Employment: Member States'policies for 1999 and implementation of the guidelines for 2000. 3rd joint report

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PURPOSE : to present the Joint Employment Report 2000. CONTENT : this report is the third prepared in accordance with Article 128 of the Treaty of Amsterdam. It presents a comparative assessment of how the Member States have implemented the Employment Policy Guidelines of 1999 and how they have transposed the revised Guidelines for the year 2000 in their National Action Plans for Employment. It provides both an overall analysis across the four pillars of the European Employment Strategy and then goes on to give a detailed analysis by Member States of their policies. Special attention is paid to the way in which recommendations adopted by the Council on 14 February have been addressed. Firstly, with regard to the European employment situation, this report highlights that the situation in the EU has steadily improved over the last couple of years, reflecting the positive overall economic climate as well as progress in reforming the labour markets. On the other hand, labour shortages and skills gaps are emerging. Most Member States have benefited from the improved economic conditions in 1999 and increased their employment rates. Some Member States already exceed the benchmarks set by the Lisbon Summit for the EU in 2010, in terms of the overall employment rate (Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK) or the female employment rate (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands and the UK). As regards the assessment of Member States' employment policies in 1999, it is true to say that structural reforms of the labour markets are making progress amidst growing optimism. It is clear that Member States are reforming their labour markets in a much more favourable macroeconomic climate. This should encourage further strengthening of policy efforts. However, an overall impact of the European Employment Strategy on the improving employment situation is still difficult to identify. However, a beneficial impact can be detected for specific groups or sectors in the case of certain new policies. While a lot has been achieved, there is an uneven implementation of the four pillars, at least from what the Member States report. This is particularly true for the adaptability pillar, and - to a lesser extent - for the entrepreneurship pillar. Thus, a fully fledged policy mix is not yet adequately developed in the Member States. The role of the Public Employment Services should be strengthened as it is now recognised as being a key institution to implement the Employment Guidelines. The Member States are also recogising the importance of local level action for the overall success of the Employment Strategy. However, much more needs to be done in the area of devolution, establishment of an enabling environment, encouraging partnership among the local actors and developing comprehensive local employment strategies. In addition, the European Social Fund has been given a key role as an instrument to underpin the European Employment Strategy. The role of the other Structural Funds, beyond the ESF, in the support for the Strategy is not sufficently explicit, and refered to by only a few countries. Finally, in 2000 and 2001, Member States will not only bereforming their labour markets amidst continued favourable economic prospects, but also within the new policy context created by the conclusions of the extraordinary European Council of Lisbon in March 2000.