



The Foundation's contribution in this context is to:

- Identify and assess ways to promote awareness and changes in behaviour by industry including SMEs and consumers;
- Analyse the impact of new instruments and actions in specific sectors including environmental industries;
- Facilitate shared responsibility and participation in policies and actions by the main social actors (public authorities, public and private enterprises, professional organizations, workers and unions, non-governmental organizations and citizens) to implement sustainable development and to assess their effects.

The work will continue to be developed in a way complementary to that of the European Environment Agency in Copenhagen.

■ Social cohesion

A cohesive society is a key component of economic progress. Issues of basic human rights, social protection and equal opportunities are integral to this concept, together with those of participation, citizenship and self-sufficiency.

Given the dangers of a dual or divided society, the challenge is to bring back those who have been excluded from the benefits of economic growth.

The Foundation's work in this area deals with three main themes:

1. Effective strategies to build a more inclusive and equitable society involving all the key actors.
2. Methods to increase the involvement of those marginalised by economic and social change
3. Reduction of barriers to employment.

The objectives of its new programme are to:

- Examine concepts of active citizenship and active social policies;
- Investigate how mainstream public policies can support effective local strategies;

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- Analyse the real outcomes of innovative developments in policy and practice.

Work has already begun on reviewing approaches by the welfare and social protection systems to tackling social exclusion. The contribution of the social partners and the active participation of those experiencing or at risk of exclusion will be integral to this work.

■ Participation

A rapidly-changing society faces complex problems. These demand full participation by the social actors in decision-making processes, both in the workplace and in the wider community.

The Foundation stresses the importance of involving those concerned in coping with change. It offers significant support for the improvement of consultation and participation processes leading to an improved quality of life.

The Foundation also contributes to the development of a more participative society by itself acting as a forum for debate, exchange of information and opinion between the key actors in society.

Within the new 1997-2000 programme it will also:

- Monitor and evaluate participatory practices at the workplace;
- Explore innovative approaches to participation (new topics, new forms of co-operation, new partnerships) in the workplace and in the wider community;
- Examine the concept of active citizenship, particularly in relation to issues of employment and social protection;
- Assess the contribution of strategies for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of public services and in the area of sustainable consumption.

The workplace will continue to be a significant focus for this work with the development of the European Industrial Relations Observatory, which will provide its different users with relevant and up-to-date information on events in Member States and at EU level.

A programme for 1997 – 2000



Facing up to the challenges of European society



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Globalization of the market, the impact of the information society, demographic and structural change and a persistently high level of unemployment; together these factors are placing unprecedented pressure on the economic and social structure of the European Union. In this context, the Foundation has examined the contribution it can make to the planning and establishment of better living and working conditions as we move toward the 21st century. Employment will be the key focus for its future work. The related critical situation in the welfare state, coupled with the need to ensure social solidarity, link six major challenges to which the Foundation will give priority attention:

- Employment
- Health and well-being
- Social cohesion
- Equal opportunities
- Sustainable development
- Participation

The activities of the Foundation over the four years to the year 2000 will address the six challenges in an integrated way, taking into account the relationships and links between major factors of change affecting the quality of living and working conditions in Europe.

The programme benefits from the unique composition of the Foundation's Administrative Board. It is comprised of representatives from government, the European Commission and employer and worker organizations in Member States. It is the authority responsible for the development of the programme. Through wide and inter-active consultation within its representatives groups it keeps the programme grounded firmly in reality. It is in this way that the Foundation effectively contributes to European policy-making.

The Foundation was established by the Council of Ministers in 1975 under the following regulation:

The aim of the Foundation shall be to contribute to the planning and establishment of better living and working conditions through action designed to increase and disseminate knowledge likely to assist this development. With this aim in view, the task of the Foundation shall be to develop and pursue ideas on the medium and long term improvement of living and working conditions in the light of practical experience and to identify factors leading to change. (Council Regulation [EEC] no. 1365/75 of 26 May 1975, Article 2)

The challenges

■ Employment

Employment, job creation and the fight against unemployment are priority social challenges in the European Union. Economic growth has not automatically translated into more jobs, and unemployment has remained persistently high.

The challenge for the European Union is to meet the need for decent work and income for its population yet remain competitive in a global economy.

Employment issues will be the focus of attention in the forthcoming work of the Foundation. Three main themes will be prioritised:

1. Potential for job creation offered through improvements in living and working conditions;
2. Improving the quality of employment and of working conditions;
3. Development of improved and more equitable access to good employment opportunities by disadvantaged groups and in disadvantaged regions.

The objectives of the Foundation will be to:

- Identify the impediments and opportunities for employment growth especially, in the service sector, in new and alternative areas of employment;
- Assess the potential offered by increased flexibility and changing patterns of life, care, work and learning;



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'Europe's ability to adapt to the challenges and to exploit the opportunities being created by a rapidly evolving economy and society will require partnership between individuals, employers, unions and governments dedicated to managing change. If that change can be managed with determination and understanding of both the competitive pressures and the social implications, especially the effect on employment, then we shall all gain in the long run. It is in this way by confronting the challenges of European society that the Foundation will make its contribution over the next four years and into the next century.'

– Clive Purkiss, Director of the Foundation

- Examine new approaches and working methods to increase the involvement of social actors in issues of job creation;
- Improve understanding of the job creation potentials of the social economy and the development of a more active society.

■ Equal opportunities

In a democratic society, equal opportunities is a concept fundamental to human rights. Closely linked to principles of justice and freedom, it is a key objective to achieving greater competitiveness and economic growth.

Despite considerable progress over the last two decades, much remains to be achieved in realising the goal of equal opportunity for men and women. In addition others continue to experience discrimination on account of their age, race, religion or other factors.

Within the new programme, the Foundation will centre its energies on:

- Evaluating strategies to promote equal opportunities' practice at the workplace, and in society in general;
- Examining the barriers to, and potential for, improved equal opportunities and increased involvement in decision-making processes;
- Analysing the impact of the information society, economic and monetary union and the changing nature of the labour market on equal opportunities between men and women and other groups subject to discrimination.

■ Health and well-being

The boundaries between life at work and life outside work are becoming blurred. Issues of health and well-being of workers and citizens must therefore be addressed in an integrated and innovative manner. The Foundation's work takes account of the value of good health as a positive element in economic performance.

It has confirmed that there is an increase in psycho-social (stress), mental health (depression) and musculo-skeletal problems. It underlines a need for a more holistic and multidisciplinary approach for tackling issues of health and well-being in Europe.

As a result, the Foundation in its work has adopted three approaches:

1. Monitoring and assessment of working conditions and health at work;
2. Identification of strategies, policies and instruments with a strong focus on prevention and on health promotion;
3. An active programme of networking and dissemination with key audiences and with the many organizations working in this field at national and international levels.

The Foundation's objective for these areas is to:

- Investigate new methods of improving the quality of life, health and well-being;
- Identify the costs and benefits of measures to promote health at work and in private life;
- Assess the quality and effectiveness of public services and utilities which affect health and well-being.

In the further development of activities in this area the Foundation will cooperate with the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work in Bilbao.

■ Sustainable development

Continued economic and social progress is possible without further detriment to the environment and natural resources.

Sustainable development policy is based on the following premise:

- Avoidance of wastage and depletion of the world's natural resources;
- Re-use and recycling of materials;
- Rational usage of existing energy resources;
- Exploration of alternative and environmentally-friendly sources;