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ON

**THE SOCIAL AND LABOUR MARKET DIMENSION
OF THE
INFORMATION SOCIETY**

People First - The Next Steps

**The Social and Labour Market Dimension
of the Information Society**

People First - The Next Steps

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Executive Summary

The Information Society represents one of the most fundamental changes of our time with enormous opportunities for society as a whole. But the scale and pace of change also present challenges for individuals and certain groups of citizens and regions. Therefore, the social and labour market dimensions of the Information Society need greater prominence within public debate and public policy, as pointed out in the Commission's Agenda 2000.

In order to underline the importance of the social dimension, the Commission appointed in 1995 a High Level Experts Group and an Information Society Forum. The Commission presented in 1996 a Green Paper *Living and Working in the Information Society: People First* as an invitation to political, social and civil dialogue. The Green Paper produced a sustained debate on the social and labour market issues and stressed the need for integrated policy responses across different areas of government.

This Communication summarises the progress made to integrate the social dimension into the development of policies for the Information Society and presents the challenges that lie ahead in reconciling social, economic and technological goals. It forms part of the rolling action plan *Europe at the Forefront of the Global Information Society*. It has three main purposes: to increase awareness of the social implications of the Information Society, to build in an Information Society dimension, where appropriate, into social policies and actions, and to identify specific actions designed to maximise the contribution of the Information Society to promoting employment and inclusion.

1. Common principles for the development of the Information Society

The Green Paper *People First* proposed a set of common principles, based on the ideas and values which have shaped the European Union, to guide the public policies for the Information Society. These principles were broadly supported during the consultation process. The Commission suggests that public policies in the Information Society field should have as basic aims to

- improve access to information
- enhance democracy and social justice
- promote employability and lifelong learning
- strengthen the capacity of the EU economy to achieve high and sustainable growth and employment
- achieve and enhance equal opportunity between men and women
- promote inclusion and support people with special needs and those lacking opportunities to improve their position
- improve the quality and efficiency of public administration.

2. Access to ICT¹ in learning, working and living

Access to the tools of the Information Society is of fundamental importance for achieving the goals of equity and efficiency set out above. Access has different dimensions: availability, continuity, affordability, accessibility and awareness. How well these dimensions are dealt with will tilt the balance towards an inclusive or exclusive society. Public policies can make the difference. The Commission therefore urges that the Member States make access a main objective in the development of national information strategies. The Commission will address this issue in its forthcoming review of the scope, quality, level, and affordability of universal service. It will also organise exchange of experience, discussions, evaluation and benchmarking of strategies and policies in particular those facilitating access. In line with the views expressed by the European Parliament, the Commission will invite collaboration with the other Community Institutions to draw up a communication strategy facilitating access to public information. The question of gender balance in the Information Society must be given more attention to ensure that the potential benefits are equally shared and to avoid the risk of reinforcing existing segregations. The Commission will further develop initiatives at various levels to improve access to ICT for people with disability and to promote awareness of the potential of ICT to improve health systems. The Commission has proposed that the creation of a user-friendly Information Society be one of the key objectives of the forthcoming 5th RTD Framework Programme.

3. Flexibility *and* security in working life

ICT offer great potential for improved productivity and thereby prosperity through new ways of work organisation. The Green Paper *People First* introduced the concept of a new balance between flexibility for enterprises *and* security for workers as a basis for such a modern organisation of work. The Commission has taken this idea forward through the new Green Paper on *Partnership for a New Organisation of Work* in order to stimulate the social partners to develop a framework for a more productive, participative and learning organisation of work. Parallel with this debate, the Commission has proposed to strengthen European research on new organisation of work under the 5th RTD Framework Programme. A European network of national institutes in this field will be developed. The Commission will present a Communication in 1998 analysing the situation regarding the privacy of data on employees. The Commission will initiate consultations with the social partners regarding the framework for developing telework; and enhance the role of social dialogue to facilitate structural change and develop ICT as a tool for policies for health and safety at work.

4. Employability for more and better jobs

The creation of more and better jobs is one of the most pressing needs for the Member States in the EU. Modernisation of the economies and improvement of productivity are prerequisites. The use of ICT is a key question. However, a fundamental structural obstacle for employment growth is the slow adjustment of skills to new economic and technological structures. This is why the European employment strategy, reinforced by the European Council in Amsterdam, increasingly emphasises employability as a key to improve the functioning of the labour markets. A new culture of life-long education, training and learning is required, supported by selective restructuring of public expenditures in favour of investment in human resources. The Commission will continue to support human resource investment through Objective 4 of the European Social Fund

¹ Information and Communication Technologies.

and the Community Initiative *ADAPT*. A further allocation of 162 MECU has been made for the purpose of Building the Information Society (*ADAPT-BIS*) for the period 1997-99. The Commission is also supporting measures to exploit the employment potential of the social economy. To improve the functioning of the labour market the Commission will encourage the development and use of ICT to modernise Public Employment Services and the linking of national vacancy systems via EURES.

5. Action at national, European and international level

The last chapter summarises how the Commission will strengthen the social dimension through action at all levels:

- at **national and regional level**, where the Commission will provide support to the Member States to integrate a strong social dimension in the ongoing development of their Information Society strategies
- at **Community level**, where the Commission will mainstream the social dimension in all relevant Community policies and exploit the potential of the ICT as a tool in employment and social policies
- at **international level**, where the Commission will promote in the appropriate international fora the development and use of technologies which can help improve social cohesion and the improvement of living, learning and working conditions for all groups in society.

I. People First - the next steps: the purpose of this Communication

1. The development of the Information Society offers enormous opportunities to improve the way in which Europeans live and work. But the scale and pace of technological change in an increasingly global economy also present a number of challenges for our societies. The process of change has to be managed in a way that promotes trust and confidence in the possibilities of the Information Society to improve people's quality of life. The Commission highlighted the importance of these issues in its 1994 Action Plan *Europe's way to the Information Society*, and in July 1996 presented a Green Paper *Living and Working in the Information Society: People First*¹.
2. The Green Paper sought comments on how best to reap the full benefits of the Information Society, in particular in the areas of work organisation, employment, and social cohesion, and invited reflection on a set of common principles for the development of the Information Society in Europe. It also drew on the work of two independent groups set up by the Commission: a High Level Group of Experts (HLGE) on the social aspects of the Information Society and a broadly based Information Society Forum (ISF). The first reports² of both groups were published as complements to the Green Paper, and in April 1997 the HLGE presented its Final Report³, which underpins this Communication.
3. The consultation process - which was officially launched at a Colloquium in Dublin in September 1996⁴ - triggered a lively debate at three interrelated levels: political dialogue, social dialogue, and civil dialogue. In total, more than 130 responses were submitted⁵, of which more than 40% came from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). The debate has demonstrated broad agreement around the following points:
 - if the Information Society is to be to the benefit of all, it needs to develop with a strong social dimension, not only integrating social policy into the Information Society, but also using the Information Society as a tool to promote a more inclusive and learning society;
 - particular attention is needed to avoid the risk that the Information Society might exacerbate existing divisions within society. People are concerned about how it will affect their jobs and about the risks of creating a society of information "haves" and "have nots";
 - while the move to the Information Society is essentially market-driven, public authorities have an important role to play in shaping this process, striking a balance between policies to enhance equality of opportunity and security and policies to promote flexibility and adaptability;
 - while prime responsibility rests with the Member States, the EU has an important role to play.
4. This Communication - which forms part of the Commission's Rolling Action Plan *Europe at the Forefront of the Global Information Society*⁶ - sets out the Commission's strategy to further develop the social dimension of the Information Society, in particular in the context of Agenda 2000. It has three main purposes:
 - to co-ordinate the process of *increasing awareness* of the labour market and social implications of the Information Society;
 - to *build in an Information Society dimension*, where appropriate, into social policies and actions, especially at European level;
 - to *identify specific actions* designed to maximise the contribution of the Information Society to promoting employment and social inclusion.

¹ The regional dimension of the Information Society has been covered in the Commission Communication *Cohesion and the Information Society* COM (97) 7.

² *Building the Information Society for Us All*. First Reflections of the High Level Group of Experts, January 1996; *Networks for People and their Communities*. First Annual Report from the Information Society Forum. June 1996.

³ *Building the Information Society for Us All*. Final Report of the High Level Group of Experts, April 1997.

⁴ The documents *Report on the Dublin Colloquium* and *Source Document on the Dublin Colloquium* present a summary and the details of the discussions held during the Conference, *in situ* and in the web site created for this occasion.

⁵ A detailed account of the responses officially submitted will be published by the Commission as a separate document. 25,000 printed copies were distributed, and the web site was accessed about 20,000 times.

⁶ COM (96)607

5. In particular, it builds on the **common principles** set out in the Green Paper - and broadly supported during the consultation - which suggested that public policies for the Information Society should have as basic aims to:
- facilitate access to information;
 - enhance democracy and social justice;
 - promote employability and lifelong learning;
 - strengthen the capacity of the EU economy to achieve high and sustainable growth and employment;
 - achieve and enhance equal opportunity between men and women;
 - promote inclusion and support people with special needs and those lacking opportunities to improve their position;
 - improve the quality and efficiency of public administration.
6. Member States have the main policy responsibilities for the matters addressed in this Communication. During the consultation the Commission held meetings with the Member States to exchange information about current initiatives. A significant number have developed strategic plans or programmes for the Information Society⁷, a further group are drafting green papers which should be followed by concrete action plans⁸ and the rest have initiatives, projects or programmes promoting research or the implementation of applications in particular areas. The main social aspects considered relate to access, education and training, electronic access to Government information, preservation of cultural heritage and demonstration projects of applications of public interest.
7. The co-existence of local, regional, national and European strategies and initiatives calls for complementarity and co-ordination of the different actions. The Commission, for its part, through its own strategy and programmes, can contribute to the development of the social dimension of the Information Society by:
- supporting the Member States in developing and implementing their strategies and programmes;
 - taking specific initiatives in its areas of responsibility;
 - taking account of the Information Society within social policy and other policies;
 - ensuring that social needs are fully taken into consideration in the Community RTD programmes⁹;
 - acting at international level.
8. The European Strategy for the Information Society established in 1994 has already been proved successful and has had a strong impact in many policy areas, both at European and national level. In order to grasp the opportunities offered by the Information Society, the Commission believes that the social dimension needs to be further strengthened. That was the stimulus behind the Green Paper *People First*. This Communication sets out the Commission's future strategy in this area.

II. An Information Society for All

II.1 Access to the Information Society: public policies can make the difference

9. In order to reap both the economic and social benefits of technological progress and to improve people's quality of life, the Information Society must be based on the principles of equal opportunities, participation and integration of all. This can only happen if everybody has access to at least a basic set of the new services and applications offered by the Information Society. Access has different dimensions: availability, continuity, affordability, accessibility, and awareness. How well

⁷ Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Finland, Sweden and United Kingdom.

⁸ Spain, Portugal and Austria.

⁹ The Commission has proposed that one of the technological and scientific objectives of the forthcoming 5th RTD Framework Programme be the creation of a user-friendly Information Society.

these dimensions are dealt with will tilt the balance towards an inclusive or an exclusive society. Public policies can make the difference.

10. Modern infrastructure, applications and services should be *available* at *affordable* prices. Industry will maximise its efforts in this respect if Governments provide an adequate regulatory framework which promotes fair competition and innovation. For this to happen, Member States must respect the timetable agreed for the liberalisation of telecommunication markets, which will increase the competitiveness of the telecoms sector and of the economy as a whole, opening up new opportunities for the private sector to deliver new applications and services. In order to ensure that all regions benefit from the liberalisation process, the Commission has recommended that Member States give priority to the completion and upgrading of telecom networks and supplement them with demand stimulation measures¹⁰.
11. The Commission has also encouraged Member States to reflect on the scope of *universal service* and on the concept of *public access*. The inclusion by the Amsterdam Treaty of a new article on services of general economic interest underlines the importance of this issue, in particular for disadvantaged groups and those living in rural and peripheral regions. Technological development and liberalisation processes have reduced dramatically the cost of storing, processing and transmission of data. However the price of communications and ICT hardware and software can still be a barrier. The availability of personal computers and Internet access in the home remains predominantly the preserve of those with higher income and educational attainment levels.
12. This rapidly changing technological context means that universal service is a dynamic and evolving concept which must be kept under review if it is to respond to people's needs and expectations. Access to advanced services and applications through public access points such as libraries, schools, and other community meeting points is regarded by some as a proxy to universal services. In a similar vein, the HLGE recommends investigation of the concept of "universal community service", extending universal service provision so as to incorporate a basic level of access to new information services, but limiting its universality obligation to some institutions. Furthermore, the Competitiveness Advisory Group has recommended the creation of knowledge resource centres to facilitate access to knowledge on the new technologies and the skills required¹¹.
13. Equal access is predicated on *accessibility*. IT hardware and services should be designed in such a way that they do not discriminate against certain groups, raising barriers and excluding them from their use. The concept of "universal design" may provide ways forward¹² and research programmes and industry should strengthen their efforts to address the barriers presented by inappropriate design. More generally, the user-friendliness of software and hardware is decisive, especially for elderly people who may face problems in accessing the new technological environment. For instance accessing the Internet via TV could enable many more people to use the new services of the Information Society.
14. Access also depends on people's *awareness* of the possibilities offered by the Information Society. Effective and equitable awareness-building requires that people are trained in the use of the new technologies and that ICT be introduced into our educational systems, especially in schools. There is some evidence of low public awareness of the technologies and how to participate in the Information Society, particularly among women, unemployed and non-office workers. Raising ICT awareness among older people is becoming increasingly important, in particular in the context of demographic trends, lifelong learning and the establishment of flexible paths of transition from work to retirement. Some Member States are targeting particular groups through awareness campaigns. The Commission's recent call for proposals of the multiannual programme on Information Society

¹⁰ Communication from the Commission *Cohesion and the Information Society*, COM (97) 7

¹¹ *Enhancing European Competitiveness*. Competitiveness Advisory Group, December 1995.

¹² For instance, the Danish Government is developing pilot activities for promoting co-operation to develop "universal design" IT products and services.

focuses on studies, demonstration actions and other accompanying measures including actions targeted at specific social groups¹³.

Objective:

Ensure access for all by promoting availability, affordability, accessibility and awareness

Key actions:

The Commission :

- urges Member States to ensure that access is a key objective of their Information Society strategies;
- will review and report on the scope, quality, level and affordability of universal service by January 1st, 1998 and report on the functioning of the Directive on the application of Open Network Provision for telephony and on universal service before December 31st, 1999;
- will continue to develop awareness actions and will organise, on the basis of the European Survey of Information Society Projects and Actions (ESIS), exchange of experience, discussions, evaluation and benchmarking of strategies and policies, in particular those facilitating access.
- will examine the feasibility of knowledge resource centres to facilitate access to the Information Society technologies and skills.

II.2. Enhancing Democracy and Public Services

15. The advent of network based communications such as the Internet has allowed much simpler and cheaper dissemination of information, allowing local, regional, national, and international communication to flourish alongside more traditional forms of mass media. However, the development and image of a vigorous Information Society will be hampered if existing standards and practice in the public media are flouted, for example by undermining pluralism, or by permitting uncontrolled access to violent, racist, or pornographic material on the Internet. The Commission has addressed this latter issue in its Green Paper on the protection of minors and human dignity in the information and audio-visual services¹⁴ and in its Communication on illegal and harmful content on the Internet¹⁵.
16. There is also the issue of open government and the way public policies can exploit the potential of ICT to support democratic processes and rights, for example by developing electronic democracy, enhancing access to public documentation, and by developing specific services for groups lacking ready access to information (eg migrant workers and their dependants). The benefits of including the European institutions in open government initiatives would be substantial and therefore specific pilot initiatives should be launched. Public info-kiosks and access points can play a vital role in bridging the gap in providing access to information for public service purposes. Closer and more effective interaction with government at local and regional level may be one of the most rapid ways of demonstrating the potential of the Information Society. Some regions and localities have already formed networks to learn, to inform and to exchange developments. Initiatives such as IRIS Initiative¹⁶, the RISI¹⁷ pilot projects and the *Bangemann Challenge*¹⁸ competition have contributed substantially to raising awareness and to dissemination of good practice examples.
17. The Commission is preparing a Green Paper *on Access to and Exploitation of Public Sector Information* to stimulate discussion on the options for Community policy action to ensure the respect of the rights of people to have access to public sector information and the conditions for commercial

¹³ Cf. Call for Proposals 97/C 148 / 07 of the Commission. O.J. N° C 148/15 of 16.5.97.

¹⁴ COM (96) 486

¹⁵ COM (96) 487

¹⁶ Inter-Regional Information Society Initiative, gathering Valencia, Piemonte, Central Macedonia, Saxony, Nord Pas-de-Calais and North West England, to build strategies for shaping the Information Society in these regions and exchange experiences.

¹⁷ Regional Information Society Initiative projects carried out in the framework of article 6 of the European Social Fund Regulation and article 10 of the European Regional Development Fund Regulation.

¹⁸ Competition in the use of information technologies in cities of similar size, launched by the City of Stockholm in 1994.

use and exploitation. The Commission is carrying out activities under various programmes (e.g. IDA¹⁹, Info-2000 and other programmes within the RTD Framework Programmes) to contribute to developing telematic applications for public administrations.

Objective:

Promote innovative use of ICT in public services and encourage high standards of practice and content within internet-based data and services

Key actions:

The Commission will:

- collaborate, following the views of the European Parliament,²⁰ with the other European Institutions to draw up a communication and information strategy to facilitate access to the institutions for the public and organisations;
- invite Member States, following the Council Resolution of 17 February 1997²¹, to encourage systems of self-regulation to safeguard against harmful material on the Internet, - co-ordinating at EU level exchange of best practice and the promotion of research on techniques to support the work of such organisations;
- present in the first half of 1998, following the debate on *the Access to and Exploitation of Public Sector Information* Green Paper, a Communication with proposals for action.

II.3. Information Society for gender equality

18. The Information Society provides a real opportunity to promote gender equality and reshape working and everyday life. However, greater efforts need to be made to ensure that the potential benefits are realised and to avoid the risk of reinforcing existing types of segregation. At present, as a relatively low number of women pursue studies in science and technology, women have less chances to reap the employment benefits of new technologies (e.g. in terms of high-skilled jobs in the ICT industries, where women are underrepresented). This requires further efforts to promote familiarisation with ICT in schools in ways that are not gender biased and to boost skills levels (see section IV.3), while also promoting flexibility in working time and security for workers²².

19. ICT can also contribute to the dissemination of a more positive and diversified image of women, help to change mentalities, and assist women to participate more actively in the production of information. Projects within the 4th Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities²³ include the creation of European databanks on women experts and women in decision-making, the use of ICT as a teaching tool for disadvantaged women, and the use of Internet to raise awareness of gender equality..

Objective:

Raise awareness of the gender dimension of the Information Society

Key actions:

The Commission will:

- invite the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities to advise on how to further integrate the Information Society in the 4th Action Programme, drawing in particular on the *EMPLOYMENT-NOW* Community Initiative;
- organise a round table with business to assess the gender equality implications of the Information Society and present its conclusions at the forthcoming European Conference on the gender dimension of Structural Funds activity;
- promote the development of websites of projects financed by the 4th Action

¹⁹ Community Programme for Telematic Interchange of Data between Administrations, 1995-1997. This programme supports projects such as EURES (European Employment Services), TESS (Telematics for Social Security) and EUPHIN (European Union Public Health Information Network).

²⁰ Report of the European Parliament on the Communications of the Commission *The Information Society: From Corfu to Dublin and Europe at the Forefront of the Global Information Society: Rolling Action Plan*. PE 221.848/fin.

²¹ O.J. C70 of 6 March 1997

²² Social Partners have adopted on 6 June 1997 a European Framework Agreement on Part Time Work to eliminate discrimination against part-time workers.

²³ Council Decision of 22.12.95, O.J. L 335 of 31.12.1995

programme and networking with projects funded by other Community programmes;

- organise in the second half of 1997 a Conference with the European Parliament on the role of women in science.

II.4. Technology for the benefit of people with disabilities

20. The Green Paper emphasised how ICT should be used to promote better a quality of life and equal opportunities for people with disabilities. The last decade has seen the development of both applications specific to the needs of people with disabilities and more general-purpose applications of particular relevance for these groups. These applications have provided new opportunities for access to remote services (e.g. telemedicine), for carrying out transactions from home (e.g. teleshopping), for new forms of participation (e.g. distance learning and teleworking) and for interpersonal communication (e.g. videotelephony). A spectacular example of this is the relay-services system which translates in both directions - text to voice and voice to text. Relay services have been widely implemented in the US as a service obligation and allow deaf people or people with a speech impairment to communicate with others. From a regulatory point of view, it is necessary to consider as much as possible the specific needs of disabled people with respect to universal service provision.
21. Particularly important challenges in this area are the cost of developing access software for use both by individuals and by public information providers and the nature and format of information provision which often discriminate against those with sight problems or learning difficulties. It is also important that creative and flexible approaches to ICT service provision and development be put into place. The Commission has mandated²⁴ an internal ad-hoc group to examine the scope for a special initiative at European level, building on past experience of ICT applications in favour of people with disabilities. The Commission has proposed that the forthcoming 5th RTD Framework Programme include actions focused on the social integration of people with disabilities.

Objective:

Promote access and full integration of people with disabilities in the Information Society

Key actions:

The Commission will take an initiative to:

- promote collaboration between industry, research bodies and users' representatives (notably the European Disability Forum) to develop specifications adapted to people with disabilities and to contribute to the transformation of the results of RTD into affordable products, and to provide advisory and training support to assist their take-up;
- examine, in the forthcoming review of the universal service, what services should be included within the definition of universal services to meet the needs of people with disabilities and how this might evolve over time;
- continue to promote projects relating to people with disabilities in the context of the Multiannual programme on Information Society;
- build up the co-operation in this area being launched within the framework of the Transatlantic Agenda.

II.5. Supporting the development of health care systems

22. The use of ICT is radically transforming health care technologies and is helping to improve diagnostic and therapeutic possibilities. Uses are rapidly emerging in the identification of scattered cases of communicable diseases, epidemiological monitoring, and the provision of medical expertise to patients living in remote areas. Other examples of its use are in providing more

²⁴ Commission's Communication on *Equality of Opportunity for People with Disabilities*, COM (96) 406.

information for self-care and home-care. However, it remains essential to avoid the risks of depersonalising the relationship between the patient and the care-giver, as the HLGE has emphasised.

23. The increasing use of ICT can also contribute to a downward pressure on costs and to improve quality control standards. This requires the involvement of health care staff, the re-assessment of staff skills, and the development of standards. Of particular importance in the health care sector is the need to ensure that data protection is safeguarded especially as concerns health records and ethical standards. The issues of professional responsibility and the liability associated with it also need to be taken into account.
24. The Community 4th RTD Framework Programme is currently supporting more than 100 projects concerning healthcare telematic applications ranging from telematics assisted co-operative work for healthcare professionals and information for citizens to telediagnosis, teleconsultation and emergency medicine. The Commission has proposed that the 5th RTD Framework Programme will give priority to the development of computerised medical systems and secure high-capacity health networks. The Commission is also giving active consideration to the health implications of radiomagnetic radiation from mobile communications. These activities are supplemented by the feasibility studies connected to the G7 Global Healthcare Applications Projects²⁵. The Commission has recently issued a request to the three European standards bodies to elaborate and execute a common work programme for standards in order to accelerate the development of ICT technologies in the health sector.

Objective:

Promote awareness of the potential of ICT to improve health systems

Key actions:

The Commission will:

- draw up a report to assess the health implications of the Information Society, including a review of RTD in this area and means of pooling the results;
- exploit and disseminate the results of health-related research undertaken within the Community RTD Framework Programmes, notably in areas such as telematic applications and the health implications of mobile communications;
- use ICT to develop a Community-wide network for a) sharing health data aimed at identifying trends in the incidence of disease, assessing the effects of public health policies and exchange information on threats to public health; and b) disseminating and supporting European public health programmes;
- strengthen international co-operation to ensure that the G-7 pilot projects are given adequate continuation.

III. Working in the Information Society

III.1. Flexibility and Security: Getting the right balance

25. The Information Society is provoking profound changes in the organisation of firms. However, the introduction of new technology does not automatically lead to improved performance. There is evidence that the successful introduction of ICT requires an integrated approach, combining the introduction of ICT with organisational transformation and the development of human resources. One of the key messages of the Green Paper *People First* was the need to have a well-informed debate on the modernisation of working life, and in particular on how to achieve a new balance between flexibility and security.
26. The consultation process has shown that employees and trade unions are concerned that the introduction of ICT and new forms of work organisation might result in greater job insecurity and

²⁵ International harmonisation of data cards in healthcare, a 24-hour multilingual and multidisciplinary telemedicine surveillance and emergency service around the world

lower labour standards and stress the need to ensure that people's rights are respected and protected. Particular concern has been expressed for groups of workers (e.g. low-skilled workers, teleworkers and women generally). Some have pointed out that highly skilled workers (e.g. computer programmers) can also be affected as ICT enable outsourcing of tasks to other parts of the world. The process of adapting the workforce to the requirements and pressures of the Information Society has to be matched by the involvement of workers in designing, selecting, and applying technologies and organisational change.

27. The Commission's Green Paper on *Partnership for a New Organisation of Work*²⁶ draws attention to how new forms of work organisation can make an important contribution to a more competitive economy. The Commission has further contributed to the rethinking of the institutions of working life through the Communication *Modernising and Improving Social Protection in the European Union*²⁷. Objective 4, the ADAPT Community Initiative (including its enhanced Information Society component ADAPT-BIS) and the LEONARDO programme support the introduction of new forms of work organisation by training workers and managers, upgrading their technical skills, helping SMEs to introduce new managerial concepts favouring innovation, developing tools for skills anticipation on which to base human resources development policies and improving the training support structures and systems. The Commission's First Action Plan for Innovation in Europe *Innovation for Growth and Employment*²⁸ has launched a series of transnational pilot actions to explore best practice in management and training fields as well as training schemes for innovation management to encourage new forms of business organisation.

Objective:

Promote knowledge and raise awareness on new forms of work organisation and the protection of workers' rights

Key actions:

The Commission will:

- present in the first half of 1998, following the debate on *Partnership for a New Organisation of Work* Green Paper, proposals for action;
- monitor, in partnership with Member States, ESF programming across all structural funds objectives and the Community Initiatives *EMPLOYMENT* and *ADAPT* to ensure that work organisation is fully mainstreamed, and will take account of the results of this when drawing up proposals for the revision of the Structural Funds;
- develop a European network - involving specialist practitioners in this field, such as the *Acteur Group*²⁹, and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions - with a view to strengthening European organisational R&D, identifying and exchanging good practice, promoting co-operation, and supporting lagging sectors and regions;
- propose to undertake, within the RTD Framework Programmes and the Innovation Action Plan, further research on new methods of work organisation and production.

III.2. Protection of data on employees

28. ICT has made it easier to store, process and access information than ever before. Continuous supervision and collection of data concerning different aspects of the worker's activities, possibly without their knowledge, is feasible, whether for security reasons or for measuring and improving productivity. However, ICT also provide an enormous potential for collecting and processing data on worker's personal behaviour, activities and characteristics, with serious implications in case of inappropriate use of data.

²⁶ COM (97) 128

²⁷ COM (97) 102.

²⁸ COM (96) 589

²⁹ The Acteur Group is an informal group meeting yearly to exchange experience on the development of new forms of work organisation, with members drawn from national institutes concerned with working conditions and organisational change.

29. In all Member States comprehensive laws aim to protect individuals and their fundamental rights with regard to the processing of personal data. At Community level Directive 95/46/EC harmonises such laws with the aim of removing obstacles to the free movement of personal information while ensuring a high level of protection of fundamental rights and in particular of the right to privacy. However, some issues, such as the processing of data on employees' health, the role of workers' representatives or the use of technical monitoring devices, may need to be further examined in order to assess specific needs of protection for employees. Current national laws provide for a rather fragmentary set of rules relating specifically to processing of employees' data.

Objective:

Protect the privacy of employee data

Key actions:

The Commission will:

- present in the first half of 1998 a Communication analysing the situation concerning the protection of the rights and freedoms of workers, in particular the right to privacy with regard to the processing of data and the use of technical monitoring devices;
- encourage privacy enhancing technologies in the context of the 5th RTD Framework Programme.

III.3. Creating an adequate framework for telework

30. Beyond the popular image of teleworkers as people working at home linked through ICT to their employer, telework also embraces forms such as multisite-teleworking, free-lance teleworkers, mobile teleworking, and telework. Teleworking offers a wide range of potential advantages for individuals, businesses and society. However, the penetration of telework is still below the initial expectations. This contrasts with an apparently high and rising interest of people in telework³⁰. Some Governments have introduced pilot schemes to experiment with the use of telework in public administration (e.g. The Netherlands, Sweden and Italy).

31. In 1996, the Commission undertook, in co-operation with the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, comparative research on the national labour law, health and safety and social security regulations and collective bargaining practices on telework. There appears to be no common legal definition of telework and there is almost no specific legislation. Some forms of telework are subject to general laws, others to specific regulations governing homework or the self-employed. In a few cases collective agreements have been concluded and in others, individual agreements, both written and informal, deal with a number of telework issues. Both the HLGE and the Information Society Forum have recommended that Member States clarify the legal and fiscal status of the various forms of teleworking and make a coherent adaptation of the social and legal framework. The consultation process revealed that there is still a need to learn more about the impact and consequences of telework

Objective:

To improve the conditions for the development of telework

Key actions:

The Commission will:

- initiate, in the first half of 1998, consultations with the Social Partners on whether and to what extent Community action on the protection of teleworkers is advisable;
- continue to co-operate with the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions to undertake research on working conditions of teleworkers;
- propose to enhance the role of research on technologies supporting telework and the related social and employment implications in the 5th RTD Framework

³⁰ It was estimated that in 1994 there were about 1.25 million teleworkers in Europe (EUR-12), about 1.21% of the European workforce (Final Report of the TELDET project. Empirica and Work Research Centre. July 1995). The same project reported that over 40% of Europeans were interested in taking up teleworking, more than doubling the interest shown in the 1980s.

Programme;

- continue to support awareness raising activities on telework;
- study how telework can be promoted within the Commission.

III.4. Supporting Social Dialogue as an instrument for change

32. The consultation process, in line with the Green Paper, has shown a clear consensus about the importance of maintaining fair, participative and productive social dialogue in the Information Society. However, the nature of social dialogue is being fundamentally altered in the Information Society. Increasingly, the social partners no longer operate within traditional collective bargaining systems due to the emergence of flexible production systems, the globalisation of markets and production and the convergence of traditionally separated industries. Information, consultation and negotiation should be at the level at which industrial policy decisions are taken, but also at levels and in ways that take into account the increasingly used new forms of work organisation. In this context, the European Works Council Directive³¹ sets a framework for EU level consultation, and the Commission has recently launched a first stage consultation with the social partners with a view to establishing a legally binding Community framework on information and consultation procedures at national level which will complete and make more coherent the Community legislation in this field.
33. The Commission's Communication on the development of the social dialogue³² emphasised that employment, flexibility at work and working conditions should be among the future priorities of the social dialogue. The Commission will encourage the social partners to enhance the role of European social dialogue as a forum for exchange of experience favouring the implementation of integrated approaches to structural change in the workplace based on principles of organisational innovation, technological innovation, human resources development, and employment creation. The current restructuring of the telecommunications sector - where the Joint Committee on Telecommunications is working toward a framework agreement - provides a good example of the nature and pace of the changes underway and how the social dialogue can help smooth the process.
34. The HLGE has recommended that ICT facilities should be made available to Social Partners to improve communication processes, enhancing employee participation and involvement in change. The Commission is already supporting several projects promoting the use of telematic applications by the Social Partners³³ as well as awareness and training actions in the use and effects of ICT³⁴. The Information Society Forum has started also a process of involving Social Partners in their discussions on the future of Information Society in Europe and on the priorities to be set.

Objective:

To enhance the role of social dialogue to facilitate structural change.

Key actions:

The Commission will :

- encourage the Social Partners to enhance the role of European Social Dialogue as a forum for exchange of experience on the implementation of integrated approaches to structural change and on the effects of globalisation;
- monitor the transformation process of former telecommunication monopolies as a basis for piloting the application of such integrated approaches;
- promote initiatives to harness the potential of ICT applications in favour of social dialogue and collaboration amongst the Social Partners to develop awareness and training actions regarding the social dimension of the Information Society.

³¹ Council Directive 94/45/EC of 22 September 1994 on the establishment of a European Works Council.

³² COM(96) 448

³³ Eg. 'Human Resources Director Network' on the Internet and ESDO - European Social Dialogue on Line.

³⁴ In particular through activities under Article 6.1.d of the European Social Fund Regulation and LEONARDO.

III.5. Health and Safety at Work

35. There is now a considerable body of Community legislation on health and safety at work. Several directives apply, inter alia, to ICT, and the directive on visual display screen equipment is specific to this field. Of particular importance is the framework Directive 89/391/EEC which places a number of obligations on both employers and workers. In order to fulfil these obligations, employers must have access to the most up-to-date information available. In this context the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work in Bilbao will promote access, through its Internet network with "focal points" in Member States and international organisations, to a wide range of relevant information on health and safety at work.
36. ICT can assist the correct implementation of Community health and safety legislation and the collection and policy evaluation of health and safety data. However, access to information through ICT is not sufficient in itself and the development of appropriate software and interactive multimedia applications could be of considerable help in the pursuit of these aims. The 1996 Brussels Conference on the use of ICT on health and safety at work identified the marketing of multimedia products and the stimulation of research on standards for their information content as two major challenges.
37. The current estimated use of ICT by 38% of all workers will continue to grow. This increased use will promote a more efficient, more challenging and safer workplace. Nonetheless, there are adverse impacts of ICT, such as growing stress, and poor ergonomics leading to musculo-skeletal disorders. These issues have already been identified by the Commission as priorities for action.

Objective: Exploiting the potential of ICT to promote higher standards of occupational health and safety

Key action: The Commission will :

- develop, together with the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, a telematic network linking the Agency with focal points in each Member State to allow access to a wide-range of information on occupational health and safety;
- examine how the collection and processing of health and safety data and their use can be improved, and make appropriate proposals;
- examine how to stimulate the marketing of multimedia products on health and safety at work.

IV. Turning the opportunities into Jobs

IV.1. Understanding the changes in employment and production

38. The creation of jobs in order to reduce unemployment and increase the employment rate is one of the most pressing needs for the EU. An integrated strategy for growth and employment has been developed at EU level since the 1994 Essen European Council. This process was given a strong political impetus at the Amsterdam Summit, where an employment chapter was introduced in the Treaty. The employment strategy is based on policies promoting a sustainable, non-inflationary growth, macroeconomic environment and structural policies strengthening competitiveness. It gives a priority to the employability of people.
39. The various facets of the Information Society are strongly interlinked with this employment strategy. The introduction of ICT together with organisational changes, in the context of a globalised economy, are driving forces for productivity gains and thereby for higher profits and real wages, which form the basis for further new demand and new employment. Employment is also affected through the changes in demand for more and broader skills and for fewer unskilled people. The more effective the transformation of profits into new investment and from old skills to new skills, the

stronger the employment growth and the quicker the reduction of unemployment. A fundamental structural problem in Europe is the slow adjustment of skills to new economic structures (the two-speed labour market), which can explain the slow economic growth. This is why the European employment strategy increasingly emphasises *employability* as one key element to improve the adjustments of labour markets and the creation of employment.

40. The consultation has revealed that there is a firm demand in Europe for establishing clearer analysis on how the transition towards the Information Society will impact on labour markets. The diverse trends in overall employment growth and decline patterns between regions (especially peripheral), sectors, and occupational groups need to be clearly identified to support a more effective management of the job transformation process.
41. The sectoral structure of employment in Europe has changed radically and services account nowadays for about 65% of total employment in Europe whereas only twenty years ago it accounted for less than 50%. The HLGE has drawn attention to the challenge that this "dematerialisation" of the economy is placing on our conceptual frameworks and statistical systems. The HLGE has also said that the shift from manufacturing towards service activities raises "fundamental issues about where value is being created and how it can be extracted, as well as by whom and how is distributed", and has drawn the attention of the Commission to "the need to adapt taxation to the changing economic structure of the Information Society". While the Commission does not consider the "bit tax" proposed by the Group to be necessary or appropriate³⁵, nonetheless it considers that the repercussions of the Information Society on the efficiency of different forms of taxation need to be carefully examined, as recommended by the European Parliament³⁶. Another aspect that deserves consideration is the environmental impact of the Information Society.

Objective: Improve knowledge of the employment effects of the information Society

Key action: The Commission will:

- undertake regular monitoring in the Annual Report on Employment of trends and changes in the employment structure;
- propose to pursue in the 5th RTD Framework Programme research on the dematerialisation of the economy and the relationships between technological change, employment, skills and economic competitiveness;
- continue, through Eurostat and ESIS, the efforts to improve the statistical framework and tools necessary to understand and monitor the development of the Information Society, particularly related to employment trends;
- analyse, through the Taxation Policy Group, the impact of the Information Society on taxation;
- assess available research and studies on the environmental impact of the Information Society and undertake, if necessary, further research.

IV.2. Exploiting the potential for new jobs

42. A key element in the European strategy for transition to the Information Society is the process of liberalisation of telecommunication markets. Different studies and reports³⁷ have concluded that the overall effects of the telecoms liberalisation in terms of jobs will depend on the pace of that process and on the speed of diffusion of the technologies. The quicker those processes, the better the

³⁵ Tax levied on the "intensity" of information transmission; amounts paid would be based on the number of bits transmitted.

³⁶ Cf. Report of the European Parliament on the communications of the Commission *The Information Society: From Corfu to Dublin and Europe at the Forefront of the Global Information Society: Rolling Action Plan*. PE 221.848/fin

³⁷ *Effects on employment of the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector*, BIPE Conseil, IFO Institut and LENTIC. Brussels, 1997; *The impact of telecoms liberalisation on the single integrated information market*, Analysis, 1996; *The effects of competition on employment in the telecommunications industry: case Finland*, Price Waterhouse, 1996.

chances of a favourable outcome in terms of net job creation. The right regulatory market frameworks have to be set up to facilitate the emergence of new jobs. Better and clearer knowledge is also needed on the mechanisms of company and job creation associated with the Information Society, in particular those related to the Internet and to electronic commerce. The recently adopted *European Initiative in Electronic Commerce*³⁸ is attempting to promote a widespread adoption of electronic commerce to create business and employment opportunities. For instance, the tourism industry (one area where employment growth can be expected) can significantly benefit from the opportunities offered by electronic commerce.

43. Software and computer services have occupied the top positions for employment creation in Europe. Most of these new jobs are created in SMEs³⁹. Programming and multimedia content jobs are expected to be the great beneficiaries of the Internet explosion in Europe. But if those jobs are to stay in Europe it is necessary, among other things, to overcome the shortage of skilled labour in ICT industry, as well as the renewal of skills that become quickly obsolete. The *Communication Competitiveness of the European Information and Communication Technology Industries*⁴⁰, has proposed, among others, the implementation of a "skills standard" scheme to fulfil the objective of upgrading the skills base of European ICT industries. The conditions favouring the development of high growth SMEs in the ICT industries have to be improved, and in particular the access of SMEs to venture and seed capital.
44. The key issue is not just the creation of globally competitive ICT industries but also how the new technologies might help develop enterprises in all other branches, not least SMEs. To remain competitive SMEs increasingly depend on their capacity to absorb and use new technologies, to participate in complex supply chains, to have access to new knowledge, and to participate in the appropriate networks. The problems SMEs face in integrating ICT and in accessing telecommunications infrastructure vary, depending on the level of awareness and the availability of internal competences and local infrastructure. There is also evidence that SMEs have in general a lower take up of new technologies and have difficulties in recruiting skilled people. A survey⁴¹ of 500 fast growing European SMEs found that one third of them had had vacancies in 1994 that were hard to fill; more than 50 % had experienced difficulties in recruiting qualified staff during the previous three years. Firms reported that major difficulties related to the availability of skilled workers and technicians. The Commission is preparing various actions and pilot projects to raise SME's awareness and provide training to SME's managers on the potential of electronic commerce.
45. Regional and local governments have a key role in supporting SMEs to build their capacities, both at management and workforce levels, and to help them grasp the opportunities offered by the Information Society. The Regional Information Society Initiative (RISI), Objective 4, *ADAPT-BIS*, *LEADER* and *LEONARDO* are amongst the initiatives contributing to help SMEs build the human resources that are necessary. The Territorial Pacts of Employment, which share with RISI a common methodology based on a bottom-up approach should be a key instrument to manage the process of change at local level and to grasp the opportunities offered by the Information Society, for example through the development of knowledge resource centres and electronic commerce.

Objective: Underpin the process of change, and develop the human resources base and the adaptation capacities of SMEs

Key action: The Commission:
• will continue to support, through the mainstreaming process of the Information

³⁸ COM (97) 157

³⁹ It is estimated that more than 16 000 software and computing services companies exist in Western Europe, with over 300 000 employees, more than 100 000 independent professionals and small offices employing another 200 000 people. To this should be added Internet and multimedia software and services, the vast majority of which have less than 20 employees and many less than 5 employees. (Panorama of Industry 1997)

⁴⁰ COM (97) 152

⁴¹ Cf *Europe's 500*, EFER, 1996. This confirms the findings of survey reporting that 41% of firms with less than 200 employees had suffered shortages of adequately skilled applicants (*European Economy, Reports and Studies, N°3, 1995*).

Society in the different Structural Funds objectives, the development of local and regional strategies towards the Information Society, and will ensure that the human resources aspects (especially within SMEs) are properly incorporated;

- will continue, in the context of the RISI pilot projects, to collaborate with the regions concerned to exploit and disseminate the results to local and regional authorities;
- urges regions and cities to ensure that the Territorial Pacts of Employment incorporate an Information Society dimension, for example to maximise the potential of electronic commerce.

46. The social economy⁴² is a driving force in forging social solidarity. The new technologies can contribute substantially to the sustainability of the social economy, by helping them to adopt flexible structures and innovative organisational solutions and supporting communication and skills development. As the consultation process revealed, non-profit organisations play a substantial role in familiarising less favoured social groups with ICT. The Structural Funds, through the funding of many local employment initiatives, play an important role in support of such activities. Despite their local focus, these experiences offer lessons that deserve to be disseminated at national and European levels.

Objective: Exploit the employment potential of the Social Economy

Key action: The Commission will :

- include within the forthcoming 1997 call for proposals concerning *The Third System and Employment*⁴³ a specific measure aiming at the promotion of the use of ICT by the operators of the third sector;
- develop a web-site for the exchange of information and experience in this field.

IV.3. Skills for living and working

47. The continuous restructuring of the economy and the introduction of new technologies combined with the slow adaptation of education and training can explain the skills gap in European economies. A recent survey⁴⁴ conducted by the Commission reported that 52 per cent of job seekers have no vocational training (as compared with 28 per cent of those with jobs). Furthermore, only a very small minority of unemployed job seekers are offered opportunities for retraining or upgrading of their skills to meet new demands. Less than 10 per cent of the unemployed were given a new start through education and training. On the business side, Section IV.2 has shown how skills shortages raise obstacles to SMEs growth.

48. The skills gap is a serious and a growing structural problem. The identification of skills mismatches requires a continuous monitoring process. It is also vital to develop the capacity for anticipation in enterprises which helps understand overall change, new skill structures and new opportunities for employment. Objective 4 of the European Social Fund, together with the related Community Initiative *ADAPT*, provides significant support for improving the management of human resources by anticipating the changes which the Information Society will bring, in particular by strengthening investment in human capital, especially low-skilled workers at particular risk of losing their jobs.

Objective: Create a "culture of anticipation" of change as a basis for a forward-looking strategy for human resources investment.

Key action: The Commission and Member States will in the current programming period up to the end of 1999 :

⁴² The social economy includes co-operatives, mutuals, associations and foundations. It covers a wide range of activities from education, cultural and social services to voluntary groups, representing about 10 percent of services employment in the EU.

⁴³ In the framework of activities carried out under budgetary line B3-4013.

⁴⁴ Cf. *European Economy, Reports and Studies*, N° 3, 1995

- a) focus on efforts underway in Objective 4 and *ADAPT*, prioritising
 - actions directed at the low-skilled, with a particular emphasis on acquiring ICT skills;
 - anticipation instruments and mechanisms (e.g. local and sectoral observatories);
 - advisory support for anticipation strategies within enterprises;
 - the role of the social partners in the anticipation of industrial change; and
 - a major Conference in 1998 on Anticipation, Employment and Skills.

b) in line with the Communication *Cohesion and the Information Society*, monitor all ESF programming to ensure that the Information Society dimension is fully mainstreamed, having special regard to:

- the integration of those at a special disadvantage on the labour market, and
- increasing ICT skills training of women and support structures for teleworkers.

The Commission will maintain, in the context of the Agenda 2000 proposals, a strong commitment to improving human resource development systems so as to anticipate economic and social change, maintain employability and harness the employment potential of the Information Society.

49. The Green Paper set out the radical changes in education and training that will be required so that people can keep pace with the changes brought by rapid technological development⁴⁵. It also called for the development of a new architecture of lifelong education and training. ICT provide huge opportunities for improving access to training and its quality through innovative and tailored pedagogic approaches. However, there remain concerns about quality standards, about potential longer-term effects of learning in new "virtual" environments, and about safeguarding education's social and cultural development functions. The economies of new technology-based approaches are also a subject of debate, as are the market conditions and policies which are necessary for the emergence of a strong European presence in multimedia training supply. In this connection, the HLGE has proposed the creation of a European Learning Agency and Network (ELAN) as a forum for sharing approaches and experiences in the areas of leading-edge applications, standards and quality assurance, intellectual property rights, training, and R&D.⁴⁶

Objective:

Promote quality and access in learning opportunities, exploiting the full potential of new ICT-based tools

Key actions:

The Commission's Communication *Learning in the Information Society* - and the forthcoming *Lifelong Learning and the Information Society* - will provide a framework for Information Society strategies for education and training, addressing areas such as inter-school networks, development of multimedia software, training and support for teachers, and mechanisms for exchanging information and pooling experience.

The Commission will :

- examine the HLGE's proposal for a European Learning Agency and Network;
- review and intensify its networking actions for the development of open and distance learning (ODL) systems to enhance employability and facilitate access to training, especially for SMEs, low-skilled workers, and long term unemployed. The provision of qualified trainers for ODL environments should be a priority;
- promote the use of ICT for improving the accessibility of language training, for example by encouraging, in co-operation with institutions and systems in the

⁴⁵ Following the Commission's 1993 White Paper on *Growth, Competitiveness and Employment* and the 1995 White Paper *Teaching and Learning. Towards the Knowledge Society*.

⁴⁶ The Commission's Action Plan *Learning in the Information Society* is already addressing certain of these issues.

Member States, open learning facilities based on the Internet;
• examine how the role of Universities of the Third Age can be developed and promote their networking at European level.

IV.4. ICT and the modernising of Public Employment Services

50. Employment services - which are responsible for 20 per cent of all placements in the Community - have a key role to play in addressing the structural problems of the labour market. ICT are an essential element in the process of modernisation of existing job vacancy and job registration systems. In the past many public employment services (PES) had separate vacancy and registration systems. They are now increasingly modernising and linking them so that local employment office advisers can register job seekers automatically and match them to the vacancies on offer at the earliest possible stage. Over and above these developments there is an increasing use of self-service terminals in local employment offices which allows job seekers to "self select" vacancies and apply direct to the employer. There is also widespread use of teletext facilities to advertise jobs and general services to clients, and use of the Internet is growing rapidly⁴⁷ to make available information on the PES themselves, training courses, employment programmes and job vacancies.
51. The possibilities of networking different local data bases may be helpful in facilitating the mobility of workers, an aspect of the utmost importance in the framework of the Single Market and EMU. At European level, the EURES (European Employment Services) network, launched in 1994, has developed an IT system which allows PES to notify each other their international job vacancies. This system is customised to meet the specific needs of each PES and some border regions have agreed to exchange through EURES all job vacancies in their areas. EURES is also developing Internet-based services, which will mirror at a European level those provided by the PES at Member State level.

Objective: Improve the functioning of the public employment services

Key action: The Commission will:

- encourage and support exchanges of experience between Member States on the use of ICT to modernise Public Employment Services; and
- encourage the linking of national vacancy systems via EURES.

V. The social dimension of the Information Society - the way forward:

52. This Communication has summarised the progress made during the 1990s to integrate the social dimension into the development of policies for the Information Society. It has presented the challenges that lie ahead in reconciling social, economic and technological goals, and new initiatives to be taken in different policy fields. These initiatives comprise an EU strategy for action at three levels:
- At **national and regional level**, where the Commission will provide support to the Member States to integrate a strong social dimension into the ongoing development of their Information Society strategies.
 - At **Community level**, where the Commission will itself contribute to the development and mainstreaming of the social dimension of the Information Society by ensuring that different areas of social policy (such as employment, equal opportunities, health and safety, public health, education and training) and other Community policies take full account of the Information Society dimension.

⁴⁷ Flanders, Wallonia, Denmark, Germany, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Austria, Finland, Sweden, United Kingdom.. France was already advertising these services by Minitel, and it is expected to do it on Internet before the end of 1997.

- At international level, where the European Union has been active to support the development of the Information Society and to give attention to the social dimension. The Commission hosted in 1995 a G-7 Ministerial Conference on the Global Information Society. It has also organised, together with the German Government, in Bonn on 6-8 July 1997, a European Ministerial conference on the exploitation of the potential of the Internet, *Global Information Networks: Realising the Potential*. At this Conference, a declaration was agreed which addressed, amongst other issues, the importance of global networks for the creation of employment, the need for easy public access for all, and the high priority of promoting electronic literacy and education. The Commission will intensify international co-operation on the social dimension of the Information Society - for example on issues such as security and harmful and illegal content - in the framework of the G-7, the Transatlantic Agenda, the co-operation with Central and Eastern Europe Countries and other international fora to which the Commission participates.

Objective:

Strengthen the social dimension at national, European, and international level

Key action:

The Commission will :

- convene an annual round table review with Member State authorities to review progress in implementing the social and employment aspects of their respective strategies and programmes, linked where appropriate, to broader meetings and exhibitions in order to exchange experience;
- continue work on mainstreaming the social dimension of the Information Society in the framework of the Information Society Forum, which will provide a focal point for co-ordinated examination of the interplay between Information Society policies and their social and employment dimension;
- promote in the appropriate international fora the development and use of technologies which can help improve social cohesion and the improvement of living, learning and working conditions for all groups in society.

Annexe:

Glossary of acronyms

ADAPT-BIS	Community Initiative for the Adaptation of the Workforce to Industrial Change - Building the Information Society
EEC	European Economic Community
ELAN	European Learning Agency and Network
EMPLOYMENT-NOW	Community Initiative on Employment and Development of Human Resources - Equal Opportunities for Women
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIS	European Survey of Information Society Projects and Actions
EU	European Union
EURES	European Employment System
G7	Group of the world seven more industrialised countries
HLGE	High Level Group of Experts on the social and societal aspects of the Information Society
ICT	Information and communication technologies
IDA	Community Programme for telematic Interchange of Data between Administrations
Info-2000	Community Programme for the development of a European multimedia content industry
IRIS	Inter-Regional Information Society
ISF	Information Society Forum
LEADER	Community Initiative for Rural Development
LEONARDO	Community Programme for vocational training
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
PES	Public Employment Services
RISI	Regional Information Society Initiative
RTD	Research and technological development
R&D	Research and development
SMEs	Small and medium sized enterprises
TV	Television