Employment policy: European strategy for developing at local level

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PURPOSE : to present a communication from the Commission which has the aim of stimulating a wider debate on the issue of strengthening the local dimension of the European Employment Strategy.
CONTENT : there is a growing awareness of the opportunities that exist at local level for developing employment. This has led most Member States to trigger institutional and administrative decentralisation processes in their employment policies, so bringing decision-making levers closer to the local communities and their needs. In the same way, it has led the European Union to support a variety of experimental work, building on the concept of the "Local Development and Initiatives" (or LDEIs) and to experiment with methodologies and instruments for supporting local employment development, such as the Territorial Employment Pacts, and the "3rd System" and the "Local Social Capital" pilot action. The European Employment Strategy has so far relied essentially on efforts at national, and to a lesser extent, regional levels. However, the emphasis on local issues has been strengthened in the Guidelines for 2000, and, reflecting the same concerns, the local development of employment is now a horizontal priority in the new ESF Regulation, as well as being reflected in other strands of the Community's structural policies. The question thus arises as to how, and how far, the European Employment Strategy should integrate these movements towards greater respect for and autonomy at the local level, and in what way could it support them. Furthermore, the purpose of this communication is: - to summarise developments which have led Member States and the EU to turn increasingly to the local level for job growth; - to consider how the various players at the local level - including local authorities, businesses, etc - but also those at higher levels whose actions influence what can be done locally - state and regions, even the EU itself in the areas where it has competence - can help job creation/job maintenance at local level; - and finally, to raise a number of questions for debate over the 6 month period from April to October 2000. This communication is addressed at the Union's institutions; and the Commission looks forward with interest to receiving their opinions. In addition, the Commission will organise a wider-scale consultation with the players concerned, structures through a series of conferences. It should be stressed that this paper in no way implies that the Commission will be launching a new seperate programme on local development; financing from the EU level is already available in all areas covered in this document through Structural Funds and EAGGF-Guarantee in the field of rural development policy. In conclusion, there is an increasing interest in action at local level to stimulate employment, and secondly,the existence of a number of factors which can help local action to play its full part in increasing the Employment Rate in Europe, and providing stable, good quality jobs. The wide range of authorities and bodies mentioned here (national, regional and local governments; enterprises; thirdsystem/social economy organisations; the social partners; and devolved public institutions such as the public employment services) demonstrates both the need for co-ordination in such activities and the fact that integrated approaches are essential within each country, each region, each locality. All players, at all levels, have responsibilities and must contribute.