Employment: combating discrimination, guidelines for Community initiative EQUAL

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PURPOSE: Establishing guidelines for the second round of the Community initiative EQUAL.
CONTENT: The EU sponsored programme EQUAL has been devised in order to create better jobs and to ensure that everyone has equal and impartial access to these jobs. It is a learning platform, or a laboratory, with the specific aim of establishing new ways in which to tackle both discrimination and inequality in the labour market. The second round of the EQUAL programme is to be launched in 2004 coinciding with the EU's enlargement from fifteen Member States to twenty-five. The implications are such that the EQUAL programme is set to cover twenty-seven new programmes. The aim of this Communication is to describe and illustrate some of the early results of EQUAL, highlighting promising practices helping to contribute to new ways of tackling discrimination. The Communication also aims to set the scene for the second round of the EQUAL initiative. The second round of EQUAL continues the thematic approach established in the first round. They are: - Facilitating access and return to the labour market for those who have difficulty in being integrated or reintegrated into a labour market which must be open to all. - Combating racism and xenophobia in relation to the labour market. - Opening up the business creation process to all by providing the tools required for setting up in business and for the identification and exploitation of new possibilities for creating employment in urban and rural areas. - Strengthening the social economy (third sector), in particular the services of interest to the community, with a focus on improving the quality of jobs. - Promoting lifelong learning and inclusive work practices, which encourage the recruitment and retention of those suffering discrimination and inequality in connection with the labour market. - Supporting the adaptability of firms and employees to structural economic change and the use of information technology and other new technologies. - Reconciling family and professional life, as well as the re-integration of men and women who have left the labour market, by developing more flexible and effective forms of work organisation and support services. - Reducing gender-gaps and supporting job desegregation. - Supporting the social and vocational integration of Asylum seekers. The Communication promises that new and emerging challenges will also be examined, such as addressing the Roma people.