maloney collected and collated information from Ireland, and Patricia Meganck assisted in the collection and synthesis of material from France, Belgium and Luxembourg.

Study Coordinator and Collaborators

Study coordinator:

Dr. Mary Braithwaite
Rue Valduc 296
B-1160 Brussels
Home tel: +32 2 672 29 20
Work tel: +32 2 732 92 09
Work fax: +32 2 732 73 19

Collaborators:

Cathy Bayer
Instituto de Assuntos Culturais
Apartado 35
P-5101 Lamego Codex
Tel: +351 546 82 46
Fax: +351 546 20 45

Bodil Bjerring
Dept. of Development and Planning
Aalborg University
Fibigerstraede 2
DK-9220 Aalborg Ö
Tel: +45 98 158 522
Fax: +45 98 153 298

Rosario Cañavate
Parvis St. Gilles 53
B-1060 Brussels
Tel: +32 2 539 39 50

Ir. Marina Endevelde
Dept. of Gender Studies in Agriculture
Wageningen Agricultural University
De Leeuwenborch
Hollandsweg 1
NL-6706 KN Wageningen
Tel: +31 8370 83379
Fax: +31 8370 84763

Renate Fries
P.I.D.
Hermannstrasse 33
D-53225 Bonn
Tel: +49 228 47 67 99
Fax: +49 28 47 87 66

Patricia Meganck
Av. Molière 298
B-1060 Brussels
Tel: +32 2 347 32 43
Fax: +32 2 215 29 68

Mary Owens and Maureen Maloney
Dept. of Economics
University of Galway
IRL-Galway
Tel: +353 91 244 11 x.3042
Fax: +353 91 24130

Vassilis Papaioannou
CREATIVE Human Resource Development
Vas. Georgiou St. 36
GR-54640 Thessaloniki
Tel: +30 31 840 625
Fax: +30 31 361 100

Paola Terzoli
Via C. Colombo 98
I-00147 Roma
Tel: +39 6 517 51
Fax: +39 6 517 5329

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