

No. 5

FEBRUARY 16, 1972

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

COMMON MARKET COMMISSION STUDYING IDEA OF INFORMATION CLEARING
HOUSE TO ASSIST PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED

WASHINGTON, D.C., February 16 -- The Commission of the European Communities is considering a proposal to create an information clearing house to help improve rehabilitation of the physically and mentally handicapped residing in the member states.

This rehabilitation problem has been formally under study by the Commission for several years and stems from the fact that approximately 12 million persons or nearly 15 per cent of the Community's working population (i.e., between 14 and 65) are in the physically or mentally handicapped category. This staggering total is the equivalent of the entire population of the Netherlands.

At the request of the Council of Ministers, the Commission produced some suggestions near the end of 1970 on the rehabilitation issue, and later organized a forum in which 400 specialists from the medical, educational, administrative, and political fields of the six member states participated. The conference took place May 24-26, 1971, in Luxembourg. These discussions helped to formulate the Commission's present views which include the desire to establish a research program on rehabilitation.

The Commission has sent a questionnaire to the member states inquiring

about their present arrangements and initiatives for aiding the handicapped. One of the major objectives of the Commission is to coordinate more effectively the medical and vocational aspects of rehabilitation. It is hoped to eliminate the situation where the handicapped live under a cloud of uncertainty because of a limited or precarious employment status. The Commission believes that cooperation between the member states can provide secure and abundant job opportunities for the handicapped.

It is noted by the Commission that progress in therapy has led experts to estimate the 80 per cent of the handicapped in the labor force could be fully integrated into society if all the resources of modern rehabilitation were at their disposal.

The quality of handicapped individuals' work has also been shown to compare favorably with their physically sound fellow employees. Cited by the Commission were conditions in the United States where the rate of production by almost two-thirds of all the physically handicapped workers was equal to the output of their counterparts in full health. Furthermore, 24 per cent of the handicapped employees had a superior productivity rate to their able bodied colleagues, while only 10 per cent of the handicapped tallied a productivity rate below average.

The Commission said the reintroduction of the handicapped into the economic mainstream, even in cases of grave disability, exercised a positive influence on the health and character of the impaired individual and diminished anxiety and tension within his own family.

The Commission also noted that in many occupations -- the manufacture of electronic instruments and machines for example -- physical impairments were no obstacle to doing a good job.