# Equality of opportunity for people with disabilities

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OBJECTIVE: This communication summarizes the developments that have taken place with regard to equal opportunities for disabled people at both Member State and Community level. It is also aimed at proposing a number of specific initiatives in line with the proposal for a Council Resolution on the same subject, to be implemented at the Community level. SUBSTANCE: The communication states that one in ten Europeans has a physical, sensory, mental or intellectual disability, which represents a total of approximately 37 m people, of whom half are of working age. It notes that, despite the efforts made by the Member States and the Community, the disabled are confronted with blatant inequality, in particular in the following areas: - in education: many young people continue to encounter problems in being accepted in mainstream schools and are excluded from receiving appropriate, good-quality training; - at work: unemployment amongst the disabled is two to three times higher than the average rate, and they are likely to remain unemployed for longer.; - mobility and access: serious problems exist as regards transport and access to public buildings; - in housing: residential buildings are not adapted to the needs of the disabled or housing is too expensive for them; - in welfare systems: such systems provide the minimum required level of support, which is often inadequate. The communication sets out to demonstrate that everyone must take responsibility for changing our societies so as to fully integrate people with disabilities in active life. Primary responsibility rests with the Member States, but the Commission believes that the Community also has a role to play in this area. For that reason, it proposes: - that the Council should confirm a new approach by adopting the proposal for a Resolution on Equality of Opportunity (cf. file on Procedure CNS96216) as a token of the Member States' political commitment to pursuing the aim of equal opportunities and non-discrimination for the disabled. The resolution would serve a reference framework for the structured exchange of information between Member States, as a platform for the clarification of common goals and the identification of best practice for the development and assessment of appropriate measures within the Member States and the Community. - and that the Community should also commit itself by drawing up a series of specific measures in line with the proposed resolution, including the following initiatives: * mainstreaming: the strengthening of the work of the Commission's inter-service disability group so as to take more account of disability issues when formulating Community policies and measures; * cooperation: a high-level group of Member States' representatives on disabilities will be set up to keep under review Member States' latest policies and to pool information and experience; * encouraging the action of NGOs: the Commission wishes to build on the cooperation developed under Helios II and intends to encourage the work of NGOs; * employment: in the Single Report to the European Council in Dublin, the Commission will strengthen policies for the prevention of long-term unemployment and for the integration of disabled people in working life whilst bearing in mind the opportunities provided by the Social Fund; * information and communication technologies: the Commission would like to exploit the development of such technologies and will set up an ad hoc group for that purpose; * the Structural Funds: a total of ECU 5.5 bn has been earmarked for combating social exclusion in the 1994-99 period. As part of the next medium-term re-evaluation of the Funds, the Commission will re-assess the scope and impact of such measures on disabled people. A new series of projects could be launched in late 1996 as part of the Community initiatives (such as Horizon).