Living and working in the information society: people first. Green Paper

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OBJECTIVE : This Green Paper is part of a series of four communications and proposals concerning the Information Society. Its purpose is to fuel the debate on the social issues raised by the transition to the Information Society by focusing on the key issues of organization of work, employment and social cohesion. SUBSTANCE: The Green Paper is largely based on the work of the two consultative bodies set up by the Commission last year, i.e. the High-Level Group of Experts and the Information Society Forum. Whilst acknowledging the job-creation opportunities presented by information and communication technologies (ICTs), it also recognizes that people are understandably worried and that action should be taken to respond to their concerns about the forecast changes. The Green Paper looks in particular at the way in which ICTs are going to reshape the organisation of work and production and how they are going to transform working life. If the new system of organizing work is to create jobs, it must be based on a combination of ICTs and education and training, the latter being an area which the Green Paper says needs to be substantially overhauled. Moreover, ICTs require new skills which the labour market has not delivered quickly enough. Investment in human resources must therefore be at the heart of employment policy. The Green Paper also indicates that ICTs can play an important role in regional and local development and help promote integration and empowerment. The Information Society should be about people and should not create inequalities between the information rich and the information poor. Moreover, local and regional authorities ought to play a part in the process through local and regional employment pacts to ensure a more employment-intensive and more human resource oriented cohesion policy. In view of this, the Commission takes the view that public policies should: - strengthen the capacity of the EU to create jobs, ensure that SMEs take full advantage of the Information Society and improve cohesion across the Member States and regions by using the potential of ICTs; - improve democracy and social justice by ensuring that citizens participate actively in building the Information Society; - incorporate more ambitious targets in equal opportunities policies, at work and in the home, by paying special attention to ICT training for young people; - remove the barriers which hinder disadvantaged social groups so that they have the opportunity to acquire a better command of ICTs; - support people with special needs so as to enable them to improve their quality of life; - improve the efficiency of public administration and overall service provision, e.g. in health care and education. The Commission invites interested parties to submit their comments on all these issues by 31/12/1996.