

## Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee on the 'Implementation of the Employment Policy Guidelines for 1999'

(1999/C 209/14)

On 28 January 1999 the Economic and Social Committee decided, in accordance with Rule 23(3) of its Rules of Procedure, to draw up an opinion on the 'Implementation of the Employment Policy Guidelines for 1999'.

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for the preparatory work, adopted its opinion on 6 May 1999. The rapporteur was Mrs Engelen-Kefer.

At its 364th plenary session (meeting of 27 May 1999) the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 105 votes to 6, with 11 abstentions.

### 1. Introduction

1.1. The inclusion of an employment chapter in the Amsterdam Treaty and the Luxembourg Employment Summit of November 1997 have set in motion the irreversible process of co-ordinating employment policies at European level in order to substantially reduce the persistently high level of unemployment in Europe. Member States have now come to recognise that 'promoting employment is a matter of common concern' (Article 126 of the Amsterdam Treaty). The goals and procedures of a co-ordinated European strategy for employment, as set out in the Amsterdam Treaty's employment chapter, first became reality with the 1998 guidelines and the drawing up of National Action Plans.

1.2. The four pillars on which the Luxembourg guidelines are based are improving employability, developing entrepreneurship, encouraging adaptability in businesses and their employees, and strengthening equal opportunity policies. These are all key areas in helping to create new jobs and reintegrating the unemployed in the labour market. All Member States have rapidly presented their National Action Plans to implement the 1998 guidelines and this in itself signifies progress. In many cases the guidelines have been accompanied by concrete, verifiable targets — e.g. deciding on the proportion of the pool of unemployed persons qualifying for active labour-market measures to promote employability — and these have proved to be particularly effective. And in the Council Decision on the employment policy guidelines for 1999 the Member States were 'invited to set themselves national targets which could be quantified wherever possible and appropriate'.

1.3. Nevertheless, the ESC considers that it is necessary to develop a common understanding which is consistent with 'active labour-market policies'. Equally, comparability of statistics must be ensured and appropriate indicators used. The ESC also calls for qualitative analyses and accordingly urges Member States to come up with ways and means of improving the evaluation of the success of work-promotion schemes.

1.4. The employment policy guidelines for 1999, which were adopted at the Council Summit in Vienna on 11 and 12 December 1998, emphasize the importance 'for the future success of the Luxembourg process of engaging in a broad and intensive dialogue between all the actors involved, i.e. the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, Social Partners, the European Central Bank and the European Investment Bank.' To this effect an additional German presidency recital has been taken on board reading as follows: 'Whereas the Vienna European Council has given the Council and the Commission a mandate to report to the forthcoming Cologne European Council on the development of a European Employment Pact in the framework of the Luxembourg process.'

1.5. Within the framework of this request from the Vienna Council Summit, the ESC, as a forum for organized civil society in Europe, would like to make its own specific contribution to the intensification of dialogue on Europe's employment strategy. This contribution would take the form of organising a thorough exchange of experiences on good practices, thereby helping to translate the employment guidelines into reality. Because of its composition, the ESC is particularly well suited to this task since it represents not only the traditional players on the labour market, but other key economic and social organisations as well. In this connection, a hearing has been organized on a number of selected 'good practices' relating to the four pillars making up Europe's employment strategy. In their joint report on European employment policy, both the Ecofin and Labour/Social Councils have already identified good practices in relation to the four pillars making up the employment guidelines and these have duly been taken into account in the hearing.

### 2. Assessment and implementation of the employment policy guidelines for 1999

2.1. The ESC bases this own-initiative opinion on Article 128(2) of the Amsterdam Treaty, which empowers the Council to consult the ESC before the annual setting of the employment policy guidelines.

2.2. The ESC welcomes the EU Commission's intention, in drawing up the 1999 guidelines, of essentially adhering to these four major principles and keeping the consolidation and continuation of the Luxembourg process in the spotlights. The ESC also understands and firmly supports the logical reasons for adopting concrete, supplementary measures in the following areas:

- reform of tax and charges systems,
- use of employment potential in the services sector,
- consolidation of lifelong learning, particularly in respect of new information technologies,
- integration of the disabled and ethnic minorities,
- improvements in reconciling work with family life.

2.3. A vital precondition for more employment is the reversal of the trend which has been noted in the EU towards higher taxes and charges on labour<sup>(1)</sup>. The ESC therefore welcomes the call in the 1999 guidelines for the Member States to examine whether and to what extent their tax and benefit systems offer incentives to the unemployed to look for jobs and to employers to create new jobs<sup>(2)</sup>. However, this must not be allowed to lead to any worsening of social welfare benefits for the unemployed. In this connection it is also particularly important, in the ESC's view, to pay greater attention to combating unreported and illegal employment.

2.4. One cause of the employment problems in Europe is the less than average (in world terms) share accounted for by the services sector, including the social, environment-oriented and industry-related services sector. It is therefore only logical that the Member States should be called upon in the guidelines to 'develop framework conditions to fully exploit the employment potential of the services sector and industry-related services'. Tapping the employment potential of the information society, the social and the environmental sector is of particular importance in creating new jobs, as the guidelines themselves state. Neither should the responsibility — in social and employment policy terms — of the public sector be overlooked.

2.5. Closely connected with this is the need to provide young people with IT skills through general and vocational training, and thereby ease their transition to working life. However, the rapid rate of change in information technology also requires a constant adaptation of male and female workers' skills through lifelong learning, in order to maintain their employability. The ESC considers it particularly important to transform the guidelines into reality.

2.6. In accordance with the strengthening of the non-discrimination principle in the Amsterdam Treaty, the EU Commission has again taken up in the 1999 guidelines the

creation of a labour market open to all, where special attention is to be paid to the integration of disadvantaged groups. The ESC welcomes this extra move because disabled people, ethnic minorities and other particularly disadvantaged groups, such as the long-term unemployed or elderly people, are threatened with social exclusion unless opportunities on the labour market are made available to them through preventive measures and active help with integration. It is therefore in favour of a 'mainstreaming' approach being adopted in this area too. The EU Commission is asked to put the announced anti-discrimination measures into effect through an annual action plan and appropriate legal measures. The action plan should take into consideration the fact that disadvantaged groups include many people whose skills and experience go untapped, and propose ways of turning diversity to our advantage, both for the individuals concerned and for society as a whole.

2.7. The EU Commission has given particular emphasis in the 1999 guidelines to promoting equal opportunities for women and men. The ESC particularly endorses the 'mainstreaming' approach, which consists of removing gender-specific disadvantages in all four key areas of the employment-policy guidelines. In particular, it supports the move whereby women should have access to active labour-market policy measures in proportion to their numbers among the unemployed, with the aim of abolishing the higher than average unemployment rate among women. Increasing the participation of women in the labour force is necessary in order to increase the employment rate in Europe as a whole. First, the appropriate framework conditions must be created by removing disincentives in the tax and benefit system. Then, adequate child-care facilities must be provided and more flexible working arrangements made available for women and men, so they can better reconcile work and family life. The ESC considers the additions made to this section of the 1999 guidelines to be particularly effective since, in addition to measures aimed directly at integration into the labour market, they include changes to the social conditions that currently still stand in the way of higher female participation in the labour force.

2.8. As the ESC has already made clear in its opinion on the Commission Communication on 'Guidelines for Member States' employment policies 1998'<sup>(3)</sup>, it is considered necessary to develop an overall concept that embraces both macro-economic policy and also other policy areas which have an impact on employment. It is therefore important to ensure compatibility between the employment-policy guidelines and the economic policy guidelines drawn up annually in accordance with Article 99(2) of the Amsterdam Treaty. More co-ordination is needed between economic, financial and monetary policies, and for structural reforms in the economy.

2.9. The ESC is pleased that the Vienna Council Summit underlines the need for such an overall concept and emphasises

<sup>(1)</sup> See too the ESC Opinion on the 1999 Annual Economic Report 'The EU economy at the arrival of the euro: promoting growth, employment and stability'.

<sup>(2)</sup> See too the ESC Opinion on the Proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 77/388/EEC as regards the possibility of applying on an experimental basis a reduced VAT rate on labour-intensive services.

<sup>(3)</sup> OJ C 19, 21.1.1998.

that 'it will be necessary to both deepen and strengthen economic policy co-ordination (...) in order to ensure the success of EMU and to support sustainable job-creating growth.' The Council goes on to say that this requires 'appropriate and coordinated responses in Member States and at the Union level, encompassing budgetary and monetary policies as well as structural policies and taking into account wage developments.'

2.10. The ESC likewise fully agrees with the Council's statement that it is necessary 'to strengthen existing instruments and forge them into a coherent strategy for employment, growth, stability as well as economic reform evolving towards a European Employment Pact within the framework of the Luxembourg process.'

2.11. The ESC is convinced that only by following such an overall strategy — which embraces all policy areas of relevance to employment and gives collective responsibility to players within the framework of a European Employment Pact — can there be any chance of success.

2.12. With regard to the Luxembourg process, the ESC regards the use of benchmarks as well as the highlighting of good practices as important instruments for introducing productive competition over successful labour-market policies. However, the ESC believes that the criteria for identifying good practices must be transparent and verifiable and must take into account the fact that individual Member States set out from different starting positions when launching active labour-market policies. A qualitative assessment should however go beyond the narrow framework of the monitoring of short-term effects. In this connection, the ESC would recall the importance the Luxembourg process places on the contribution of the social partners. According to the Luxembourg European Council, 'the social partners at all levels will be involved in all stages of this approach and will have their contribution to make to the implementation of the guidelines.' In the ESC's view, this also means that the social partners must take part in drafting and comment on National Action Plans prior to the compilation of the Joint Employment Report.

2.13. The ESC generally agrees with the Council that progress needs to be made in comparing performances positively and constructively. It therefore strongly supports the European Council's conclusions calling for 'additional verifiable objectives and deadlines both at European and national level, common performance and policy indicators, as well as a consistent statistical basis as key elements on the way to a European Employment Pact...'

2.14. The ESC is of the view that if we are to take Europe's employment strategy forward, equal weight needs to be given to the policies of stability, growth and employment laid down in the Amsterdam Treaty. A balanced economic and structural policy is needed so that achieving a high level of employment receives the same attention as the consolidation of central

government budgets and the fight against inflation. Without calling into question the independence of the European Central Bank, monetary policy does have particular significance here<sup>(1)</sup>. In the opinion of the ESC this requires a greater co-ordination of economic, financial and monetary policies at European level and the introduction of economic reforms within the framework of structured dialogue between governments, the EU Commission, the ECB and the social partners.

2.15. The ESC expects a signal to be sent from the Cologne Council Summit in support of a European Employment Pact (in the sense of a process) and hopes that the Pact will be taken into account in the employment policy guidelines for the year 2000.

### 3. Evaluation of good practices

3.1. With the Joint Employment Report for 1998 of the Labour/Social Affairs and Ecofin Councils, the EU Commission has for the first time used selected quantitative indicators to carry out a comparative analysis of the implementation of employment policy guidelines in the different Member States. The methodological approach used on this occasion — i.e. identification of the relative position of each Member State compared with the average of the three best performing Member States on the basis of selected quantitative indicators — contrasts favourably with the approach adopted with earlier reports. The method in fact may very well spark a productive competitiveness between Member States to achieve a reduction in unemployment. In addition, the EU Commission should evaluate those measures taken by the Member States themselves to improve the employment situation and subject such measures to a qualitative, comparative analysis. The EU Commission has laid the groundwork for this by making reports on individual Member States part and parcel of the Joint Employment Report. This important first step however needs to be consolidated by reaching an understanding on common performance and policy indicators which would have to be put on a solid footing acceptable to all Member States. The exchange of views among Member States on successful labour-market policies should also be pursued in greater depth whilst taking into consideration the overall employment policy strategy of each individual Member State.

3.2. International comparisons show that labour-market successes depend on a large number of factors, but particularly on the existence of a macro-economic approach geared to sustained growth and employment and accompanied by financial, monetary and taxation policy measures.

3.3. Quite independently of any assessment by the ESC, an Institute for Labour Market and Occupational Research (IAB)'s<sup>(2)</sup> evaluation of the experiences of three European Member States, namely the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Denmark, comparing them with the situation in the USA, identifies the following factors, for example, as being essential to a successful employment policy in terms of the findings of the study:

(1) See too the ESC Opinion on the 1999 Annual Economic Report 'The EU economy at the arrival of the euro: promoting growth, employment and stability'.

(2) Institute for Labour Market and Occupational Research (IAB): Communications from the Institute, No. 2, 1998.

- a comprehensive macro-economic approach geared to sustainable growth and employment,
- the creation of a climate favourable to investment and the growth of domestic demand (through financial, monetary and taxation policies),
- moderate wage rises and differentiated wage systems whilst maintaining the regulatory function of collective wage agreements for the labour market,
- a reduction of labour factor costs by cutting down on legal non-wage benefits,
- the establishment of links between active labour-market measures and institutional incentives to take up work, e.g. for example those in Denmark and the Netherlands,
- structural reforms of the economy to improve competitiveness.

3.4. All in all, the IAB's evaluation shows that success in fighting unemployment cannot be achieved by tackling individual aspects in isolation, but must encompass all areas of economic, financial, monetary and labour-market policies. Only if there is a longer-term, consistent overall policy is there any chance of success. This is confirmed, in the ESC's view, by the comprehensive approach to employment policy adopted in the EU Commission's 1993 White Paper 'Growth, Competitiveness, Employment'.

3.5. In the hearing held by the study group on 15 April 1999 at the Bundesanstalt für Arbeit in Nuremberg, selected examples of employment and labour-market policy were presented. The emphasis was placed on the areas in the guidelines: promoting employability and developing entrepreneurship, where the promotion of equal opportunities in the sense of the 'mainstreaming' approach was taken into account through the choice of practical examples and inclusion in the presentation (see Appendix 2).

3.6. For the ESC the examples presented gave rise to the following conclusions:

- labour-market policy measures are all the more efficient if the social partners and those who take measures are involved at national level in development and implementation;
- local implementation of projects in collaboration with national labour authorities is particularly promising. Often the initiatives for projects come from local and regional circles and are only taken over by national institutions in a second phase;

Brussels, 27 May 1999.

- the involvement of concerned groups, such as in the projects 'Unemployed help the unemployed', opens up new opportunities of increasing the effectiveness of labour-market policy integration measures;
- the assumption of responsibility by the parties to collective agreements themselves, through agreements on labour-market policy measures and working hours, and the provision of financial help, including in conjunction with national funds, seems particularly worthy of imitation;
- vocational training measures should combine a broad vocational basic training with training segments and elements that are geared to actual practice and work requirements. The collaboration of the main actors in vocational education, business, the unions and the state is of particular importance here;
- results in promoting young businesses will only be achieved if targeted advice and financial support accompany their foundation. Equally necessary is the abolition of red tape, which hampers company formation.

#### 4. Prospects for a lasting contribution to Europe's employment strategy

4.1. The ESC would like the hearing on successful labour-market practices to be seen as its first contribution to the intensification of dialogue on a European employment strategy, with other activities to follow. With this in mind, it is essential to avoid duplicating the work of the EU Commission and other European-level committees and ensure that the ESC concentrates on its specific role as a forum of organized civil society. It is in the interests of the ESC to ensure that its approach to Europe's employment strategy in accordance with Article 128(2) of the Amsterdam Treaty is based on a balance of interests between the different socio-economic groups represented in the ESC.

4.2. Because of the practical experience of its members, the ESC could play a special role in the further development of a European employment strategy. This might take the form of a regular evaluation of successful approaches to employment policy, or organising exchanges of views on good practices.

4.3. But appropriate steps need to be taken first if the ESC is to carry out such tasks. One should ensure that the work on European employment policy carried out by different ESC sections is coordinated, so that the ESC can follow European employment policy continually and make its own contributions.

*The President*  
of the Economic and Social Committee  
Beatrice RANGONI MACHIAVELLI

## APPENDIX I

**to the Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee**

The following amendment was rejected but received more than 25 % of the votes cast:

**Point 4.3**

Delete.

*Result of the Vote*

For: 38, against: 74, abstentions: 5.

## APPENDIX II

**to the Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee**

Report on the hearing of the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship in Nuremberg on 15 April 1999 on 'best practice' in employment and labour-market policy

**Netherlands: Integration of the long-term unemployed**

The Dutch foundation 'Settlement and Integration Projects', which exists since 1987 and is co-sponsored by the two biggest trade unions, the FNV and the CNV, supports active measures to re-integrate the long-term unemployed into the labour market. It is characterised by its work in small projects, its individual care for job-seekers and its collaboration with national foundations. In 1998 job opportunities were found for a total of 903 difficult cases of the long-term unemployed, some of whom had been more than three years without work, were over 40 years old or were of foreign origin. Work in the projects is largely based on collective labour agreements between the social partners in various sectors or individual firms.

For the past four years the foundation has been entrusted with the transposition of a wage agreement for the hotel and catering industry on the integration of the long-term unemployed. In nine regional projects contacts have been established between long-term unemployed persons and firms willing to offer jobs, in collaboration with the national labour authorities. The hotel and catering industry and the labour authorities each pay half towards the costs of implementing projects. In this way national support benefits and financial allowances from employers under the wage agreement are combined with each other as an essential precondition for the success of projects. In 1998 alone, 227 long-term unemployed persons obtained a job in this industry, out of a total of 800 in the last four years.

For some years the wage agreement in the banking industry has provided for 0.2 % of wages to be set aside to support job-promotion measures outside the sector. The 'Flevoland settlement project', which is among those financed by the scheme, concentrates on the re-integration of people with psychic problems into the labour market. The counselling of the groups of persons concerned is individual and based on psychic stability and removal of the obstacles to starting work in the whole life environment. Only then does actual settlement begin. Up to 1998, 165 participants in the scheme, most of whom had been jobless for two or three years, had got a job and 65 participants had been placed on a training scheme. Since April 1999 the project has been continued by the national labour authorities, in order to give it a permanent character. In addition to financial support from the national authorities and employers, the prerequisite for the success of this project is the experimental approach and individual care for the long-term unemployed, which covers the whole life environment.

**Sweden: Integration of unemployed young people**

From Sweden came a report about special job centres for unemployed young people where young job-seekers have the choice between a job, integration measures or training schemes. Various national promotion programmes are set up for this. In computer centres IT skills are taught and support provided for finding a job. At least 20 % of young

people found a job within three months of the end of the training programme. A special municipal youth programme for young people under 20 has been set up to develop individually-tailored job or practical opportunities in the civil service or the private sector or on a training scheme. The municipality, which receives help from the state, is responsible for the young person for a maximum of 12 months, during which time the young person must also accept offers from the labour administration. In 1998, 40 % of the participants on this programme were able to get a job and 22 % to benefit from another job-promotion measure. Since January 1998 there has been a 'Development Guarantee' programme for young people between the ages of 20 and 24, in which the labour administration submit individual promotion measures. If no suitable offer is found within 100 days, the young person is further in charge by the municipal promotion programme. While they are on such schemes, young people get either national unemployment benefit, a special maintenance allowance or social benefit.

#### **Spain: Integration of people with disabilities**

In a joint committee of representatives of the ministry of labour and the council for the disabled, which was set up in October 1997, an agreement was reached on promoting the employment of people with disabilities. The measures agreed concern improving the institutional involvement of disabled people, offers of intermediation and counselling, further training and targeted integration measures. The aim of these measures is to improve facilities for disabled people, particularly young people and women, and offer new job opportunities for disabled persons. In 1998 alone, efforts at integration led to 15 000 labour contracts for disabled persons, in which the employers received 90 % of the cost of their social security contributions from the state. Within the framework of this agreement and the national action plan for the implementation of the 1998 employment-policy guidelines, the ONCE foundation started a private initiative to promote employment for people with disabilities, known as the '5 000 Plan'. Within a period of four years (1997-2000) the foundation promised to create 5 000 jobs and 10 000 training opportunities for the disabled. After just two years 5 089 jobs for disabled people have been provided through this initiative. In connection with the promotion of employability, special attention must be paid to offers for disabled people, so that they have the chance of integration into a labour market subject to rapid changes.

#### **Italy: Young enterprise-creation scheme**

The 'company for young entrepreneurship' (IG) was formed in 1994 to replace the state-run young entrepreneurs promotion programme of 1986, whose purpose was to create business enterprises in disadvantaged regions of Italy. The IG, which works in the public interest, provides counselling, training, material and financial support for new companies and company reorganisations. The IG works in 40 local counselling centres in collaboration with chambers of commerce and industry and public authorities.

Its activities over the last 12 years have covered:

- action to promote the spirit of entrepreneurship, especially in southern Italy;
- the evaluation of 6 000 business plans;
- the implementation of 1 500 business plans for a total investment of 2 billion euros, and creating 25 000 new jobs;
- the financing of 970 new businesses, of which 81 % still survive.

Crucial to success is the creation of business partnerships and the provision of support for founders of companies during the initial stages by a tutor with experience in business management or counselling.

Since 1986 the IG has also been involved in helping and providing financial support for unemployed persons setting up in business on their own. IG provides advice on implementing business plans and offers special training and further training courses on business management and preparing for self-employment. The effectiveness of IG's company-foundation programme is emphasised by the fact that it has been selected by the Italian government as an example of best practice.

#### **France: Programme for new services and new jobs**

The French programme for employing young people in new service areas is focused on unemployed young people under 30. New public-sector posts are created in social services and public utilities for a period of 5 years with state subsidies to the tune of 80 % of the legal minimum wage provided if a young person is hired. The target of creating 150 000 jobs by the end of 1998 has been exceeded after somewhat more than one year. Some 85 000 jobs have been created in local authorities and associations, 65 000 in local training institutes and 8 250 in local police services. The new jobs concern such areas as the family, health, social affairs, the environment, culture, sport and education. They involve predominantly co-ordination and organisational tasks, support and welfare activities for

people requiring assistance, older people and people with disabilities or supervisory duties in schools. Since the programme is predominantly geared to creating jobs at local and regional level, involvement of the local labour-market players is of decisive importance. The framework agreements concluded at national level with central organisations and national authorities are implemented at local level. Such agreements exist, for instance, with the postal service, adult education associations, health and social welfare associations and with low-cost housing associations. The aim of the programme is to continue the measures that have been begun and provide young people with a permanent job in the relevant institutions or on the regular labour market.

#### **Sweden: Employment-oriented services of the social partners**

The Swedish organisation Trygghetsrådet SAF/PTK (Restart), which was jointly established by the parties on the labour market, helps persons made redundant in the private sector to find a new job or set up their own company. Its activities derive from a 1974 joint agreement between the SAF and PTK. Restart offers affiliated companies or employees threatened with unemployment professional advice and support when changing jobs or becoming self-employed. Restart is financed by contributions from its 30 000 affiliated companies, which set aside 0,3 % of their payroll. Its services cover personal vocational development planning, various further training offers tailored to individual needs, help with job-hunting or setting up a company up to financial support for older unemployed persons under certain conditions. The combination of unemployment support and 'redundancy pay' by RESTART can amount to 75 % of former income for a period of 1½ to 2½ years, depending on the age of the person concerned. The nucleus of Restart's activities is a network of 100 counsellors in local and regional offices in around 30 locations. Out of 143 000 clients in the 1990s, 85 000 have found a new job, 12 000 have set up in their own business and 16 000 are still looking for work. Company start-ups, which make up about 10 % of cases, are concentrated in trade and sales, the share of women rose in 1998, and in 80 % of the cases the firms are still a going concern. Restart's person-oriented counselling concept starts with the premise that every change of job is the opportunity for a new professional beginning, if the corresponding support measures are forthcoming.

#### **Finland: On-the-job learning in initial vocational training**

In 1995 the Finnish government decided that from the beginning of the year 2000 initial vocational training would include a 6 months' period of on-the-job learning. At the same time the length of initial vocational training would be increased to three years. The aim of the reform is to give young people the chance to get practical experience of work and thereby facilitate the transition from school to working life. The government and social partners concluded an agreement in January 1998 laying down the aims of such work experience. The two main features of this agreement are:

- training institutes, social partners and companies should work together to try and find out the possibilities of work experience; and
- the creation of appropriate framework conditions for actual training at the workplace.

The social partners have agreed that such on-the-job training is not normal regular work and have called upon the government to make the necessary changes to Finnish labour legislation. At the same time they have declared that work experience as part of an on-the-job learning scheme must not be allowed to replace regular employment. The new training system will start officially in August 1999 in three branches of industry, the metalworking industry, the plumbing industry and land surveying. There have already been some successful pilot projects, their success being particularly due to the good co-operation between the government and the social partners.

#### **Germany: North Rhine-Westphalia training consensus**

State and municipalities, economic organisations, trade unions and labour administration are the partners in the North Rhine-Westphalia training consensus in Germany. Joint solutions are developed in 16 regional co-ordination centres in chambers of commerce and industry. The aim is to offer a place for skilled training for everyone in NRW who wishes to be trained. For this, companies need to be motivated to offer extra training places, so as to ensure that the available training potential is maximised. In addition, pilot schemes for reforming the dual training system are to be implemented. The partners are concentrating here on the following key areas:

- testing models of target group-specific training in existing professions; four model projects have already been concluded;
- providing access to new professions, especially in growth sectors such as telecommunications or the media;

- developing models for a flexible organisation of vocational education in order to improve on-the-job training;
- identifying the potential of existing training places through complete reporting to labour offices and extensive publicity using new media such as the Internet, so as to achieve the greatest possible transparency of the market in training places.

Other activities of the NRW training consensus include providing increased information and advice for companies on creating new training institutes. Target groups are above all foreign companies and company founders in the phase of market consolidation. In addition, the provision through training of additional skills tailored to needs aims to bring about a better link between initial and further training and improve the chances of getting a skilled job. Counselling and information for training place candidates, teaching staff and parents is also being stepped up so as to optimise preparations for choosing one's profession, better exploit the supply of training and provide information about new professions and growth areas. Through such activities more than 2 900 extra training places were mobilised in 1998 alone and the total supply of new training places in 1998 was increased to 122 000 compared with 112 000 in previous years.

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