



ESF InfoReview

Newsletter of Employment and the European Social Fund N°8 - May 1999

Employment and the environment promoting a virtuous circle

The idea that economic growth, job creation and environmental protection are compatible has been gaining ground for well over a decade. Indeed, it is becoming ever clearer that the European economy can not only withstand state intervention on environmental grounds, but can also grow on the back of new markets created by policy initiatives designed to make economic development more sustainable.

New markets create new jobs

The driving force behind this transformation is the evolution of new environmental legislation that has led to companies, local authorities and individuals increasing the spending they devote to environmental protection. Local authorities are building wastewater treatment works, cleaner waste management systems and more energy efficient power plants. Companies are installing equipment to control emissions to air and water. Households are investing in insulation or buying more eco-friendly domestic goods.

This demand for environmental products has brought about the development of a totally new business sector; producing both environmental goods and services, that is growing at more than 5% annually and is responsible for the creation of more than 3.5 million jobs. New jobs have been created both directly from the manufacture of new products and provision of new services, and indirectly when companies require personnel to operate new equipment and monitor new processes. Moreover, new incentives to recycle and re-use materials have led to a significant increase in the number of people employed in recycling activities and producing recyclable goods.



Agenda 2000



Member States reach agreement on Structural Fund reform

EU leaders have struck an important compromise on the Agenda 2000 package of budget, structural fund and agriculture reforms. InfoReview looks at the implications of the agreement for the Structural Funds in the next programming period.

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Employment & social affairs



European Commission

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Gains and losses

Sceptics have suggested that environmental protection initiatives may actually destroy more jobs than they create, because they often lead to a streamlining of production processes, with a need for fewer, albeit higher-skilled, jobs. Others have pointed to the short-term loss of competitiveness that may result when firms in one part of the world must comply with tougher – and more expensive – environmental standards than those imposed on firms elsewhere.

Supporters of cleaner industrial development acknowledge that it is easier to measure growth in the environmental services sector than to measure the value of investments made by companies that are the first to stem pollution in their sector or the economic and social consequences of non-action.

Nonetheless, research clearly indicates that investment in cleaner technologies on the whole brings with it greater productivity and hence keener competitiveness. Moreover, where supported by public policy, the new markets in environmental goods and services will create jobs far in excess of those lost due to failure to comply with tougher environmental standards.

For example, the UK's recent Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution and Traffic Growth has forecast an employment gain in the UK due to increased use of public transport and bicycles by 2010. Car-based jobs, including those in oil production and distribution, would fall by a maximum of 43,000 – unless use of clean technologies and schemes such as car leasing expands, in which case the net effect of the shift towards sustainable transport would be 86,000 extra jobs by 2010.

An expanding sector

The EU's statistical office, EUROSTAT, estimates that, in 1997, some 1.5 million Europeans were employed in so-called eco-industries, producing technologies, goods and services to measure, prevent, limit or correct environmental damage to water, air and soil. Another 2 million people were involved in activities such as renewable energy, waste recycling, nature and landscape protection, and ecological renovation of urban areas.

These numbers are set to increase, particularly as technologically innovative sectors, such as renewable energy production, improve their economic viability. In Germany in 1993, for example, the production of solar cells, solar collectors, hydroelectric turbines, bio-mass systems and wind turbines was worth DM 625 million (€ 360 million), with annual growth of over 20%. In Spain, wind power production has increased from 8 MW in 1991 to almost 400 MW in 1998. The Spanish government estimates that this will increase to 1,440 MW by the year 2000, with the creation of an additional 20,000 jobs.

Skills and training

The potential for growth in these new areas implies a huge need for specialised skills and training, which figures indicate has currently not been met. Indeed, on average, fewer than 50% of all workers in environment-related jobs have had training or gained a qualification in their specific field.

Much training work has been provided by schemes organised at local level to integrate the long-term unemployed and other socially disadvantaged groups back into the labour market. Initiatives in recycling and re-use, protection and management of natural areas, the regeneration and renovation of urban spaces, including the provision of local public transport, and in eco-tourism are all creating new jobs and training opportunities.

But the European Commission predicts a need for around another 2 million new jobs in eco-friendly activities, if the EU is to be able to meet its commitments under the UN's Climate Change Convention. This represents a massive challenge, but also a massive opportunity. If it is to be fully grasped, much heavier investment in training will be needed to develop a workforce that can keep the EU at the forefront of one of the newest – and most important – economic sectors.

The European Commission published a Communication on Environment and Employment in November 1997 (COM (97) 592).



The environmental sector offers real potential for diverse job creation

Environmental legislation

a catalyst for green jobs

The main driver of economic growth in environment-related sectors is the development and implementation of environmental legislation, and the imposition of higher EU-wide environmental standards. A large number of regulations and directives adopted by the EU lay down standards for the quality of air, water, and soil, and set down restrictions on emissions from industry and transport.

Market

instruments

The EU's Fifth Environmental Action Programme promotes the use of a wide range of policy instruments in addition to direct government regulation. Voluntary agreements, taxes and charges, and information dissemination are all recognised as valid and important policy instruments for achieving key environmental objectives.

For example, EU legislation, such as the directive on integrated pollution prevention and control (IPPC), encourages companies to invest in the best available clean technologies but helps them to avoid excessive costs by allowing these to be tailored to the needs of the local environment. As a result the market opportunities for companies developing clean technologies has been reinforced, which in turn will lead to the development of new jobs.

There are also voluntary EU initiatives, such as the eco-labelling scheme and the Environmental Management and Auditing Scheme (EMAS), which aim to give companies public recognition when they invest in cleaner products and processes.

Investing in the environment

Loans, grants and subsidies can also be used to stimulate and support environmental expenditures and the numbers of environment-related jobs. Most Member States give grants or special loans for investments in cleaner technologies or for technological innovation. Grants for demonstration projects that develop environmental technology are also common, as are grants for promoting the use of more environmentally friendly products, reducing emissions, noise abatement, and the restoration of contaminated land.

Some 7% of the current EU budget goes towards supporting environmental activities. Investments have been made in areas including water and waste treatment installations; cleaner production and industrial waste recycling; and land management, bio-diversity, and soil decontamination. The Commission estimates that EU environmental spending may be responsible for supporting more than 150,000 additional jobs.



Many companies have invested in recovery and re-use facilities

Strengthening the link

Fiscal incentives to use more labour and less natural and non-renewable resources, would, the Commission believes, be effective in promoting the development of environment-related jobs. But some Member States remain opposed to decisions being taken on taxation policy at European level, although many have introduced eco-taxes on their own. Nonetheless, the Commission continues to encourage the adoption of eco-taxes and charges, and recently proposed a new environmental tax system that would harmonise minimum levels of tax on energy products, creating potential for an estimated 500,000 new jobs by the year 2005.

New patterns of training would also help to link job creation more closely to environmental protection activities. Skills needs exist in fields throughout the environmental sector – from energy conservation and waste disposal in public institutions, to erosion control and prevention. The ESF can and does play an active role in this regard.

Most crucially, environmental legislation must be implemented quickly and thoroughly, as this will spur the demand for environmental products and services. In some regions of the EU even the most basic environmental infrastructures are missing. However, this problem is not restricted to less-developed regions, even in the richest areas there are still implementation gaps, in particular in the areas of water, waste and nature conservation.

Sowing the seeds of sustainable development

the Sunflower Recycling project

The European Union funds a large number of projects promoting job creation in environment related activities. The Sunflower Recycling Project in Ireland, provides an excellent example of how ESF funding is not only helping to get unemployed people back to work, but is also improving the environment in which they live.

Sunflower was established in 1995 as a non-profit organisation by the residents of an inner-city district in the north east of Dublin to address problems caused by above-average unemployment, low levels of training, crime and drug abuse, and a general environmental deterioration in the area.

"No-one in Ireland had seen recycling as a great way to employ people and raise the quality of their living environment," says project manager Bernadette Walsh. Ireland's waste management policy had, until 1995, consisted solely of using landfill.

Objectives and activities

The Sunflower project covers a number of complimentary areas that help to create jobs and improve the environment. The main objectives of the project are to combat long-term unemployment by offering work experience and training; to run an effective recycling facility; to work in partnership with local businesses and communities; and to lay foundations for sustainable employment creation.

Sunflower collects, grades, sorts and sells-on recyclable materials such as paper, glass, cans, furniture and clothes. It has no competitors in its field, but its sales of pre-sorted paper – its biggest product in terms of volume – only cover around 10% of its costs. This would be less were it not for an agreement between Sunflower and the multinational Smurfit, which buys up materials that are more economical to incinerate. "We are trying to secure contracts from the Irish state, as these would help to put us on a firmer, more stable footing," says Bernadette. In the meantime, Sunflower has started offering services to pubs and restaurants, and intends to begin working with schools and other public institutions.

Creating jobs

The project employs 46 workers, and, says Bernadette, "at least 60% of staff that have moved on have gone either into further education or permanent employment."

Those over 35 years old can stay with the project for three years. Many older workers have suffered from low numeracy and literacy levels, and Sunflower runs courses to address these problems as well.

But Sunflower has become victim of its own success. "We handle 10 tonnes of paper a week, with demand for collection coming from all over the country. We haven't got the capacity to process it all because we don't have the money to make capital investments," says Bernadette. She hopes policy-makers will answer her call.



Sunflower aims to improve the environment and promote employment

The European Employment Strategy

moving into the next phase

According to Karl-Johan Lönnroth, Director responsible for employment and labour market issues in DG V, considerable progress has been achieved under the European Employment Strategy since its launch in November 1997.

The Commission's evaluation of the 1998 National Action Plans (published in the Joint Employment Report) revealed that all Member States had made good progress in implementing the strategy. Some Member States were well advanced due to their favourable starting point. Others had made clear commitments on activation and prevention, and a few were committed to doing more in their 1999 NAP. Only a couple of Member States had not set targets in accordance with the guidelines or had not provided sufficiently quantified targets.

Building on this progress, the Member States endorsed a new set of Employment Guidelines for 1999 at the December Vienna Summit. They agreed that the four-pillar structure should be kept in order to respect the multi-annual nature of the strategy. However, it was agreed that the process should be simplified and streamlined. Key elements of the process now include:

- the requirement to mainstream equal opportunities in to all four pillars
- the setting of national targets for lifelong learning
- the promotion of service industries
- the review of tax and benefit systems for employers to create jobs and unemployed people to take them

- support for an increased participation of older workers
- promoting the inclusion of disadvantaged groups into the labour market.

However, much remains to be done in particular to improve indicators and statistics for measuring progress and to improve links with financial instruments, such as the European Social Fund. The Commission and the Member States therefore agreed at Vienna to continue working on reinforcing the process, particularly in the area of common performance and policy. They also agreed to introduce a more consistent statistical basis, together with additional verifiable objectives and deadlines. This is crucial for effective and transparent monitoring and evaluation at national and EU level.

On a proposal from Germany, it was also agreed to introduce an Employment Pact, to enhance the synergies between macroeconomic and structural policies. This is particularly important not only in relation to the launch of the Euro, but also because of the worsening global economic climate. A concerted effort is required by Europe's key economic and social actors to ensure that achievements made during the last few years, namely the steady rise in employment levels, are not lost in an economic downturn.

The Employment Strategy is now entering a new phase. The implementation of the guidelines is fully underway, the National Action Plans are being revised, and a series of Member State/Commission bilateral meetings have taken place to prepare for the joint evaluation of progress made. The Cologne Summit in June and the Helsinki Summit in December will show how far we are in this multi-annual process and how well Member States have performed in creating jobs for their citizens.



Member States will review progress made under the European Employment Strategy at the next EU Summit in Cologne

Agenda 2000 agreement paves the way for reform

EU leaders reached a final agreement on the Agenda 2000 package of reforms at a special summit held in Berlin on 25-26 March. Ending many months of hard bargaining between the Member States over the EU's budget, structural funds and common agricultural policy, the agreement was described by Gerhard Schröder, the German Chancellor, as a "good compromise". This decision marks a vital step forward in the EU's preparations for enlargement to the east - the next key deadline for the European Union.

InfoReview takes a look at how the conclusions reached on the Agenda 2000 package at Berlin will affect the ESF within the overall Structural Funds package in the next programming period (2000-2006). As discussions between Council and Parliament are still underway, all financial allocations should be considered provisional.

Financing for the Structural Funds



- Overall amount agreed for the Structural Funds and Cohesion Funds: € 213 billion, of which Structural Funds receive € 195 billion, and the Cohesion Fund € 18 billion



EU leaders concluded months of hard bargaining in Berlin

- The overall spending profile for the Structural and Cohesion Funds combined declines over the seven year period from € 32.045 billion in 2000 to € 29.170 billion in 2006 (at 1999 prices)
- Within the Structural Funds allocation, the Community Initiatives will receive 5% or € 9.75 billion, Innovative actions and technical assistance get 1% between them € 1.95 billion.

Revising the objectives

Overall, the € 195 billion allocated to the Structural Funds will be divided as follows (with the balance going to Community Initiatives, innovative actions and technical assistance):

- Objective 1 - € 135 billion (69.7%) for the poorest regions of the EU (those whose GDP per capita is 75% or less of the EU average and current Objective 6 ultra-peripheral areas in Sweden and Finland).
- Objective 2 - € 22.5 billion (11.5%) for the economic and social conversion of areas facing structural difficulties (including areas undergoing economic and social change in the industrial and service sectors, declining rural areas, urban areas in difficulties and depressed areas dependent on fisheries).
- Objective 3 - € 24.05 billion (12.3%) to support the adaptation and modernisation of policies and systems of education, training and employment everywhere outside Objective 1 regions.

Community Initiatives

- "At least 50%" of appropriations available go to INTERREG
- INTERREG to pay due attention to cross-border activities, particularly in the perspective of enlargement, and to improved cooperation with Phare, Tacis and Meda
- EQUAL to take due account of "the social and vocational integration of asylum seekers" (this will be inserted in Article 19 of the General Regulation).

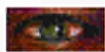
The legislative framework

The European Council has now instructed the European Commission and the European Parliament to achieve the final adoption of the legislative texts - specifically the ESF (and ERDF) regulation "before the next European Parliamentary elections... particularly in view of the need to prepare a smooth transition into the next Structural Funds programming period beginning on 1 January 2000". Once formally adopted, the new Regulations will enter into force three days after their publication in the Official Journal of the European Communities. They will be binding in their entirety and directly applicable in all Member States. The new measures will repeal the existing Structural Fund Regulations as of 1 January 2000.

Preparing for EU enlargement to central and eastern Europe

The challenges facing the applicant countries of central and eastern Europe in the area of employment are daunting, not least because of the pressing need for structural reform. Nevertheless, most of the countries have shown a strong desire to launch active labour market policies and are preparing to implement the European Employment Strategy. For its part, the European Commission is supporting their efforts through several inter-related programmes.

The Special



Preparatory Programme for Structural Funds (SPP)

Financed by PHARE, the 'Special Preparatory Programme for Structural Funds' (SPP) aims to promote awareness and understanding of EU-structural policies in the ten applicant countries of central and eastern Europe. Given the size of the institution-building task facing the applicant countries as regards the ESF in particular, the programme is supporting a concentrated series of activities during 1999, including:

- a series of training events for officials at national, regional and local administrative levels to inform officials about the structural policies in general, and the ESF in particular
- a series of employment policy reviews will be launched in 1999 covering employment policy and labour market structures, with particular emphasis on the Employment Strategy and the Employment Guidelines. These reviews will determine the ESF-type of assistance that could be financed in the future through the PHARE pre-accession instrument
- the establishment of "Objective 1-type" pilot projects in the national context in which ministry officials can be trained in designing and implementing ESF-type programmes on the basis of existing socio-economic analysis.

Support provided in the context of the SPP-programme reflects the priorities outlined in the EU's Accession Partnerships with the applicant countries, which underline the need to establish a legal, administrative and budgetary framework for an integrated regional policy, to develop appropriate labour market structures, and to facilitate the future participation of applicant countries in EU Structural programmes. They also stress the need for a joint review of employment policies as preparation, inter alia, for participation in EU Structural Fund programmes. These priorities have now been translated into action by the National Plans for Adoption of the Acquis (NPAAs) adopted by each applicant country outlining the priorities for transposing Community policies into the national context.

Community support after 2000

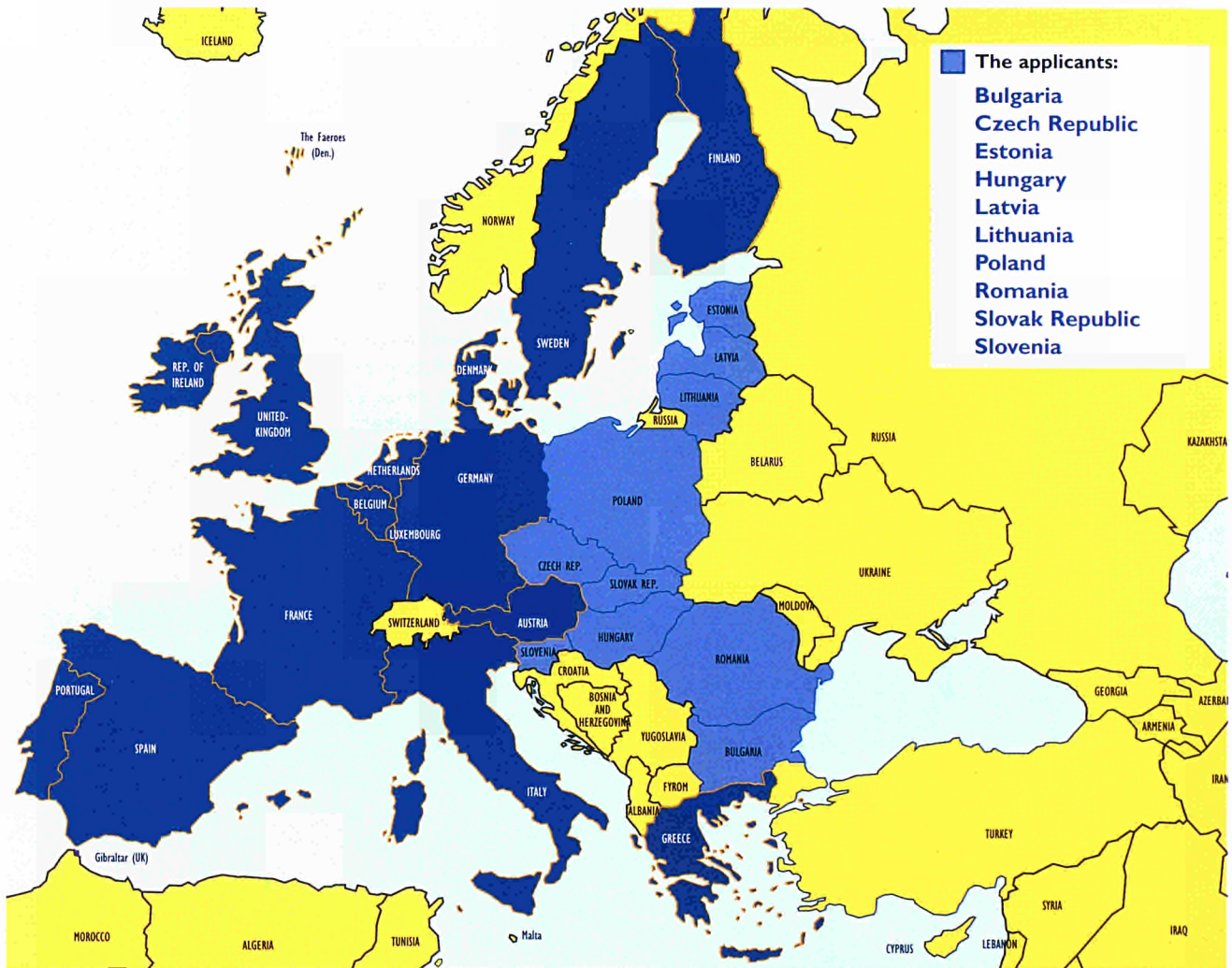
The Commission's Agenda 2000 proposal sets out the conditions and scope of future Community financial support to the applicant countries of central and eastern Europe in the run-up to accession. For the programming period 2000-2006, the proposal foresees three pre-accession instruments dealing with structural issues. The first, SAPARD, will concentrate on rural development and the implementation of the common agricultural policy; secondly, ISPA will deal with environment and transport infrastructure; and finally PHARE will cover other enlargement issues, including those related to employment and social cohesion.

The revised Accession Partnerships and correspondingly revised NPAAs will, as of next year, be supported by the proposed pre-accession instruments. The scope for PHARE interventions will, as a result, shift to reflect the new structural priorities. New national guidelines will be established which will, subject to the final adoption of the new PHARE proposals, concentrate more on labour market policies and human resource development. One proposal currently on the table is to have a limited number of regional programmes per applicant country which support economic re-conversion, infrastructure development and the active promotion of an appropriately qualified workforce. Such a proposal, it is hoped, will spur new and existing labour market institutions to implement a genuine employment policy in line with the European Employment Strategy.

Operational framework for the Enlargement Process

According to the decisions taken by the European Council, in order to become a member of the EU, applicant countries of central and eastern Europe must have a functioning democracy, an economy capable of competing in the Single Market, and the capacity to transpose and comply with the complete body of Community law (the 'acquis'). Whilst the first criterion is undoubtedly political, the other two necessitate the establishment of an appropriate legal, economic and institutional framework for implementing and applying Community policies. As far as the applicant countries of central and eastern Europe are concerned, this process was initiated de facto in advance of the decision to apply for membership by the Europe Agreements - which introduced bilateral co-operation between the Union and each of these applicant countries on approximation of laws and exchange of information on the Community acquis - and was reinforced through the Accession Partnerships. Assistance to the applicant countries of central and eastern Europe is now focused within a single bilateral framework as laid out in the National Plans for Adoption of the Acquis (NPAAs). These plans define the short and medium term priorities for transposing Community policies into the national context.

The applicant countries of central and eastern Europe



The Special Preparatory Programme for Structural Funds (SPP) was conceived as a multi-country sub-programme under PHARE with a three year (97-99) indicative budget of 60 million ECU .The 1997 budgetary commitment of 4 million ECU was allocated to three major activities:

- a statistics project, supervised by EUROSTAT, which aims to create the statistical base needed for the future management of Structural Fund-type programmes (850,000 ECU);
- a project to assist the development of fishing vessels registries (350,000 ECU);
- and an ESF training programme for Ministry officials who will administer future ESF-type programmes (2.1 million ECU).

The remaining 56 million ECU will be allocated within the 1998 National PHARE programmes, the design and implementation of which is to be devolved to the applicant countries concerned in close co-operation with representatives from the Structural Funds services. Programmes are now being prepared, or are already underway in the applicant countries of central and eastern Europe.

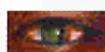
Focus on Germany

a view from the EU Presidency

InfoReview spoke to Walter Riester Federal Minister of Labour and current President of the Social Affairs Council about the European Employment Policy and the role of the ESF in Germany.



German voters



expect results

The German electorate expects a great deal from its new Federal Government. As stated in the coalition agreement, the main aim of the new government led by Gerhard Schröder is to combat unemployment - a challenging task.

This year the unemployment rate in Germany is expected to climb above four million. Nearly 500,000 young people below the age of 25 are without a job and there is a shortfall of apprenticeships to the tune of 35,000. There are many reasons behind this high rate of unemployment. Like other industrial societies, Germany has to meet the challenges of globalisation and the increased demand for higher skills. Moreover, German re-unification and in particular the huge labour market problems faced by the new Länder, have placed a heavy burden on the Federal Republic.

To fight unemployment, the Federal Government relies on an active labour market policy. 45 billion DM has been allocated this year for active measures for providing people with skills and assisting the creation of new jobs. Outlining the Federal Government's approach to active labour market policies, Walter Riester, the Minister of Labour pointed out that, "in our social market economy, the main task of labour market policy is to get the unemployed into regular jobs. Wherever necessary, we make great efforts to be in a position to meet the challenge of a working environment which is changing at an ever faster rate".

Funds for active measures are allocated in close coordination between the government and economic actors. According to Gerhard Schröder, Germany's new Federal Chancellor, "it will be possible to overcome unemployment, which is the problem of the century, only if all social actors collaborate". A good example of cooperation is the Alliance for Work, Training and Competitiveness, through which representatives of employers and the trade unions meet regularly for round-table discussions with Ministers responsible for economics, finance, labour and health.

Employment

is the top priority

The Schröder government is determined to make progress with the Employment Pact at European level. According to Walter Riester, Member State governments and the European Institutions and partners should collaborate in this effort. He sees combating unemployment as a "pan-European task" which calls for a joint effort by the Member States. The common employment policy pursued by the Member States, he argues, does not relieve them of their national responsibilities. According to the Minister, "it is an essential instrument in the fight against unemployment". In particular, he expects a great deal from the exchange of good practice. The objective must be to learn from one another. In Riester's view, successful initiatives in the Netherlands provide interesting food for thought as the social partners there have already agreed on a joint long-term pay policy.

Riester believes that the inclusion of the employment title in the Amsterdam Treaty was a major step forward in making employment a European issue. The German Presidency's motto "for an economically and socially strong Europe" underlines its commitment to achieving three key tasks:

- improving the interplay between financial, pay and monetary policies
- continuing structural reforms aimed at greater competitiveness and more effective operation of the goods, service and capital markets
- continuing the Employment Strategy in the context of the Luxembourg process and thus implement more effectively the employment policy guidelines.

As far as implementation of the guidelines is concerned, Riester expects the 1999 National Action Plans to provide further impetus. Germany supports the development of EU-wide mandatory and verifiable objectives aimed, on the one hand, at improving equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market and, on the other, at reducing long-term unemployment and the high rate of unemployment among young people. Germany will therefore continue the approach previously laid-down by the European Council.

Improving opportunities

for young people

Ensuring that employment measures are mandatory and verifiable is the first requirement that the Federal Government intends to meet at national level. Immediately after taking office, the government established, as part of an emergency programme, a general framework for providing 100,000 young people with training and employment. The programme provides for concerted action and representatives of trade unions, the government and employer organisations will be involved. In Riester's opinion, this goal can only be achieved if all of the actors involved pull together.

Young people without a work placement will be encouraged to gain qualifications and prepare for further training. The aim is to provide young people who have been unemployed for more than three months with a job, training place or funding. A nationwide poster campaign, launched by the Ministry of Labour, was used to draw attention to the programme and the ESF funding that helps to support it. More than two billion DM have already been provided to fund the programme in its first year: € 720 million (1.42 billion DM) was provided from the federal budget and € 308 million (600 million DM) came from the ESF. Clearly, this major programme has an important role to play in relation to the implementation of the European Employment Strategy.

Germany is also proposing a similar procedure at European level. In his plea in support of the European Employment Pact, Riester proposed a special action called "Youth and Europe: Our Future". Europe's youth unemployment - 20.8 % - is more than double the rate of overall unemployment (9.8 %). The Labour Minister is convinced that the integration of young people depends, to a crucial extent, on the opportunities available to them in the labour market: "They should therefore feel that European social and employment policies show concern for them".

ESF plays a crucial role

Approximately € 7.5 billion (14.7 billion DM) of ESF funding was received by Germany during the 1994-1999 programming period and it has been estimated that more than 2 million people benefited from ESF activities during this time. Riester is quick to acknowledge that ESF funding has "greatly helped the German labour market".

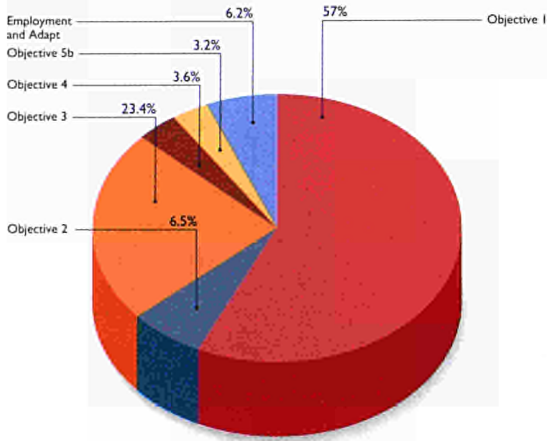
The latest performance checks carried out on behalf of the Ministry of Labour give good grounds for optimism. For example, 60 % of people assisted under the EMPLOYMENT Community Initiative obtained a job or training place after six months. This is a sizeable figure given the difficulties this target group, which includes disabled people, the long-term unemployed, disadvantaged young people and women, faces in finding work. Women form a large proportion of ESF beneficiaries. Nationally 53% of the people assisted through the ESF are women, while in the former East German Länder, this figure rises to 70%.

The ESF also supplements German Employment initiatives in qualitative terms. Measures that are not eligible for national funding are implemented with the aid of the ESF. For example: in Germany, promotion of employment is



A historic move: the Federal Government relocated to Berlin in April this year

The ESF in Germany - financing by Objective (1994-1999)



based on the insurance principle which means that people only receive unemployment benefits if they have paid contributions to an unemployment insurance scheme. Women often lose out in this situation as they do not pay insurance contributions when they take time off to raise a family. If they wish to re-train before returning to work, German legislation only allows for the training to be funded and makes no provision for maintenance to cover living costs. Without ESF funding, which is used to bridge this gap, many women would find it impossible to undertake the training they need in order to return to work.

Following a twin-track approach

At federal level, individuals are helped by ESF funding which supplements national funding legislation. The Federal Labour Office and local employment services allocate the funds. Decisions about how to place people in different programmes are taken by the employment services as they have a good overview as to which skills are in demand at local level.

In the 16 Federal Länder, qualification and counselling projects are funded through the ESF. Training bodies apply for funding for a project. In order to avoid duplication of funding and also frictional losses, a working group composed of representatives of the federal and regional governments was set up with the Federal Minister of Labour and Social Affairs as chairman.

Preventing unemployment through Objective 4

The new Objective-4 measures are targeted at workers threatened with unemployment as a result of industrial change. Emphasis is placed on the needs of employees in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) who often lack access to continuous training, compared to workers in larger companies. SMEs have limited capacity to deliver ongoing training as employees are needed at their workplaces.

Therefore the ability to combine work with training is essential for SMEs. The Internet College is an example of a successful initiative funded by the Ministry of Labour and the ESF. Through a dedicated website (www.akademie.de)

Providing advice on-line

With the help of ESF funding, the internet college provides advice to entrepreneurs

<http://www.akademie.de>



free advice is provided to entrepreneurs and new businesses about establishing a presence on the Internet. In addition to training in web design, web marketing, electronic commerce and on-line research, the virtual college offers basic knowledge in the field of multimedia. Moreover, eligible participants get a free domain name giving them a platform for their own home page. The monthly processing fee is only € 8.86 (17.25 DM) and full recognition is given to the importance of ESF funding both on the website and in accompanying publications.

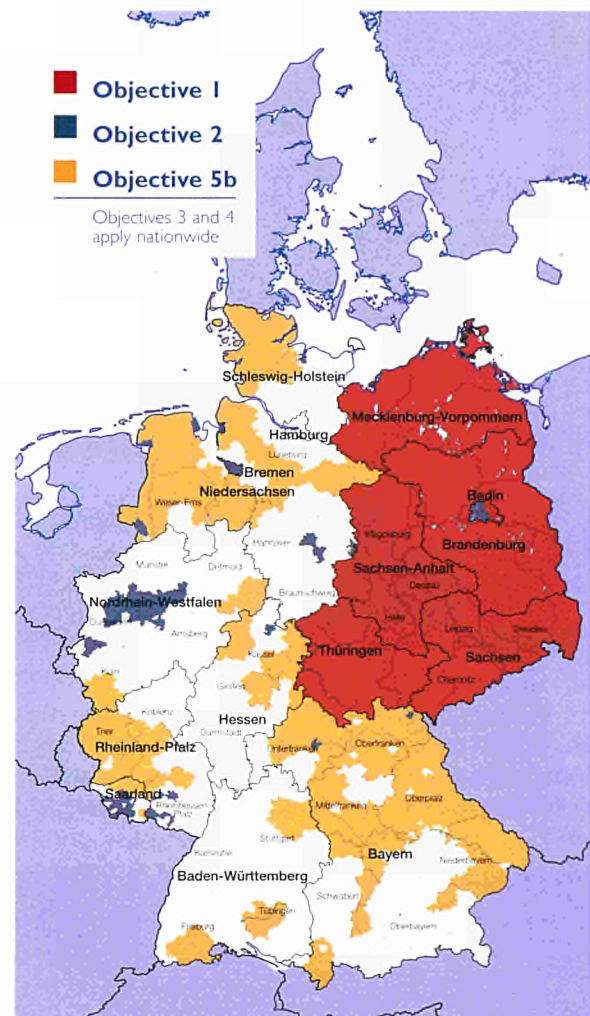
Ensuring the future effectiveness of the ESF

If the European Social Fund is to continue to fulfil its tasks, it must be provided with the necessary financial resources. According to Riester, this is "all the more necessary as the European Social Fund is to assist the European Employment Strategy and the National Employment Action Plans". He believes that the compromise text relating to a new ESF regulation - which the German Council Presidency presented following preliminary work under the Austrian Presidency - shows the way forward. There has already been a positive preliminary decision in favour



Employment is a top priority for Gerhard Schröder

Objectives in Germany (1994-1999)



of this in the Council of Ministers. The compromise text provides for equal funding opportunities throughout the European Union and it therefore introduces a considerable degree of simplification.

Riester also believes that the European Commission must take account of the Member States' call for the simplification of administrative procedures. "Planning, application and processing procedures are extremely complicated and put Member States in an unnecessary straitjacket. We should take seriously the principles of partnership and subsidiarity and give Member States the ability to supplement their labour market and employment policies effectively through the European Social Fund." In Riester's view, the emphasis is shifting from regional policy to employment policy. Reducing the current European-wide unemployment figure of 18 million is one of the most important common tasks for the future.

Unemployment rates hit 4.4 % in the United States & Japan

A Tale of Two Cities

In February this year unemployment rates in the US and Japan converged at 4.4%. But, as our New York and Tokyo correspondents report, these economies are travelling along very different tracks.

Americans hard at work as the economy grows

With unemployment rates at their lowest for three decades, the United States seems more concerned about the threat of rising wages than the plight of the unemployed. When the US unemployment rate for February edged up from 4.3 to 4.4%, Wall Street soared on expectations that interest rates would remain unchanged.

The US unemployment rate has been at or below 4.5 % since April last year. As the Clinton Administration never hesitates to point out, Americans haven't been this busy since 1969. Current figures reveal that just 6 million Americans are unemployed and seeking work, a figure that few would have believed possible ten years ago.

Since President Clinton came into office in 1993, more than 14 million jobs have been created. According to Janet Yellen, Chair of the President's Council of Economic Advisers, the United States economy "is the strongest it has been in a generation". The signs of success are easy to see.

In towns all over America, local newspapers are full with job adverts and HELP WANTED signs appear daily in shop windows. Some companies are frustrated that they cannot find the workers they need.

Yet declining world-wide demand for industrial goods and falling commodity prices suggest that the good times cannot last forever. Labour Department figures for February showed the manufacturing sector shedding 50,000 jobs with some high profile companies such as Levi Strauss announcing large scale cut backs. Many economists are predicting a slowdown, but continued growth in the construction and service sectors is expected to help soften the impact on jobs and the overall unemployment rate is not expected to exceed 5.3% by 2001.

Not only are more Americans working than before but they are also working harder than they have in the past. The average American married family worked an additional 247 hours in 1996 compared to 1989, while the median family income fell by \$1,000 over the same period (according to The State of Working America, released in September 1998). Even economists have been surprised that despite tight labour markets, pressure on wages has actually eased. Hourly earnings increased by just 3.6% over the past year, compared to 4.4% the year before.

While the flexible labour market may have helped to create large numbers of new jobs, increased flexibility, it seems, has come at a price for the average American worker, with job insecurity an increasing cause for complaint.

Much of this insecurity is a result of the high levels of part-time employment in the United States. Approximately 20%



Although the US economy is booming wage inflation remains low



Picking up the pace: average annual working hours in the US increased by 247 hours between 1989 and 1996

of all American workers have part-time jobs, which is not clearly indicated in the national statistics, and they are therefore subject to much more uncertainty. Meanwhile, unemployment surveys themselves may disguise the actual level of unemployment. People being surveyed are required to declare if they have worked "even for an hour" in the previous week. If they answer "yes", they do not appear in the unemployment statistics. In particular, these survey methods tend to disguise levels of youth unemployment, as most teenagers in the US are at least partially employed in jobs such as washing cars, baby-sitting, mowing lawns, etc.

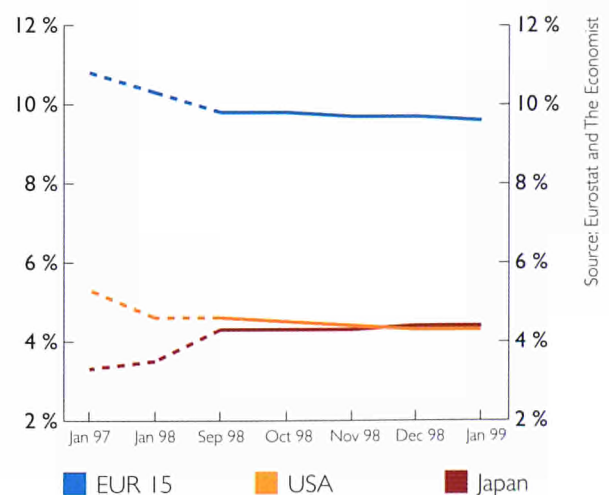
Meanwhile there are important regional differences in employment rates across the United States. Midwestern States have suffered from employers moving to other locations to find the particular employees they want and repeated regional recessions have made people wary about the future. New Mexico and Florida seem to have fallen victim to their climate, as unemployed people in these sun belt states seem unwilling to move north to find work.

And then there is the question of skills. "If you cannot breathe or write software" says one Massachusetts economist, "then forget it". Even in a state considered by some to enjoy full employment, many people cannot find their way back to work. For workers in declining sectors with outdated skills the opportunities offered by the expanding technology sector seem a long way out of reach.

Although the Federal government continues to encourage companies to take on former welfare recipients (Federal

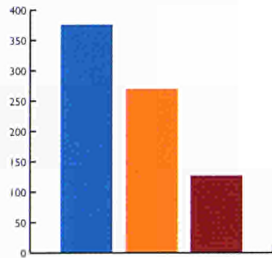
agencies have themselves hired more than 10,000 welfare recipients in the last two years) there has been a dramatic cut back in Federal expenditure on employment training. Since the years of the Carter administration (1976-80), government spending on training has fallen from \$13 billion to \$2 billion, raising real questions about how the long term unemployed and the unskilled will cope in an economy being driven by new technology.

Unemployment Rates in the EU, USA and Japan

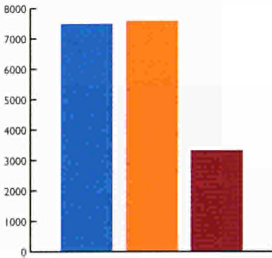


US, Japan and the EU comparison

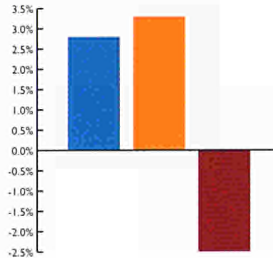
Population (millions)



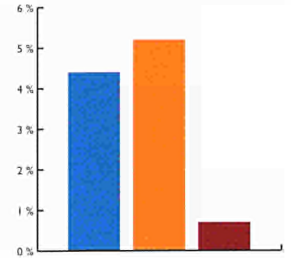
GDP in 1998 (bn ECU)



GDP growth 97-98



Short-term interest rates



■ EUR 15 ■ USA ■ Japan

Source: Eurostat

Japan acts as employment rate slides

Japan's unemployment rate also reached a record 4.4 % at the end of 1998. Yet this provided little cause for celebration. For a nation that has seldom seen unemployment rise above 3.5%, these figures were seen as a startling illustration of an economy in decline.

The length and depth of Japan's current economic downturn is having a profound social impact. Japanese corporations, which have traditionally sought to protect employees from redundancy, are now having to rethink established practices of lifetime employment and seniority-based pay. This trend is leading some people to question how long the nation's traditional employment system can survive.

During the boom years of economic growth, Japanese workers became used to exchanging long hours and lifetime loyalty for a job for life. Companies did all they could to prevent staff from 'job-hopping', paying them strictly according to time-served and providing big retirement bonuses. Many companies were happy to keep employees on until they retired, even if they had nothing useful to do. Indeed, laying-off workers was seen as an unacceptable admission of corporate failure. As the population prospered, government spent little time worrying about welfare spending or training initiatives.

Falling profits and sharper foreign competition have brought a dramatic turn around in the country's economic fortunes. Despite the social stigma attached to being unemployed, the number of people registering as out of work continues to climb as small companies close down and corporations are forced to react to the decline in domestic demand. In a survey conducted last year by the Japanese Association of Corporate Executives (Keizai Doyukai) about 80% of respondents felt that by the year 2002 the idea that companies should sacrifice profits in

order to maintain employment would no longer be held sacred. Another recent study by Dai-ichi Life Insurance Co. found that the ratio of corporate labour costs to sales had risen about 25% since 1991. Corporations would have to eliminate 6.7 million jobs in order to bring the ratio back to 1991 levels. That would mean an unemployment rate of 13.5 % – a staggering statistic.

It is this 'hidden unemployment' that worries Japanese Government Agencies the most, because it seems clear



Labour costs are a problem for Japanese employers



People on the move: Japanese workers no longer expect a job for life

that Japanese companies will have to shed workers in order to struggle their way back to profitability. The Labour Ministry, together with other Government Agencies, is therefore introducing new measures to fight unemployment. Traditional 'employment-adjustment' subsidies are still the most important area of government intervention. They focus on subsidising the wages of employees in struggling companies, in order to prevent people being laid-off. In the next twelve months the government plans to spend US \$ 535 million on such payments.

However, many economists argue that these subsidies are slowing down change in uncompetitive sectors. That's why the government is also trying to introduce programmes to help people who have been made redundant to retrain. The Labour Ministry is currently setting up training courses for more than 60,000 people in the next six months. In partnership with more than 120 professional schools and colleges, the government is offering training in a variety of subjects, including accounting, computing, marketing and advanced manufacturing techniques to unemployed people.

To encourage the growth of new industries the government has also introduced subsidies for start-up companies. They are being offered help in meeting their wage bills through a programme that allows the government to pay 50 % of the salaries of 6 company employees - with a limit of US\$ 29,000 per employee per year. Other programmes are being set up to target employees over 45, who because of their age, are more expensive to employ and are therefore more likely to be made redundant.

Meanwhile, deregulation is regarded by many as the real solution to Japan's employment problems. In 1997, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) put forward a deregulation package, that it claimed would lead to the creation of 7.4 million new jobs by the year 2010. However, these proposals were based on the assumption that Japan would embark on a broad deregulation package, which has proved difficult to implement politically.

Increased attention is also being paid to new sectors that offer opportunities for employment growth. With the Japanese population growing older, one promising area for deregulation is in medical care. Proposals have been tabled to allow private companies to enter this potentially high-growth sector. Meanwhile the need to provide suitable housing for the elderly, could help to revive the flagging construction sector that has shed over half a million jobs in the last two years.

Trade Unions like the Rengo Federation, together with the Nikkeiren (Industry Association), have suggested that the market for environmental products and services should also be exploited more thoroughly as a source of growth and jobs. Proposals on these issues are currently under review and could, it is hoped, have a positive impact on Japan's employment situation.

With consumer confidence at an all-time low, any progress would come as a welcome break for Japan's employers and employees alike.

The Community Initiatives on the Iberian Peninsula

Spain receives more ESF funding for the EMPLOYMENT Initiative than any other Member State and is second only to the UK in terms of funding received for the ADAPT programme. So as you might expect, there are a lot of projects. By way of example, Andalusia has more ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT projects than any other region in Europe.

Autonomous since 1981, the Andalusian region has significant powers in the fields of education and training. However, in recent years, the local economy has become increasingly dependent on tourism and services as the agricultural sector has declined. High levels of unemployment have resulted from this transition which is a major concern for the regional administration, the Junta de Andalusia.

The Community Initiatives make an important contribution in Andalusia, both in qualitative and quantitative terms. The majority of firms in the region are SMEs, and they often lack the resources and information required to increase their competitiveness. Antonio Toro, the General Director for Training and Employment of the Junta noted that "ADAPT activities and the diffusion of the results from the better projects make SMEs more aware of the possibilities available to them and help them anticipate change." Moreover, ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT provide valuable opportunities for innovation. "Transnational partnerships improve the quality and effectiveness of the resulting tools and outputs thanks to their joint conception and development".

Training and placement systems have gained particular benefit from the Community Initiatives. Experiments in integrated approaches to training include a final phase of support for individuals as they begin their jobs. These approaches have been very effective not only in getting people into work but also in building collaboration between different actors and services. Local development and local partnerships are essential components of most projects and often involve actors who have not worked together before. Remarking on the importance of HORIZON and INTEGRA projects that promote the vocational integration of groups facing discrimination, Mr. Toro argued that they make entrepreneurs and managers more aware of the contribution these groups can make. "Their demonstrative effect on employment policies is very important".

INTEGRA projects in the region have developed the concept of 'insertion enterprises' which are now proving an effective formula for getting those who are furthest from employment back into work. Other projects, particularly in EMPLOYMENT, identify local employment needs and convert potential market niches into job opportunities. Antonio Toro was particularly interested in these activities because "entrepreneurial and job creation methods are currently being discussed and defined in Andalusia".



Antonio Toro - General Director for training and employment

Just over the border in Portugal, there is a keen interest to explore and mainstream innovation in programmes supported by the ESF, and by the two Community Initiatives in particular. This interest is shared by France, so representatives of ESF Missions and National Support Structures in both Member States came together to consider the issue. The result was a new approach involving major public service institutions for ensuring that mainstreaming takes place from within.

The venture is supported by ANPE (Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi) and AFPA (Association pour la Formation Professionnelle des Adultes), in France, and IIEP (Instituto do Emprego e Formação Profissional) and INOFOR (Instituto para a Inovação na Formação), in Portugal. These institutions maximise the influence of the mainstreaming process at local, regional and national level.

In Portugal, SMEs are responsible for more than 60% of all jobs and the development of skills and competencies in these enterprises is of crucial importance. The successful transition of young people from school to working life is also a top priority. In France, employment policy priorities are focused on work organisation, combating exclusion and the modernisation of the law on vocational training. But there was enough common ground to develop criteria for identifying good practice and an action plan for dissemination and mainstreaming. This joint exercise may have much to offer the benchmarking and exchange of good practice that will become increasingly important under the European Employment Strategy.



Another example of exploiting the experience of the Initiatives was the series of events on reconciliation of work and family life that took place in March this year. Key players in the field of equal opportunities participated in activities aimed at enhancing reconciliation - a major challenge that women and men face in their daily lives. Throughout Portugal, exhibitions, seminars, conferences, debates, theatre plays, project visits, public relations campaigns and open days were launched.

This programme resulted from collaboration between the European Social Fund Mission; the National Support Structure for NOW; the High Commissioner for Equality and the Family; the Commissions for Equal Opportunities in Work and Employment, Equal Opportunities and Women's Rights; local authorities; non-governmental organisations; social partners; training institutions and public enterprises.

The highlight came on 3 March when the Portuguese Public Broadcasting Company (RTP), hosted a conference which provided companies based in Portugal, and NOW projects from other parts of the European Union, with an opportunity to describe their work on reconciliation.

"What happened in March was spurred on by NOW, and we are particularly pleased with what happened", said Maria do Céu Cunha Rêgo, the President of the Commission for Equality in Work and Employment. She explained how the Community Initiatives were helping her organisation. One NOW project for women 'returners' with low levels of qualification is run in collaboration with the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training. The project is investigating the Dutch system of 'Vrouwen-vakscholen' (vocational schools for women) and will try to adjust the Dutch approach to the Portuguese situation. ADAPT is also being used to create a pool of professional consultants that can give information and advice to firms about all aspects of equal opportunities.

According to Maria do Céu "the Initiatives are not only important in terms of the financial resources they provide, but they also give credibility to national activities and offer international exchanges and transfer of good practice".

Full transcripts of the interviews with Antonio Toro and Maria do Céu Cunha Rêgo may be found on the ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT web site. (www.europs.be)



Portuguese fishing communities have benefited from ESF funding

The EU improves its response to the plight of refugees

As world attention focuses on the plight of Kosovo's refugees, InfoReview looks at how the EU is striving to improve the help offered to displaced people arriving in the European Union.

Refugees are not a new phenomenon in Europe, although until recently the majority of refugees tended to be concentrated in a few Member States, notably Germany, France, the UK, Sweden and the Netherlands. However, this picture is changing, and today citizens in almost all Member States are coming into contact with refugees. For countries like Ireland, which for centuries were used to mass emigration, the arrival of refugees is quite new. With the Member States holding regular discussions on this issue in the Council of Ministers, Social Affairs Commissioner Pádraig Flynn believes that the integration of refugees has become an important matter for the European Union.

The Treaty of Amsterdam, which entered into force on May 1, 1999, brings with it new powers for the European Commission to act in this field. Meanwhile, the Commission has funded a range of initiatives designed to promote a more coordinated approach to the problems faced by refugees. These include improving the reception of asylum seekers and displaced persons; helping with the repatriation of those



who wish to return to their home countries and promoting the integration those given permission to stay. In addition the Commission has sought to dispel the fears and misconceptions held by some of Europe's citizens about refugees.

Breaking down barriers

to improve integration

The INTO-Project (Ecumenical initiatives for refugee integration INTO European society) is coordinated by the Austrian Evangelischer Flüchtlingsdienst. A multi-dimensional, transnational project, it provides housing, legal and social counselling, educational and vocational training and advice on the establishment of small businesses for refugees. Operating in Austria, Belgium, Greece and Italy, the project works through a partnership of six ecumenical social service agencies. Nearly 1,400 refugees from 61 countries in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Latin America have been assisted through this initiative. Among the many activities have been neighbourhood help projects where refugees offer services such as gardening for local residents and the organisation of ethnic food buffets for local weddings and religious festivals, earning additional income and at the same time making contact with the local population.

Promoting understanding



In November last year, the European Commission, along with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), launched a Europe-wide public awareness campaign to provide better information about 'displaced persons'. The campaign features a series of mass media activities including TV, radio and press advertisements and an educational pack for European schoolchildren. Launching the initiative, Pádraig Flynn said that Europe's citizens should be prepared to see refugees not as a threat but as people who are themselves threatened. "Refugees are ordinary people who have been forced to cope with extraordinary situations. They are often highly educated and skilled individuals who have a huge amount to offer the societies they settle in. Getting this message across is what this campaign is all about."

A coordinated approach

In addition to the humanitarian aid which the European Union provides in emergencies for refugees and displaced persons the Commission adopted, in December last year, two longer-term complementary proposals to ensure that a coherent programme of support is available for people seeking protection in the Member States.

Reception of asylum seekers and repatriation

The Commission's proposal for Joint Action on the reception of displaced persons and asylum seekers (COM(98) 733) provides for financial support for reception facilities for people seeking protection. It provides, in particular, for the creation or improvement of the necessary infrastructure in the Member States for the reception of asylum applicants and displaced persons. It also covers the social rights to be accorded to them, such as basic standards of living, medical care, education and training. Other measures are related to the efficiency and fairness of asylum procedures, covering, for example, legal assistance and counselling services. Particular attention is given to vulnerable groups such as unaccompanied children, victims of torture and rape and people requiring special medical treatment.

In order to ensure a reasonable level of burden sharing between the Member States, the European Commission believes that it is important to ensure that all EU countries are able to receive asylum seekers according to common minimum standards. The joint action includes proposals for the voluntary repatriation of refugees, displaced persons and asylum seekers and for assistance with their re-establishment in their home countries.



Integration of refugees

In 1997 and 1998 the European Commission provided a total of 20 million ECU for the co-financing of over 100 pilot projects to improve the integration of refugees who have permission to stay in a Member State.

Building on the work carried out and the experience gained in the implementation of these pilot projects, the European Commission put forward a proposal in December last year for an action plan to promote the integration of refugees (COM(98)731). The action plan will involve innovative, large-scale, multi-dimensional projects in the Member States; European-wide projects involving all 15 Member States; transnational cooperation networks; and the compilation of data and statistics at European level.

Designed to prevent social exclusion, the proposal aims to encourage innovation and the sharing of ideas and good practices through the development of contacts among people involved in the integration of refugees in the EU including NGOs, local authorities and refugees themselves. Meanwhile the proposal seeks to ensure that the cultural identity of refugees is protected.

In addition, a wide range of projects funded by the ESF have also helped refugees to settle into new communities and develop the skills they need to rebuild their lives.

Helping refugees to rebuild their lives

The 'Europa Forteller' project in Denmark, launched in 1995 and partly funded under the ESF Integra Community Initiative, helps refugees including Kurds, Bosnians and Sri Lankans, to learn Danish, while developing their artistic and manual skills. Tapestry and puppet theatre are used to help them explain their own heritage and experiences - providing a more practical and positive way of learning Danish than simply attending language classes. With local unemployed Danes participating alongside the refugees, the project has helped to enhance cultural understanding and diffuse racial tensions in a deprived inner city area.

Sweden's Jobs Train prepares to take to the tracks

For two and a half weeks last summer the 'Jobs Train' - an employment exhibition on wheels - wound its way through Sweden's towns, cities and countryside. Widely acclaimed as a 'roaring success', the organizers are now planning to put the Jobs Train back on the tracks, to promote a debate about the future of employment.

Raising awareness across Sweden

The concept of a 'roadshow on rails' was developed to raise awareness about the many initiatives taking place in Sweden to promote employment and the development of new businesses. In 1998 the Jobs Train visited 27 towns, starting its journey in Gothenburg and arriving in Uddevalla 18 days later. On the way, it picked up more than 50,000 visitors and attracted valuable media attention. More than 200 articles appeared in the local and national press and the train's progress was tracked by both national and regional television stations as it travelled around the country.

The 1999 Jobs Train is scheduled to leave from Enköping station on 17 May and will visit 27 destinations on its tour around Sweden. Once again, it is hoped that this mobile exhibition will provide an excellent forum for politicians, business leaders, local government representatives and trade union leaders to meet and discuss issues related to employment and development in Sweden. Last year Göran Persson, Sweden's Prime Minister and several other government representatives, visited the train, along with Sweden's European Commissioner Anita Gradin. MEPs and local politicians were also on-hand at many of the stops to make opening speeches and to participate in meetings and debates about the many issues raised by the travelling exhibition.

A roadshow on rails

The train itself will consist of several exhibition wagons, one of which will be dedicated to the European Union, featuring exhibition material from the Commission and the European Parliament. The exhibition wagons will be open to the public for 4-6 hours at each stop, with other events taking place in the vicinity. Last year many local projects funded by the ESF and the other Structural Funds used the arrival of the Jobs Train as an opportunity to promote their activities and services.

The other wagons on the train will be designed around a number of related themes including: job seeking; education and training; international cooperation; innovation; new companies; the environment; integration; youth; local government; and trade and industry.



The 1998 Jobs train covered the length and breadth of Sweden

New publications

on Employment and the ESF

Coming

Soon

Employment and the Environment

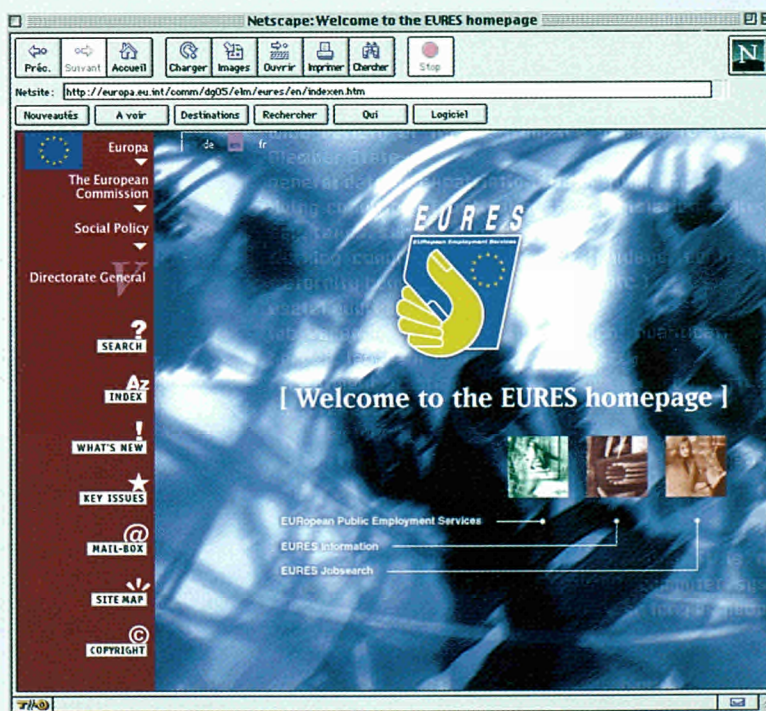
A new publication on Employment and the Environment will be published soon by DG V. Taking a detailed look at how employment and environment policies can work together to meet common goals, this new publication also includes practical examples of European projects that combine environmental and employment objectives.



Internet
search

The EURES web site

EUROpean Employment Services (EURES) is a European labour market network aiming at facilitating the mobility of workers in the European Economic Area. It links more than 450 Euro advisers – specialists in employment matters – throughout Europe.



<http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg05/elm/eures/en/indexen.htm>

ESF & Employment

Events Update

Building Territories

for the Millennium

Belfast 21-23 January 1999

Europe's approach to local development came under close scrutiny at a conference organised by DGV and Northern Ireland's Training and Employment Agency. The three-day event entitled "Building Territories for the Millennium", explored options for improving services and development opportunities at the local level.

Particular attention was paid to the development of 'territorial approaches' that seek to build broad partnerships between local and regional actors. The 200 experts participating in the event focused on a number of examples of good practice from across the EU. Northern Ireland is seen as a leader in developing a territorial approach to local development. New methods have been developed for pooling resources and building partnerships across the region in order to improve the provision of services and pace of development.

The Conference conclusions will be used by the Commission to formulate future policy recommendations for local development.

Opportunities '99

Careers, skills and education exhibition

Dublin 31 January-2 February 2000

Opportunities '99, Ireland's most important jobs fair, provided an excellent occasion to promote the visibility of both the European Employment Strategy and the ESF in Ireland. More than 100,000 people attended the event that was organised by FÁS, Ireland's national training and employment agency. Set up to provide a showcase for the country's leading employers, universities and training organisations, the jobs fair demonstrated the growing range of opportunities available to job-seekers in Ireland.

Representatives from DGV were on-hand at the event to promote both the ESF and the Employment Strategy. The Commission exhibition stand was shared with the Irish ESF Mission, which used the occasion to launch its new web site (www.esf.ie).

The stand proved very popular with the Irish audience and many visitors posed challenging questions about the EU's role in employment policy. The ESF publications proved to be particularly popular with several thousand visitors taking copies away with them by the end of the three-day event.

European policy for the employment of disabled people

Dresden 24-25 February 1999

Organised by the German Federal Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs this conference was held in the framework of the 1999 Employment Guidelines. The aim was to build on ideas set out in the European Commission's working paper "Raising employment levels of people with disabilities".

The conference brought together 800 key actors responsible for the implementation of disability and employment policy across Europe. They used the opportunity to improve their knowledge and understanding of these two policy fields and to identify strategies for achieving their common goals. The event was launched by German Social Affairs Minister, Walter Riester and Kurt Biedenkopf, Head of the Saxony Government. The German Federal President, Roman Herzog and Allan Larsson from DG V also took part in the debate.

Based around five workshops, the conference was concluded with a panel discussion involving representatives of the European Parliament, the Bundesrat, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE), the European Disability Forum (EDF) and the European Commission.

