

EUROPEAN SOCIAL AGENDA**approved by the Nice European Council meeting on 7, 8 and 9 December 2000**

(2001/C 157/02)

1. Policy guidelines laid down by the European Council

1. The Lisbon European Council set a strategic goal for the European Union, namely 'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustained economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'.
2. It also set a goal of full employment in Europe in a society more adapted to the personal choices of women and men. The ultimate goal is, on the basis of the statistics available, to bring the employment rate (which currently stands at an average of 61 %) up to a level which is as near as possible to 70 % by 2010 and to increase the proportion of working women (currently an average of 51 %) to over 60 % by 2010. The Heads of State or Government said that an average economic growth rate of around 3 % should be a realistic prospect for the coming years, if the measures they had adopted in Lisbon were implemented against a sound macroeconomic background.
3. In this context, the European Council instructed the French Presidency to initiate proceedings 'on the basis of a Commission communication, with a view to reaching agreement on a European social agenda at the Nice European Council in December, including the initiatives of the different partners involved'.
4. In accordance with these guidelines, on 28 June 2000, the Commission submitted its communication on the European social agenda. The Commission announced this communication, in the framework of its five-year programme, as one of the key elements of its economic and social agenda. The Member States unanimously stressed the high quality of that contribution. They saw it as a relevant basis in view of the guidelines laid down by the European Council in Lisbon and Feira. It may also be noted that the communication clarifies the way in which the Commission intends to use its right of initiative in the field of social policy.
5. On this basis the European Parliament resolution adopted on 26 October 2000 provided substantial elements of deepening and enhancement. It particularly emphasised the following points: the importance of interaction between economic, social and employment policies, the role of the various instruments and especially the open method of coordination and legislation, the mobilisation of all the players involved. It sought to reinforce the agenda on a

series of points and stressed the need for an annual follow-up to the social agenda on the basis of a scoreboard drawn up by the Commission.

6. The discussion has also been enriched by the opinions issued by the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. The contributions from the social partners and the non-governmental organisations have made it possible to incorporate the views of these key players in the sphere of social policy. The relevant committees and working parties of the Council or the Commission, and in particular the Employment Committee, the High-level Working Party on Social Protection and the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, have also played their part in this work.

2. Modernising and improving the European social model

7. At Lisbon the Member States recalled that: 'The European social model, with its developed systems of social protection, must underpin the transformation to the knowledge economy'. They emphasised that: 'People are Europe's main asset and should be the focal point of the Union's policies. Investing in people and developing an active and dynamic welfare state will be crucial both to Europe's place in the knowledge economy and for ensuring that the emergence of this new economy does not compound the existing social problems of unemployment, social exclusion and poverty'.
8. At the heart of its communication the Commission placed the need to ensure a positive and dynamic interaction of economic, employment and social policies and to mobilise all players to attain that strategic objective.
9. In this perspective, the dual objective of social policy needs to be emphasised: the agenda must strengthen the role of social policy as a productive factor; it must enable it to be at the same time more effective in the pursuit of its specific aims concerning the protection of individuals, the reduction of inequalities, and social cohesion. The European Parliament and the social partners have laid particular stress on this dual objective. Economic growth and social cohesion are mutually reinforcing. A society with more social cohesion and less exclusion betokens a more successful economy.

10. An approach of this kind presupposes in the first instance an increase in the level of participation in the employment market, especially by groups that are under-represented or disadvantaged in it. More and better jobs are the key to social inclusion. More accessible labour markets should be promoted, and diversity in employment as a productive factor and a factor for social integration should be encouraged. The strategy of mutual reinforcement of economic and social policies, as defined at Lisbon and consisting in mobilising the full potential of the jobs available, is thus decisive in ensuring the sustainability of retirement pension systems.
11. To prepare for the future, the Union must rely on its achievements. It must continue to promote its inherent values of solidarity and justice as enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The European social model, characterised in particular by systems that offer a high level of social protection, by the importance of the social dialogue and by services of general interest covering activities vital for social cohesion, is today based, beyond the diversity of the Member States' social systems, on a common core of values.
12. The European social model has developed over the last 40 years through a substantial Community *acquis* which the Treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam made it possible to strengthen to a considerable extent. It now includes essential texts in numerous areas: free movement of workers, gender equality at work, health and safety of workers, working and employment conditions and, more recently, the fight against all forms of discrimination. The social chapter of the Treaty established the fundamental role of agreements between the social partners in the law-making process. The Extraordinary European Council in Luxembourg constituted a major step in mobilising the European Union to act on employment. The Amsterdam Treaty, with the European employment strategy, and the European Council meeting in Lisbon and Feira, with the open method of coordination on the subject of social exclusion and greater cooperation in the field of social protection, have contributed new and relevant methods for expanding the new areas of Community action.
13. The objective set at Lisbon presupposes that the European Union identifies the new challenges that call for a response over the next five years.

3. The common challenges

Achieve full employment and mobilise the full potential of jobs available

14. The pace of Europe's growth, supported by continued structural reforms, should make it possible to attain the

objective of a return to full employment. That prospect involves ambitious policies in terms of increasing employment rates, reducing regional gaps, reducing inequality and improving job quality.

15. It is crucial to improve qualifications and increase the opportunities for lifelong education and training, giving an essential role to the social partners. It is essential for skills to develop and evolve in order to improve adaptability and competitiveness and combat social exclusion. Changes in the organisation of work will be necessary in order to take full advantage of the potential of the information and communication technologies. Flexibility and security must be combined in the context of a changing economy.

Benefit from technical progress

16. The rapid changes in information technology, communication and life sciences make it necessary for each Member State, in line with the objective set by the Lisbon European Council, to be at the cutting edge of the knowledge-based and innovatory economy and society, the wellspring today of growth and development.
17. Technological changes also have to bring about an improvement in the standard of living to the benefit of society at large. The emergence of new information and communications technologies is therefore an exceptional opportunity which must be put to the best use, taking care not to widen the gap between those with access to new knowledge and those excluded from it.

Develop mobility

18. Economic integration and the setting up of bi-national or multinational companies mean increased mobility for men and women throughout the European Union. This trend, which is already quite clear among young graduates and senior management, must be encouraged and facilitated, particularly for teachers, researchers and trainees. This demand must be duly taken into account in the context of national education and training systems. Moreover, it is necessary to modernise and improve the Community rules for the protection of the social rights of workers who exercise their right to mobility.

Take advantage of economic and monetary integration

19. The realisation of economic and monetary union and the existence of a large single market are bringing about greater transparency in the comparison of costs and prices. This process of integration, a token of increased competitiveness, will result in the restructuring of the apparatus of production, and sectoral changes that must be

managed and backed up by a greater effort to train workers and help them acquire skills. A positive approach to these changes must be developed by involving undertakings and workers.

20. If, within economic and monetary union, growth is to be sustained and non-inflationary, pay rises in each Member State must in particular reflect increased productivity and must comply with the provisions in the Treaties on maintaining price stability.

Deal with population ageing

21. Every Member State is faced with the challenge of an ageing population. Pursuing appropriate policies on the family and children is one matter, but new responses have to be found, whether in terms of increasing the level of female employment, facilitating and supporting older workers to remain in employment or in terms of the sustainability of retirement systems and measures to take care of those who are dependent.
22. Achieving a high level of employment and increasing female employment will, by reducing the burden of pensions per employed person, reinforce the capacity to deal with the issue of ageing. It is therefore necessary to facilitate access to the labour market by measures to combat discrimination and by the adjustment of social protection systems to promote employment and reinforce the relationship between working life and family life.

Strengthen social cohesion

23. Social cohesion, the rejection of any form of exclusion or discrimination and gender equality are all essential values of the European social model and were reaffirmed at the Lisbon European Council. Employment is the best protection against social exclusion. Growth should benefit all, but for this to be so, proactive measures, especially in problem districts, should be continued and stepped up to deal with the complex nature and multiple facets of exclusion and inequality. Alongside employment policy, social protection has a fundamental role to play, but it is also necessary to recognise the importance of other factors such as housing, education, health, information and communication, mobility, security and justice, leisure and culture. Non-member country nationals legally resident in the territory of the Union should also be integrated satisfactorily.

Make a success of enlargement in the social field

24. Enlargement is a challenge facing the European Union, especially in the social field. The Union should resolutely

support the efforts already made by the applicant countries to adjust and transform their social security systems and to encourage the establishment of a process of convergence in making progress. Not only do they face the major challenge of adjusting and changing their systems but they are also confronted with most of the problems that beset the existing Member States of the European Union. The prospect of enlargement therefore needs to be taken into account in all areas of social policy.

Affirm the social dimension of globalisation

25. By expanding competition, the globalisation of trade and finance increases the demand for competitiveness, which has implications for social policies (e.g. the impact of social-security contributions on wage costs). Multilateral negotiations on economic issues increasingly have a social dimension (for example, discussions on fundamental social rights, health-care problems). It is important that the European Union should organise itself in such a way as to ensure that social issues are taken into account in international negotiations.

4. Implementation arrangements

26. To meet these new challenges, the agenda must ensure the modernisation and deepening of the European social model and place the emphasis on the promotion of quality in all areas of social policy. Quality of training, quality in work, quality of industrial relations and quality of social policy as a whole are essential factors if the European Union is to achieve the goals it has set itself regarding competitiveness and full employment. The implementation of this approach and action taken at Community level must be aimed more particularly, subject to the principle of subsidiarity and giving all due importance to the social dialogue, at ensuring the achievement of common objectives.
27. All those involved, the institutions of the European Union (European Parliament, Council, Commission), the Member States, local and regional authorities, the social partners, civil society and businesses have a role to play.

28. In the implementation of the social agenda all existing Community instruments bar none must be used: the open method of coordination, legislation, the social dialogue, the Structural Funds, the support programmes, the integrated policy approach, analysis and research.

29. The agenda recognises the need to take full account of the principle of subsidiarity and the differences between Member States in social and labour traditions and situations.

30. The agenda will have to remain progressive in character so as to take account of economic and social changes.

31. Strengthening and modernising the European social model so that it can face up to new challenges means realising the implications of the interaction between economic growth, employment and social cohesion when defining the policies of the Union. It is on this basis that the strategic options for these policies must be defined.

32. Taking account of the future direction laid down by the European Council in Lisbon and Feira, and on the basis of the Commission communication, the Employment and Social Policy Council proposes to the Nice European Council that it agree on:

— the following future orientations for social policy:

- I. more and better jobs
- II. anticipating and capitalising on change in the working environment by creating a new balance between flexibility and security
- III. fighting poverty and all forms of exclusion and discrimination in order to promote social integration
- IV. modernising social protection
- V. promoting gender equality
- VI. strengthening the social policy aspects of enlargement and the European Union's external relations,

— the following arrangements for implementing these orientations:

the Commission is requested:

to make appropriate proposals and to exercise its powers with regard to implementing and monitoring the application of Community law in accordance with the role conferred on it by the Treaty,

in accordance with the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council concerning the open method of coordination, to support the latter by means of appropriate initiatives, with particular reference to the development of indicators, in conjunction with the Employment Committee and the Social Protection Committee,

the Council:

is instructed, in its employment and social policy formation, with the involvement of the other formations of the Council, to implement the social agenda,

examines, with a view to their adoption, for the duration of the social agenda, the appropriate proposals submitted by the Commission, with the participation of the European Parliament in accordance with the arrangements laid down by the Treaty,

in accordance with the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council concerning the open method of coordination, formulates and updates the orientations and the appropriate or common objectives; establishes, where necessary, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks. Instructs the Employment Committee and the Social Protection Committee to support the Council's work, favouring contributions from the social partners and, as regards social exclusion, from non-governmental organisations. Welcomes the desire expressed by the European Parliament to be fully involved in this implementation and to establish appropriate contacts,

the social partners are requested:

to make full use of the scope offered by the Treaty for relations based on agreements and joint actions and to make known, before each spring European Council, the joint actions undertaken or planned,

in this connection, to submit an initial joint contribution for the Stockholm European Council in March 2001,

the Member States:

ensure the implementation at national level of the acts adopted by the Council,

in accordance with the conclusions of the Lisbon European Council on the open method of coordination, translate these orientations and these appropriate or common objectives into national, regional or local policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures which take into account national, regional and local differences,

— the following monitoring and updating procedures:

the Commission is requested:

in its annual summary report to the European Council, to present the initiatives it has taken and to emphasise the contributions of all the other actors in modernising and improving the European social model in order to attain the strategic objective adopted in Lisbon,

in this framework to monitor and check the implementation of the social agenda, as requested by the Lisbon European Council, in the context both of the Commission communication of 28 June 2000, and of the orientations set out below and their mid-term review in 2003, to submit, for this purpose, in preparation for the spring European Council, an annual scoreboard of progress made in implementing measures,

the Council:

in its employment and social policy formation:

- examines the Commission reports and scoreboard and
- contributes, in coordination with the other Council formations concerned, to the spring European Council, to achieve the strategic goal set in Lisbon. An initial contribution is expected for the Stockholm European Council.

I. MORE AND BETTER JOBS

The prospect of achieving full employment must be underpinned by resolute efforts to open up access to the labour market to as many people as possible; this in particular means firming up policies on the promotion of gender equality at work, on reconciling professional and family life, on helping older workers to keep their jobs, on combating long-term unemployment and (by mobilising all of the actors concerned, especially those working in the social economy) on providing the most vulnerable categories of people with the prospect of integration. Opting for a knowledge-based society requires investment in human resources to encourage workers to acquire skills and accept mobility. At the same time it is important to promote quality in employment and to develop effective lifelong learning and training strategies to benefit as many people as possible.

- (a) Increase active employment by improving policies for reconciling family and professional life for both men and women, and by encouraging specific categories to have access to jobs or to stay in existing jobs (particularly the long-term unemployed, disabled workers, older workers and minorities): a comparative analysis by the Commission before 2002 on the structural factors likely to encourage participation in the labour market and adjustments to the employment guidelines, in particular when it comes to setting a benchmark on child care provisions.
- (b) Strengthen and continue the coordinated strategy for employment under the auspices of the Employment Committee. Complete the review and impact assessment of the strategy in 2002 with a view to contributing to the further development of the strategy.
- (c) Focus more, in this context, on attaining quality in work and its importance for growth as a significant attractive factor and as an incentive to work. A Commission communication will refer in 2001 to the contribution of employment policy to quality in work (in particular as regards working conditions, health and safety, remuneration, gender equality, balance between flexibility and job security, social relations). On that basis, the Employment Committee will submit a report at the end of 2001 on how to define the indicators to enable these to be monitored.
- (d) Combat long-term unemployment by developing active preventive and reintegration strategies based on early identification of individual needs and improving employability.
- (e) Support, in this context, the local and regional dimensions of the employment strategy. The regional dimension will require a strategic approach at all levels, including at European level, and may require varied and targeted policies for different regions, in order to meet the objectives agreed at Lisbon, including greater regional cohesion.
- (f) Improve effective access to lifelong education and training, in particular in new technologies in order to avoid skills shortages. Strategies in this area should coordinate the shared responsibility of public authorities, social partners and individuals, with a suitable contribution being made by civil society. The social partners are requested to negotiate measures to improve further education and training to increase adaptability. They are also requested, as are governments, to inform the Employment and Social Policy Council by the end of 2001 of any provisions adopted at European or national level in the context of national employment action plans. A conference will be held on this question for all parties concerned in 2002. A European award will be created for pioneering companies.
- (g) Promote both the identification and dissemination of good practice in employment and the social dimension of the information society, in close conjunction with the High Level Working Party on this question and develop further the 'human resources' aspect of the 'e-Europe' plan.
- (h) Facilitate mobility for European citizens:
 - by developing a knowledge-based Europe through eliminating the barriers to mobility for teachers, research workers, students, training professionals and

people undergoing training, specifically within the context of the mobility action plan and the recommendation adopted by the Council,

- by promoting at European level the recognition of qualifications and skills gained in the Member States in keeping with the Treaty,
 - by encouraging the free movement of persons: amend, by 2003, the Directives on the right of residence and encourage improvement of the rules on the free movement of workers,
 - by modernising the rules, while the social policy agenda is being implemented, ensuring that migrant workers retain their rights to social security; by improving the application of legislation on this matter, in particular by promoting the use of new information and communication technologies,
 - by strengthening the arrangements for safeguarding additional pension rights before the end of 2002 for workers moving with the European Union.
- (i) While the social policy agenda is being implemented, commence a study of the links between migratory flows and employment policies.
- (j) Ask the Commission to continue its examination, with due regard for the responsibilities in the matter conferred on it by the Treaty, of the relationship between social policy and competition policy, while maintaining appropriate contacts with the Member States and the social partners.

II. ANTICIPATING AND CAPITALISING ON CHANGE IN THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT BY CREATING A NEW BALANCE BETWEEN FLEXIBILITY AND SECURITY

The far-reaching changes in the economy and the labour market, resulting specifically from the emergence of a knowledge-based economy and from globalisation, are gaining momentum in all Member States. These changes call for fresh collective responses that take account of workers' expectations. Social dialogue and consultation must create the right conditions for workers to participate in change, by anticipating new developments in enterprises, sectors of industry and countries. The search is on for new kinds of collective framework more suited to the new forms of employment and these must allow for mobility and individual investment in increasingly diversified forms of work by making it easy to go from one situation or one job to another. The measures adopted to accompany these changes must strike a balance between the various existing Community instruments, in particular the open method of coordination and leave the social partners considerable scope for initiative.

- (a) Involve workers more in managing change by improving the Community framework, by the year 2002, of rules on workers' rights to be informed, consulted and involved (review the Directive on the European Works Council, continue to examine the Directives on information and consultation and on the social aspects of the European company).
- (b) Develop, in particular on the basis of a Commission communication in 2002, the Community strategy on health and safety at work:
- to consolidate, adapt and, where appropriate, simplify existing standards,
 - to respond to new risks such as work-related stress, by initiatives on standards and exchanges of good practice,
 - to promote the application of legislation in SMEs, taking into account the special constraints to which they are exposed, to apply them by means of a specific programme,
 - to develop, from 2001 onwards, exchanges of good practice and collaboration between labour inspection institutions in order to satisfy the common essential requirements more effectively.
- (c) Take account, in the context of the growing interdependence of European economies, of changes in the working environment and in work relations:
- while the European social policy agenda is being applied, organise the exchange of innovatory experiences at Community level on labour relations combining worker security with flexibility for undertakings, while involving the social partners in all relevant aspects of modernising and improving work relations,
 - as of 2001, in line with the proposals from the social partners, set up a 'European Monitoring Centre on Change' within the Dublin Foundation,
 - before 2003, examine, with a view to its adjustment, the Directive on the protection of workers if the employer is declared bankrupt; review, as the Commission has announced, existing Directives on the guarantees afforded to workers in the event of mass redundancy, on the protection of labour relations if the employer changes and, where appropriate, adapt them,

- invite the social partners:
 - to continue the social dialogue, on problems related to the organisation of work and new forms of employment,
 - to launch debates which might lead to negotiations on shared responsibility between undertakings and workers as regards the employability and adaptability of the workforce, in particular from the perspective of mobility,
 - to examine data-protection questions.
- (d) Support initiatives linked to the social responsibility of undertakings and to managing change, by means of a Commission communication.
- (e) Improve the functioning of the macroeconomic dialogue provided for at the European Council in Cologne so that it fully contributes to the positive and dynamic interaction of economic, social and employment policies. Encourage exchanges of information between the Community institutions and the social partners, on ongoing changes in the make-up and content of wages and salaries.
- (f) By the year 2004, organise an exchange of views on individual dismissals, taking account of social-security benefits and national labour market characteristics.
- (g) In 2001, supplement Community legislation on working time by finalising the provisions for the road-transport sector. Make progress on the texts on harmonising the social aspects of maritime and air transport.
- III. FIGHTING POVERTY AND ALL FORMS OF EXCLUSION AND DISCRIMINATION IN ORDER TO PROMOTE SOCIAL INTEGRATION**
- The return to sustained economic growth and the prospect of full employment in the near future do not mean that poverty and exclusion in the European Union will automatically decrease. These factors do, however, make the continued existence of poverty and exclusion even less acceptable. The Lisbon European Council underlined the need to take steps to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty. That political will has been affirmed at the highest level in each of the Member States and must be transmitted to the grass roots by mobilising all the local actors, in particular NGOs and the social services. It must be accompanied too, by action to ensure equal treatment for all non-member country nationals residing lawfully on Union territory.
- (a) Implement by June 2001, pursuant to the open method of coordination defined by the Lisbon European Council, a national two-year action plan for combating poverty and social exclusion on the basis of the jointly adopted objectives. This plan states the progress aimed for by national policies and lists the indicators used to assess the results of the action undertaken; progress, as from 2001, on the basis of the indicators adopted by the States in their national action plans, towards achieving compatibility as regards those indicators and the defining of commonly agreed indicators.
- (b) Exploit the possibilities offered by new information and communication technologies to reduce social exclusion by encouraging access for all to the knowledge society, and to that end, implement the Commission action plan 'e-Europe 2002 — An information society for all', approved by the Feira European Council.
- (c) Ensure a follow-up, when the first national action plans are completed, to the 1992 recommendation on minimum guaranteed resources to be provided by social protection systems and examine possible initiatives to monitor progress in the area.
- (d) Use exchanges of experience to support the efforts of Member States in urban policy so as to combat social and spatial segregation.
- (e) Evaluate the impact of the ESF, including the Community initiative EQUAL, on the promotion of social inclusion.
- (f) Ensure effective implementation of Community legislation on combating all types of discrimination on grounds of gender, race or ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, disability, age or sexual orientation. Develop exchanges of experience and of good practice to strengthen these policies.
- (g) Conduct, in accordance with the conclusions of the Tampere European Council, a more vigorous integration policy for non-member country nationals legally resident on Union territory which should aim at granting them rights and obligations comparable to those of European Union citizens. Develop exchanges of experience on national integration policies.
- (h) Develop, in particular during the European Year of Disabled Citizens (2003), all action intended to bring about the fuller integration of disabled people in all areas of life.
- (i) Establish conditions for an efficient partnership with the social partners, non-governmental organisations, local authorities and bodies that manage social services. Involve undertakings in this partnership to strengthen their social responsibility.

IV. MODERNISING SOCIAL PROTECTION

Social protection systems are an essential component of the European social model, and although they remain the responsibility of each Member State, they face common challenges. To confront them more effectively, cooperation between Member States must be strengthened, particularly through the Social Protection Committee. The modernisation of social protection systems must meet the requirements of solidarity: that is what is at stake in the action we have to take on retirement and health and to achieve an active welfare state that strongly encourages participation in the employment market.

- (a) Continue cooperation and exchanges between States on strategies designed to guarantee secure and viable pensions in future: national contributions forwarded with a view to the Stockholm European Council meeting (March 2001), study on this subject to be sent by the Employment and Social Policy Council to the European Council in Gothenburg (June 2001), which will determine the subsequent stages.
 - (b) Analyse, on the basis of each of the Member States' policies, the adjustments made to social protection systems and the progress still to be made in order to make work pay and promote secure incomes (2002) and to encourage reconciliation between work and family life.
 - (c) Before 2003, conduct a study on how, with due regard for the requirements of solidarity, a high and sustainable level of health protection can be guaranteed, taking into account the impact of ageing (long-term care): report to the Employment and Social Policy Council in conjunction with the Health Council.
 - (d) Examine, on the basis of studies undertaken by the Commission, the evolution of the situation with regard to cross-border access to quality health care and health products.
 - (e) Ensure monitoring and evaluation, throughout the period of the agenda, of close cooperation in social policy; envisage and develop appropriate indicators in this field.
- (a) Integrate the concept of gender equality into all relevant areas, particularly those covered by the social policy agenda, in the design, monitoring and assessment of policies by establishing appropriate mechanisms and tools, such as, where appropriate, gender impact assessments, monitoring tools and performance assessment criteria.
 - (b) Increase women's access to decision-making by setting appropriate goals or time-bound targets for the public sphere and the economic and social sectors in every Member State.
 - (c) Implement the Commission communication entitled 'Towards a Community framework strategy on gender equality (2001 to 2005)', examine, with a view to their adoption, the proposed amendments to the 1976 Directive on equal treatment and reinforce equality-related rights by adopting before 2003 a Directive, based on Article 13 of the EC Treaty, on promoting gender equality in areas other than employment and professional life.
 - (d) Increase awareness, the pooling of resources and the exchange of experience, in particular through the establishment of a European institute for gender issues and the setting up of an experts' network. The feasibility study should be completed in 2001.
 - (e) Extend and reinforce initiatives and action designed to promote equality between men and women at work, particularly as regards pay. Develop the existing initiative for female entrepreneurs.
 - (f) Better reconcile work and family life, particularly by encouraging quality care for children and dependent persons.

V. PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

Equality between the sexes must be established across the board throughout the whole social policy agenda and be supplemented by a number of specific measures concerning women's access to decision-making and the reinforcement of equality-related rights and those reconciling family life and working life.

VI. STRENGTHENING THE SOCIAL POLICY ASPECTS OF ENLARGEMENT AND THE EUROPEAN UNION'S EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Enlargement and external relations are, in several respects, a challenge and an opportunity for Community action in the social field. It is necessary to develop the sharing of experience and strategy with applicant States, particularly so as better to face together the challenges of full employment and the fight against exclusion; and to promote an integrated economic and social agenda consistent with the European approach in international bodies.

- (a) Prepare for enlargement with the aim of promoting economic and social progress in the enlarged Union:
- organise regular exchanges of views on all aspects of social policy linked to enlargement, in conjunction with the social partners,
 - help the applicant countries to take on board the European employment strategy, implementation of the objectives of combating poverty and social exclusion, and strengthened cooperation on social protection,
 - support the role of the social dialogue in that context.
- contribute to the development of the NGOs concerned in the applicant countries.
- (b) Develop a concerted approach to international social policy issues within the multilateral institutions (United Nations, World Health Organisation, Council of Europe, International Labour Organisation and, where appropriate, WTO and OECD).
- (c) Strengthen the social dimension of cooperation policy, particularly the fight against poverty, the development of health and education as well as the taking into account of gender equality (especially in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean process).
-