Social protection in Europe. 1995 Report

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OBJECTIVE: the purpose of this document is to facilitate exchanges between Member States on the development of European social protection systems, mainly with a view to helping political decision-makers and social partners make the rights choices in this context. CONTENT: this report aims to help Member States gain a better understanding of how their individual social protection systems can develop. It focuses in particular on the following points: . the social protection systems in the Union, . adaptation to change: recent reforms and key developments, . trends in social protection systems and how they are financed, . unemployment benefit systems and the incentive to find a job, . reforms in health care systems, . social protection and the self-employed, . social protection and concomitant responsibilities. The report focuses in particular on the links between social protection and employment, highlighting the "cost" factor. It therefore analyzes the rate of unemployment benefits paid in the various parts of the Union in relation to the income received during the course of a professional activity. It notes, as far as cost is concerned, that expenditure on social protection is tending to increase in relation to GDP in all the Member States of the Union, whereas the national economies are generally entering a recession. At the same time, it notes that, in order to reduce the cost of social protection, the Member States have introduced a package of measures motivated by a dual concern: to reduce dependency on the system and to maintain assistance given to the most destitute persons by the authorities, while showing willing to minimize potential abuse. It studies two aspects of social protection in particular which are currently growing in importance, namely access by the self-employed to insurance and social benefits and the forms of social protection provided for everyone (especially women) who have to give up paid employment or reduce their working hours temporarily for family reasons. Finally, it draws attention to a basic phenomenon which is important to the future of social protection, i.e. the ageing population and the resultant explosion in the cost of health care.