

**Brussels, 30 November 2000**

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Subject :            Fight against poverty and social exclusion  
                  – Definition of appropriate objectives

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Members of the European Council will find attached the appropriate objectives in the fight against social exclusion and the eradication of poverty, as finalised by the Council (Employment and Social Policy) on 17 October 2000 pursuant to the instructions of the Lisbon and Santa Maria da Feira European Councils. The objectives are accompanied by an introductory note.

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**OBJECTIVES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

**– Introductory note –**

**1. Political guidelines laid down by the European Council**

At the European Councils in Lisbon and in Feira, the Member States of the European Union took a major initiative by making the fight against poverty and social exclusion one of the central elements in the modernisation of the European social model. The Heads of State and Government agreed on the need to take steps to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by setting suitable objectives to be agreed by the Council by the end of the year. They also agreed that policies for combating social exclusion should be based on an open method of coordination combining national action plans and a programme presented by the Commission to encourage cooperation in this field.

The European Councils in Lisbon and in Feira made the promotion of social cohesion an essential element in the global strategy of the Union to achieve its strategic objective for the next decade of becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. It also set a goal for full employment in Europe in an emerging new society which is more adapted to the personal choices of women and men.

This initiative follows from the inclusion, through the Amsterdam Treaty, of the fight against exclusion in the provisions relating to the Union's social policy (Articles 136 and 137 of the Treaty).

## **2. Multi-dimensional approach**

Poverty and social exclusion take complex and multi-dimensional forms which require the mobilisation of a wide range of policies under that overall strategy. Alongside employment policy, social protection has a pre-eminent role to play, while the importance of other factors such as housing, education, health, information and communications, mobility, security and justice, leisure and culture should also be acknowledged.

It is necessary, therefore, to mainstream the objective of fighting poverty and social exclusion into relevant strands of policy, at both national and community level.

Employment is the best safeguard against social exclusion. In order to promote quality employment it is necessary to develop employability, in particular through policies to promote the acquisition of skills and life-long learning. The implementation of the objectives to which the European Union has committed itself within the European Employment Strategy will, therefore, make a vital contribution to the fight against exclusion. Economic growth and social cohesion are mutually reinforcing. It is a precondition for better economic performance that we create a society with greater social cohesion and less exclusion.

Social protection systems also play a key role. In this context, the national social assistance and minimum income schemes are important instruments in social protection policy. It is vital, in the context of an active welfare state, to create modern systems of social protection which promote access to employment. Retirement pensions and access to health care also play an important role in the fight against social exclusion.

The new knowledge-based society offers great possibilities for reducing social exclusion, both by creating the economic conditions for greater prosperity and by opening up new ways of participating in society. The emergence of new information and communication technologies constitutes an exceptional opportunity, provided that the risk of creating an ever-widening gap between those who have access to the new knowledge and those who do not is avoided. The Lisbon Council directed that exclusion from the information society should be prevented and that it was necessary to pay special attention to the needs of people with disabilities. The implementation of the Commission's action plan "E-Europe 2002 – an Information Society for all", approved by the Feira European Council, should contribute to the achievement of this objective.

In line with the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council, setting appropriate objectives should also involve promoting a better understanding of social exclusion; mainstreaming the promotion of inclusion in Member States' employment, education and training, health and housing policies; and developing priority actions in favour of specific target groups (for example, minorities, children, the elderly and disabled), with Member States choosing amongst those actions according to their particular situations.

### **3. Arrangements for implementation**

Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty respectively give to the Community the task of promoting equality between men and women and of ensuring that all its activities aim to eliminate inequalities and promote equality between men and women. It is therefore necessary to ensure that a concern for gender equality is mainstreamed in all action to be taken to achieve the stated objectives, in particular by assessing the implications for both men and women at the different stages of the planning of, decision-making on, and monitoring of that action.

The implementation of this approach must take account of the principle of subsidiarity. Combatting social exclusion is first and foremost the responsibility of Member States and their national, regional and local authorities, in cooperation with the full range of the bodies concerned, in particular the social partners and NGOs. Furthermore, the nature of the response depends particularly on the nature of national social protection systems and social policies.

Applying the open method of coordination to the fight against social exclusion, in line with the principles defined in the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council, will allow for both coherence and diversity of action at national level. Policies in pursuit of the objective of fighting social exclusion and poverty can vary in nature, and in their implications for Member States and their target groups. Differences in approach between Member States in dealing with these problems will result in solutions and priorities reflecting their individual circumstances.

The open method of coordination will combine national action plans with a Community support programme. In this context, it would be desirable for the Member States to present their national action plans by June 2001. The Social Protection Committee will play a key role in following up this initiative. On employment matters, it will work closely with the Employment Committee.

#### **4. Implementation of the Lisbon European Council's conclusions**

The Council, having regard to the guidelines defined by the Lisbon and Feira European Councils, proposes to the Nice European Council:

- the following objectives, detailed in the annex hereto:
  - to facilitate participation in employment and access by all to the resources, rights, goods and services;
  - to prevent the risks of exclusion;
  - to help the most vulnerable;
  - to mobilise all relevant bodies;

- the following arrangements to pursue these objectives:

**The Member States,**

will pursue the objectives of fighting social exclusion and poverty;

underline the importance of mainstreaming equality between men and women in all actions aimed at achieving those objectives;

are invited to develop their priorities within the framework of those overall objectives and to present a national action plan by June 2001 covering a period of two years;

in order to make it possible to monitor the policies set out here, are also invited to develop, at national level, indicators and monitoring mechanisms capable of measuring progress in regard to each of the objectives elaborated in their national action plans.

**The Commission,**

with a view to a joint report, is invited to present, on the basis of the national action plans to be prepared by the Member States, a summary report identifying good practice and innovative approaches of common interest to the Member States.

**The Member States and the Commission**

are invited to undertake cooperation at European level in order to bring about a better understanding of the problem of exclusion, to promote exchanges of good practice and to seek to develop common approaches and compatibility in regard to indicators; the Action Programme proposed by the Commission will support that cooperation.

**OBJECTIVES IN THE FIGHT**  
**AGAINST POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

**1. To facilitate participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services**

**1.1. Facilitating participation in employment**

In the context of the European employment strategy, and the implementation of the guidelines in particular:

- (a) To promote access to stable and quality employment for all women and men who are capable of working, in particular:
- by putting in place, for those in the most vulnerable groups in society, pathways towards employment and by mobilising training policies to that end;
  - by developing policies to promote the reconciliation of work and family life, including the issue of child- and dependent care;
  - by using the opportunities for integration and employment provided by the social economy.
- (b) To prevent the exclusion of people from the world of work by improving employability, through human resource management, organisation of work and life-long learning.
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## **1.2. Facilitating access to resources, rights, goods and services for all**

- (a) To organise social protection systems in such a way that they help, in particular, to:
  - guarantee that everyone has the resources necessary to live in accordance with human dignity;
  - overcome obstacles to employment by ensuring that the take-up of employment results in increased income and by promoting employability.
- (b) To implement policies which aim to provide access for all to decent and sanitary housing, as well as the basic services necessary to live normally having regard to local circumstances (electricity, water, heating etc.).
- (c) To put in place policies which aim to provide access for all to healthcare appropriate to their situation, including situations of dependency.
- (d) To develop, for the benefit of people at risk of exclusion, services and accompanying measures which will allow them effective access to education, justice and other public and private services, such as culture, sport and leisure.

## **2. To prevent the risks of exclusion**

- (a) To exploit fully the potential of the knowledge-based society and of new information and communication technologies and ensure that no-one is excluded, taking particular account of the needs of people with disabilities.
  - (b) To put in place policies which seek to prevent life crises which can lead to situations of social exclusion, such as indebtedness, exclusion from school and becoming homeless.
  - (c) To implement action to preserve family solidarity in all its forms.
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### **3. To help the most vulnerable**

- (a) To promote the social integration of women and men at risk of facing persistent poverty, for example because they have a disability or belong to a group experiencing particular integration problems.
- (b) To move towards the elimination of social exclusion among children and give them every opportunity for social integration.
- (c) To develop comprehensive actions in favour of areas marked by exclusion.

These objectives may be pursued by incorporating them in all the other objectives and/or through specific policies or actions.

### **4. To mobilise all relevant bodies**

- (a) To promote, according to national practice, the participation and self-expression of people suffering exclusion, in particular in regard to their situation and the policies and measures affecting them.
  - (b) To mainstream the fight against exclusion into overall policy, in particular:
    - by mobilising the public authorities at national, regional and local level, according to their respective areas of competence;
    - by developing appropriate coordination procedures and structures;
    - by adapting administrative and social services to the needs of people suffering exclusion and ensuring that front-line staff are sensitive to these needs.
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(c) To promote dialogue and partnership between all relevant bodies, public and private, for example:

- by involving the social partners, NGOs and social service providers, according to their respective areas of competence, in the fight against the various forms of exclusion;
- by encouraging the social responsibility and active engagement of all citizens in the fight against social exclusion;
- by fostering the social responsibility of business.

