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## Agriculture and illegal employment in Europe

Opinion<sup>1</sup>

Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

Rapporteur: Mr Alain COUSIN, France, Group of the European People's Party (EPP/CD)

### I. Conclusions of the Committee

1. The Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee wishes first of all to thank the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs and its rapporteur for its report, which covers a very sensitive issue, especially under the current economic circumstances.

2. While fully endorsing the recommendations made, the committee would nevertheless like also to underline the principles set out in the revised European Social Charter, which could increase the protection of workers in the agricultural sector.

### II. Explanatory memorandum

3. Although it is a major source of employment, the agricultural sector is affected by high levels of poverty, in particular because of seasonal unemployment and low pay. At the same time, the seasonal nature of the employment on small farms means that many rural workers live under very basic conditions without any social protection.

4. In addition, working conditions are often very hard, the work is mostly physically exhausting and working hours often tend to be very long, with very few breaks throughout the day.

5. These conditions all result in the employment of illegal foreign workers who suffer high levels of vulnerability and exploitation, which is contrary to the principles defended by the Council.

6. The Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee cannot but condemn the conditions of great insecurity affecting the workers concerned, which very often amount to modern-day slavery. It therefore fully supports the proposals to put an end to these disparities by establishing a binding legal framework with appropriate penalties and reiterates the importance of states signing and/or ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

7. In this context, it also points out that, in accordance with the principles set out in the revised European Social Charter, "all workers have the right to just conditions of work" and "have the right to dignity at work."

8. It also believes that agricultural sector employers' and workers' organisations and farmers' co-operatives and associations have a crucial role to play.

9. The committee congratulates the report's authors on the recommendation that collective labour agreements for agriculture be drawn up and recommends that the principles set out in the relevant articles of the revised European Social Charter be followed here.

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<sup>1</sup> See Doc. 11114 tabled by the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regionals Affairs

### **III. Proposed amendments to the draft recommendation**

#### **Amendment 1**

In paragraph 2, add the following after “other groups of the population [...]”:

The Assembly draws attention to the principles set out in the revised European Social Charter, which provide that “all workers have the right to just conditions of work” and “have the right to dignity at work” (Part I, Articles 2 and 26), and to the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

#### **Amendment 2**

Add the following after paragraph 11:

11.4 to sign and/or ratify the revised European Social Charter;

11.5 to sign and/or ratify the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

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*Reporting committee* : Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regionals Affairs

*Committee for opinion* : Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

*Reference to committee* : Doc. 10597 and reference No. 3104 of 24 June 2005

*Opinion approved by the Committee on 22 January 2007*

*Secretariat of the Committee* : Mr Mezei, Mrs Nollinger, Mrs Meunier