monitoring committees, with a view to examining how efforts to promote equal opportunities within the mainstream of Structural Fund actions and Community initiatives, as well as through specific initiatives, can be improved;

(d) to cooperate in the production of statistics, on the basis of available data, which are an essential prerequisite for measuring:

— the impact of action supported by the Structural Funds on the availability of social infrastructure,

— break down of long-term unemployed by sex,

— female and male economic activity rates, and

— proportions of women and men by socio-economic category;

(e) to consider using the flexibility which results from annual reprogramming of unspent credits to strengthen efforts to promote equal opportunities;

2. in relation to evaluations and forthcoming reviews:

(a) to ensure that evaluations measure the extent to which the principle of promoting equal opportunities has been taken into account in the current programming period, with particular regard to the involvement of women in general measures and to the implementation, the relevance and the outcome of such measures; to develop, where appropriate, adequate evaluation procedures, tools and indicators to this end;

(b) on the basis of these evaluations, to decide on any changes which it may be necessary to make in the programming of actions for the remainder of the programming period.

IV. INVITES THE COMMISSION:

1. on the basis of existing structures, to systematize:

— the identification of good practice with regard to the promotion of equal opportunities through action supported by the various Structural Funds, and

— the dissemination of information and experience on such good practice;

2. to take account of this resolution, as well as the Council Resolution of 22 June 1994 on the promotion of equal opportunities for men and women through action by the European Structural Funds, when making a proposal for review by the Council of the Structural Funds;

3. to review each year in its annual report on the Structural Funds the impact of this Resolution, beginning with the report drawn up in 1998.

RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL AND OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES, MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL

of 2 December 1996

on the role of social protection systems in the fight against unemployment

(96/C 386/02)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL,

Whereas the European Council at successive meetings — Essen, Cannes, Madrid and Florence — reiterated that the level of unemployment is unacceptable and that the fight for employment must remain the top priority for the European Union and its Member States;

Whereas the European Council at its meeting in Madrid urged Member States to apply measures with particular emphasis on those categories requiring special attention, such as young people seeking their first job, the long-term unemployed and unemployed women;

Whereas in its Recommendation 92/441/EEC [1] on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and

[1] OJ No L 245, 26. 8. 1992, p. 46.

social assistance in social protection systems adopted on 24 June 1992 and in its Recommendation 92/442/EEC (1) on the convergence of social protection objectives and policies adopted on 27 July 1992, the Council recommended the Member States to maintain, adapt, and where necessary, develop their social protection systems and set themselves common objectives as a guide to national policies;

Whereas the Council, in these Recommendations, recognized that social protection is an essential instrument of solidarity and social cohesion among the inhabitants of each Member State;

Whereas the Council, in these Recommendations, recognized that, because of the diversity of the schemes and their roots in national cultures, it is for Member States to determine how their social protection schemes should be framed and developed and the arrangements for financing and organizing them;

Whereas the Council, in these Recommendations, stated that social protection systems have a number of well established and widely recognized roles in relation, for instance, to the fight against poverty and the prevention of social exclusion; the provision of a replacement income to employed workers who are forced to interrupt their careers owing to sickness, accident, maternity, invalidity or unemployment; and the provision of sufficient resources and social assistance to people who have no means of subsistence;

Whereas social protection can make a significant contribution to the maintenance of social peace and thus can contribute considerably to positive economic development in the European Union;

Whereas, in addition to, and in support of, these aims, social protection systems have an important contribution to make to the fight against unemployment, in particular in enabling people to achieve the transition into work;

Whereas changes in family structures, society and the economy as well as the ageing of the populations impose new demands on the traditional objectives of social protection systems;

Whereas illegal work has negative effects on social protection systems;

Whereas the Commission Communication on 'The Future of Social Protection' which invited Member States to undertake a 'collective reflection' on the major issues facing social protection systems initiated a broad debate in this field,

(1) OJ No L 245, 26. 8. 1992, p. 49.

I. CALL ON MEMBER STATES:

1. to incorporate into their social protection policies, in addition to and in support of the established aims of such policies, the objectives of combating unemployment and of integrating and re-integrating unemployed women and men into economic and social life;

2. to organize social protection systems so that they may also contribute actively to the social and economic re-integration of the unemployed;

3. to address the problem of integrating and re-integrating the unemployed and in particular the most marginalized groups among them, as a further important aim of social protection and labour market policies;

4. to seek a balance in methods of financing social protection according to national rules and practices, which will take account both of the need to provide systems with resources adequate to attain their objectives and the need to avoid the possible detrimental impact on employment arising from excessive charges and taxes on labour;

5. to address the problem of illegal work which has negative effects on social protection systems;

6. to promote, where appropriate, policies on benefits, tax, contributions and compulsory deductions from wages, which interact to provide people with a clear incentive to seek, take up and stay in work or self-employment, and, in this context, to consider policies which provide incentives for employers to recruit employees from among the unemployed, in particular the long-term unemployed, young unemployed and unemployed women;

7. to develop, in accordance with national rules and practice, social protection systems capable of adapting to structural changes in the labour market and new patterns of work and of providing also appropriate social protection to people engaged in such work;

8. to develop their social protection, fiscal, economic and employment policies in an integrated and consistent way which underpins the European objective of a high level of employment and social protection, in consultation, where appropriate, with the social partners according to national rules, traditions and practice.

II. URGE THE COMMISSION AND MEMBER STATES, WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP:

1. to deepen within the existing structures exchange of information and experiences and collective reflection among Member States on techniques and policies aimed at achieving the above objectives;

2. to examine as a priority within this process of exchange and collective reflection the role that social protection can play in the fight against unemployment and how systems can adapt in order to respond to emerging needs, in particular in enabling people to achieve the transition into work;

3. to foster economic and employment strategies in the European Union which take into account the objectives of social protection and the requirement for systems to respond to emerging needs;

4. to develop the Community system of coordination of social security so that it may also contribute to the above objectives.

III. INVITE THE COMMISSION:

1. to foster within the existing structures this process of exchange and collective reflection with a view to facilitating the achievement of these objectives;

2. to analyse developments, innovation and progress achieved with regard to the above objectives and to submit appropriate reports to the Council.