

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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Proposal for a COUNCIL DECISION

concerning the continued development of the HANDYNET system within
the framework of Decision 93/136/EEC establishing a third
Community action programme to assist disabled people
(HELIOS II 1993 to 1996)

(presented by the Commission)

COMMISSION REPORT FOR SUBMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL AND THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

Implementation of the HANDYNET computerized
information and documentation system

Proposal for a Council Decision
concerning the continued development
of the HANDYNET system
as part of the HELIOS programme

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

In accordance with article 4.1.(b) of the Council Decision of 25 February 1993 (93/136/EEC) establishing a third Community action programme to assist disabled people (HELIOS II 1993 to 1996) the Council shall re-examine the HANDYNET system, before 31 December 1994, on the basis of a Commission report evaluating, inter alia, the first HANDYNET module on technical aids and, acting on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, shall decide on the conditions for continuing the HANDYNET system after that date.

INTRODUCTION

Since 1974, the Commission has focused part of its work in the social sector on issues relating to disabled people, both through the European Social Fund and by means of studies undertaken by working parties set up specifically for that purpose.

The first action programme in favour of disabled people was launched in 1983. In 1988, the Council established the second action programme in favour of disabled people, entitled HELIOS. HANDYNET, the European information system, was developed as part of this programme.

HANDYNET is a European multilingual computerised information system designed to inform disabled people. It comprises a database, an electronic mail facility and an electronic journal.

The HANDYNET system's technical aids module became operational in 1990-1991. The 30 million + disabled people living in the twelve Member States need information which will allow them to enjoy greater independence in the daily and professional life. The main aim of the HANDYNET modular system is to give these people access to Europe-wide - and hence multilingual - information which will, step by step cover all areas of interest to them. This drive towards greater transparency touches upon all aspects of economic and social life and promotes a truly European market at various stages of the process of integrating disabled people. HANDYNET is therefore a resource for information, communication and cooperation at the service of disabled people and the professionals promoting their economic and social integration.

Two basic principles underpin the Europe-wide HANDYNET information system. First, it is multilingual. This poses a considerable technical challenge: Member States must be able to gather information in the language of their choice, which must then be made available in the nine official Community languages. Second, the HANDYNET system involves on-going partnership with the Member States, via the national data collection and coordination centres. The purpose of this cooperation is to ensure that the HANDYNET system is adapted to the real needs of the ultimate users - disabled people. The HANDYNET system is therefore fully in line with the principle of subsidiarity.

Following consultation, the European Disability Forum, the Advisory Committee and the Liaison Group are in favour of developing further the HANDYNET system further. Prior to this, the HANDYNET technical coordination group had approved the figures given in this report, which are extracted from the national evaluations carried out in 1992 and 1993.

POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE HANDYNET SYSTEM

In line with the general aims of integration and equal opportunities which govern Community action to assist disabled people, the Commission plans to study the possibility of expanding the HANDYNET system with two additional modules on the vocational training and employment of disabled people and the accessibility of public buildings. Furthermore, HANDYNET's electronic mail system will be extended to include all the partners of the HELIOS programme. Finally, the dissemination of the HANDYNET technical aids module on CD-ROM will be contracted out to an outside organisation which, in collaboration with the Commission and the Member States, will also be responsible for production and marketing.

THE DECISION

Sole article

It is for the Council, after consulting the European Parliament, to determine the conditions for continuing the HANDYNET system on the basis of a Commission evaluation report.

The national evaluations included in this report indicate, first that data collection for the first module on technical aids should be continued with regard to both technical aids manufactured in the Member States and technical aids manufactured in non-EU countries and available on the European market.

Second, the vast majority of users are in favour of developing and expanding the HANDYNET system further.

summary

Implementation of the HANDYNET computerised information and documentation system

1. The technical aids module of the HANDYNET database contains, in the nine languages of the Community, information on technical aids manufactured in the Member States, on manufacturers and distributors of the technical aids, on the organisations responsible for disseminating information and providing training etc. in the field of technical aids as well as information on the regulations in force in the Member States with regard to the allocation of technical aids. (see Chapter 1.2)
2. All the Member States participate in the collection of information for HANDYNET, either directly for HANDYNET or indirectly through the agency of national databases whose contents, where relevant, are transferred to HANDYNET (DK-DE-IT-UK). (See Chapter 2.1.)
3. CD ROM No 6 distributed in February 1994 contains 46 632 records of information, representing 32 266 records on technical aids and 14 366 records on manufacturers, distributors etc. (See Chapters 2.1.2 and 2.1.3.)
4. 76% of technical aids reviewed in HANDYNET relate to motor disability since Member States appointed Data Collection Centres for this particular field as a matter of priority. (See Chapter 2.2.1.2.)
5. The HANDYNET CD ROM contains textual data, pictures and demonstrations of technical aids for products which can be described as educational or reeducation software. (See Chapter 2.4.4.)
6. Textual data in the HANDYNET system are structured and detailed to satisfy multilingual requirements and other interrogation criteria desired by prospective users of the CD ROM (specialists) and the information users (disabled people). (See Chapter 2.4.2 and Chapter 2.4.3.)
7. HANDYNET can be used in the nine official languages of the European Union. It is only the free-text descriptions which are available exclusively in the language of the country of manufacture and in English. (See Chapter 2.4.3.)
8. HANDYNET can be accessed by the visually impaired using a data reader outputting vocally or in braille. (See Chapter 2.1.)
9. HANDYNET's technical aids module is operational and currently runs on a network comprising 363 Information and Advice Centres, 47 specialist Data Collection Centres and 12 National Coordination Centres. (See Chapter 3.1.6.)

10. Six issues of the HANDYNET CD ROM have been produced since the end of 1991. Distribution of the European database is restricted to partners in the HANDYNET network and this is reflected in the consultation rate. At this stage in the distribution of the system it is impossible to produce reliable data on the numbers of disabled people who have benefited by consulting the database. (See Chapter 2.1.1.)
11. The Commission is hoping for a wide distribution of the CD ROM with effect from the beginning of 1995 both within the Community and elsewhere. It is the responsibility of the Member States to organise the national level dissemination of the data on the technical aids. (See Chapter 2.1.)
12. Although technical development of the first module can be considered complete, efforts on the collection must be pursued both with regard to technical aids manufactured in the Member States and the technical aids manufactured in non-EU countries and available on the European market. (See Chapter 2.1.)
13. Communication within the HANDYNET system is backed up with the use of electronic mail and an electronic journal which ensure communication between the National Coordination Centres and the HELIOS team of experts responsible for providing assistance for the Commission. (See Chapter 3.3.)
14. A breakdown of expenditure on the HANDYNET system since 1988 shows that 39% of overall budget has gone towards technical developments whereas 61% of the said budget has been transferred to the Member States as a contribution towards costs, mainly for expert opinions and data collection. (See Chapter 4.2.)
15. Overall, Member States' reaction to the content and use of the HANDYNET system has been positive (demonstrated by the evaluations which were carried out between 1992 and 1994). Any criticism or proposals made by evaluators have been, or are in the process of being, taken into account by the Commission for the ongoing process of improving the system. (See Chapter 5.3.2.)
16. A list of research projects for technological applications is currently being put into the system jointly with associated initiatives from other Commission services (DG XIII). (See Chapter 6.)
17. The HANDYNET system is modular in structure. The structure of the module on technical aids is broadly speaking capable of being used, without changes, for any new module. (See Chapter 1.3.)
18. In order to meet more fully the information requirements of disabled people, the Commission is proposing a study of two new modules (employment - training and accessibility) in the form of a review of the requirements of disabled people and utilising to the full at European level existing information tools available in the Member States for information in the two fields in question. The Commission is also proposing that the HANDYNET mail system should be extended to cover all partners in the HELIOS programme. (See Chapter 9.2.)

PROPOSAL FOR A COUNCIL DECISION

concerning the continued development of the HANDYNET system within the framework of Decision 93/136/EEC establishing a third Community action programme to assist disabled people (HELIOS II 1993 to 1996)

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 235 thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission¹,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Parliament²,

Having regard to the opinion of the Economic and Social Committee³,

Whereas the principal objective of Council Decision 93/136/EEC establishing a third Community action programme to assist disabled

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people (HELIOS II 1993 to 1996)⁴ is to promote equal opportunities for and the integration of disabled people; whereas one of the general objectives is to meet the information needs of disabled people by means of the HANDYNET computerised information and documentation system based on data collected at national level and updated and adapted at European level;

Whereas under the HELIOS II programme, the Commission, in accordance with Decision 93/136/EEC, has collected, adapted at European level, updated, exchanged and disseminated information on technical aids collected in the Member States;

Whereas the HANDYNET system's technical aids module promotes transparency with regard to the technical and economic aspects of the rehabilitation technologies market by suggesting the benefits for disabled people for their integration into daily life;

Whereas in accordance with Article 4.1.(b) of Decision 93/136/EEC, the Council shall re-examine the HANDYNET system, before 31 December 1994, on the basis of a Commission report evaluating, inter alia, the first HANDYNET module on technical aids and, acting on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, shall decide on the conditions for continuing the HANDYNET system after that date;

⁴ OJ No L 56, 9.3.1993, p. 30.

Whereas the Commission's evaluation report demonstrates the value of continuing the HANDYNET computerised information and documentation system which, on account of its European scope, offers a broader range of information accessible in the nine official Community languages;

Having regard to the opinions of the HELIOS programme's advisory bodies and in particular the Advisory Committee, the European Disability Forum and the Liaison Group, and cooperation with Member States' National HANDYNET Collection and Coordination Centres regarding the structure of the system and its supply of textual and multimedia information;

Whereas the HANDYNET system should be continued under the conditions provided for in Decision 93/136/EEC;

Whereas the Treaty does not provide, for the adoption of this Decision, powers other than those of Article 235;

HAS DECIDED AS FOLLOWS:

SOLE ARTICLE

The computerised information and documentation system HANDYNET shall be continued in the framework of the activities of the HELIOS II programme from 1 January 1995 to 31 December 1996.

Commission Report
for submission to the
European Parliament,
the Council
and the Economic and
Social Committee



Implementation of
the HANDYNET
computerised information and
documentation system

H A N D Y N E T

Commission Report
for submission to the
European Parliament,
the Council
and the Economic and
Social Committee

introduction

Pursuant to Article 4.1.(b) of the Council Decision of 25 February 1993 (93/136/EEC) establishing a third Community action programme to assist disabled people, known as the "HELIOS II Programme" to cover the period 1 January 1993 to 31 December 1996, the Commission is required to submit, before 1 July 1994, to the European Parliament, the Council and the Economic and Social Committee a report on the implementation of the HANDYNET system in order to allow the Council to take action before 31 December 1994 concerning the conditions under which the system will continue after that date.

This report describes the content and operation of the HANDYNET system in the first half of 1994 and is based on the contents of CD ROM No 6, which was distributed at the end of February 1994. It summarises the results of national evaluations of the system which were carried out in the various Member States.

An evaluation of the HANDYNET system by an organisation outside the European Commission is being prepared.

This report describes developments with the "technical aids" module. It also stresses the need for supplementing existing data in the field of technical aids and for studying the development of two other modules, one of which relates to the vocational training and employment of disabled people and the other to the accessibility of public buildings. These two areas are of critical importance for independent living and the promotion of equal opportunities for disabled people.

Lastly, the report describes how the information is distributed. Distribution of the HANDYNET database is currently restricted to the National collection Coordination Centres, the specialist Data Collection Centres and the Information and Advice Centres set up by the Member States.

In order to comply with requests from other organisations in the Member States and in non-EU countries, the HANDYNET CD ROM will be distributed from the second half of 1994 onwards by an organisation outside the Commission. This organisation will be selected on the basis of an invitation to tender.



HANDYNET

HANDYNET - European information system on technical aids

The HANDYNET database today

The operating structures of the HANDYNET system

The cost of the HANDYNET system

Evaluation of the HANDYNET system by the users

Cooperation with Community initiatives

Cooperation with international organisations

Developments in progress

Conclusions and future prospects

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summary

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16. A list of research projects for technological applications is currently being put into the system jointly with associated initiatives from other Commission services (DG XIII). (See Chapter 6.)
17. The HANDYNET system is modular in structure. The structure of the module on technical aids is broadly speaking capable of being used, without changes, for any new module. (See Chapter 1.3.)
18. In order to meet more fully the information requirements of disabled people, the Commission is proposing a study of two new modules (employment - training and accessibility) in the form of a review of the requirements of disabled people and utilising to the full at European level existing information tools available in the Member States for information in the two fields in question. The Commission is also proposing that the HANDYNET mail system should be extended to cover all partners in the HELIOS programme. (See Chapter 9.2.)

HANDYNET - European information system on technical aids

1.1 AIMS AND COVERAGE

HANDYNET, the European computerised information system has been set up by the European Union under the HELIOS programme. HANDYNET aims to achieve a gradual coverage of the information requirements of disabled people throughout their integration process.

Priority was given to developing the information module on technical aids which help disabled people achieve a greater degree of independence.

Disabled people are defined in Article 2 of the Council Decision of 25 February 1993 establishing the HELIOS II programme as:

"People with serious impairments, disabilities or handicaps resulting from physical, including sensory, or mental or psychological impairments which restrict or make impossible the performance of an activity or function considered normal for a human being".

Technical aids are understood to be as defined in ISO (International Standards Organisation standard 9999) as "any product, instrument, equipment or technical system used by a disabled person, especially produced or generally available, preventing, compensating, relieving or neutralising the impairment, disability or handicap".

The development of the information module on technical aids in the HANDYNET system is in response to:

- ▶ a social need since technical aids allow a disabled person to be more independent and thereby strengthen that person's position in society;
- ▶ a financial need since technical aids should help to reduce social spending and spending on health by assisting the reintegration of disabled people and by playing a secondary and tertiary prevention-type role (secondary prevention = preventing the disability, tertiary prevention = prevention of the handicap);
- ▶ an economic need by bringing together a producer and a user, promoting transparency in the single market in Europe, stimulating industrial and commercial competition to contribute dynamic force to research and innovation and achieve products offering greater performance at lower cost.

HANDYNET, which has been developed as part of the HELIOS programme, can in a general way contribute to:

- ▶ improving the conditions for the integration of disabled people by making available to them more relevant information on technical aids;
- ▶ bringing to the attention of people involved in the process of integrating disabled people information on applied research projects relating to technical aids.

1.2 THE COMPOSITION OF THE SYSTEM

The HANDYNET European information system comprises:

- ▶ a database;
- ▶ an electronic mail and journal.

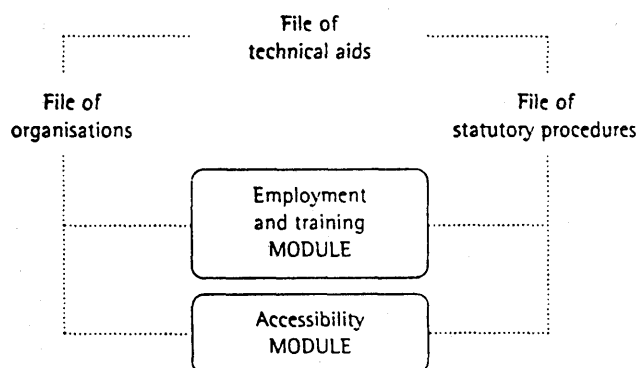
The multilingual database (in the nine official languages of the European Union) is available on compact disk (CD ROM - Compact-Disk-Read-Only-Memory) and can provide three basic types of information:

- ▶ technical aids in the strict sense with a description of their technical, functional and economic features, i.e. price;
- ▶ the organisations involved with technical aids i.e. manufacturers, distributors, information centres, training organisations, research organisations etc.;
- ▶ the statutory provisions in force in the Member States governing the supply of technical aids to disabled people.

The electronic mail and journal are communication tools available via telecommunications networks which offer partners in the HANDYNET network, the National data collection and Coordination Centres (NCC - see Chapter 3.1.1), scope for sending and receiving messages by computer as well as information on European - scale events of relevance to disabled people.

1.3 THE MODULAR APPROACH

HANDYNET is modular in structure.



It will be seen that should other modules be developed to cover the information requirements of disabled people, two thirds of the information structures already exist in the technical aids module.

These are:

- ▶ the data on organisations;
- ▶ the data on statutory procedures.

The structures for these two categories of data can be used without change when new fields of information on disability are introduced.

The modular structure means that the investment in setting up the first module on technical aids comprising three files can be used for future developments.

the HANDYNET database today

11

II THE HANDYNET DATABASE TODAY

This report on the HANDYNET database, which is currently available on CD ROM No 6 (whose distribution commenced in February 1994), describes how the data are structured, the technical aspects which represent original features of the system. The report also indicates the cost of the system since 1988.

It should be stressed that HANDYNET is a system undergoing constant development both in terms of its data content and in terms of its interrogation procedures with a view to keeping abreast of latest developments in information processing.

Improvements are made on the basis of remarks and suggestions from users, namely the National Coordination Centres on the one hand and the evaluators of the HANDYNET system, the disabled people themselves, on the other.

2.1 The data collected

One of the original features of the HANDYNET system is that data collection is a responsibility shared between the 12 Member States.

Interfaces allow data to be accessed in braille or by voice synthesizer.

Given the abundance of technical aids on the European market it would seem that the large numbers of technical aids available on the market can be most comprehensively covered by the 12 Member States acting together, thereby minimising the effort required of each one individually to achieve this comprehensive coverage.

In the first instance it was the National collection and Coordination Centres which undertook to collect information on the technical aids manufactured in their particular Member State as well as on the manufacturers and distributors based there.

The next stage is to collect data on technical aids manufactured in non-EU countries and available on the internal market. This is one of the objectives set for 1994.

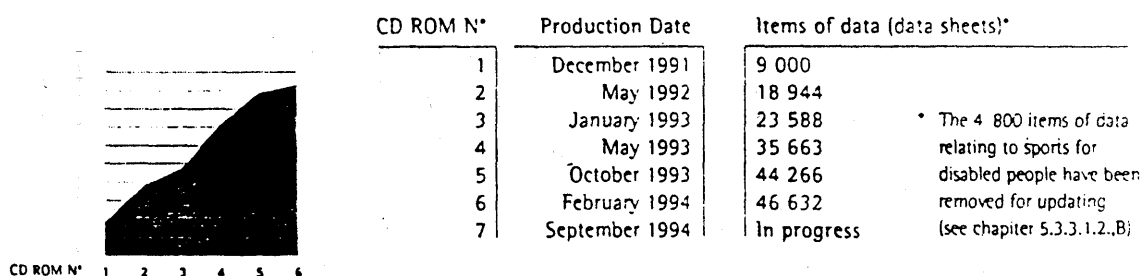
If the European Union is enlarged or if the European Economic Area Agreement (EEAA) is applied to the HELIOS programme, the collection of data on technical aids manufactured in the EFTA countries in question (Sweden, Norway, Austria, Finland and Iceland) will be covered by the Collection Centres appointed in these countries. This operation could commence early in 1995.

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2.1.1 Progress with data collection

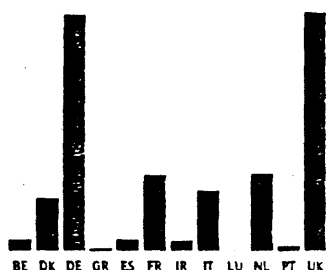
The situation reflected by the CD ROMs produced since 1991.

Progress with data collection at European level (total number of technical aids and organisations)



In two years the collection of data for HANDYNET has increased five-fold

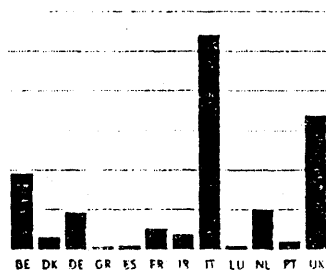
2.1.2 Data collected on technical aids



Belgium	465	Italy ¹	2524
Denmark ¹	2189	Luxembourg ³	1
Germany ¹	9730	Netherlands ¹	3201
Greece	89	Portugal	211
Spain	463	United Kingdom ¹	9829
France	3145		
Ireland	419	Total	32266

- (1) The data sent by these Member States are obtained via an interface between the national databases and HANDYNET.
- (2) The network of Data Collection Centres in Greece is currently being reactivated. A sizeable increase should be evident for the production of CD ROM No 7 (planned for September 1994).
- (3) Only one technical aid is manufactured in Luxembourg.

2.1.3 Data collected on manufacturers, distributors and non-profit making organisations



Belgium ²	1922	Italy ¹	5421
Denmark ¹	316	Luxembourg	95
Germany ¹	932	Netherlands ¹	1009
Greece	70	Portugal	209
Spain	93	United Kingdom ¹	3394
France	525		
Ireland	380	Total	14366

- (1) The data sent by these Member States are obtained via an interface between the national databases and HANDYNET.
- (2) The French community in Belgium has a file of manufacturers and distributors and has requested an interface facility for the national database on organisations.

2.1.4 Data collected on national statutory procedures

With a view to comparing the statutory procedures in force in the Member States enabling a disabled person to purchase or rent a technical aid or to arrange for its repair, the National Coordination Centres were asked to provide information in their national languages and in English.

Belgium	French + Dutch	Ireland	English
	German + English	Italy	Italian + English
Denmark	Danish + English	Luxembourg	French + English
Germany	German + English	Netherlands	Dutch + English
Greece	Greek + English	Portugal	Portuguese + English
Spain	Spanish + English	United Kingdom	English
France	French + English		

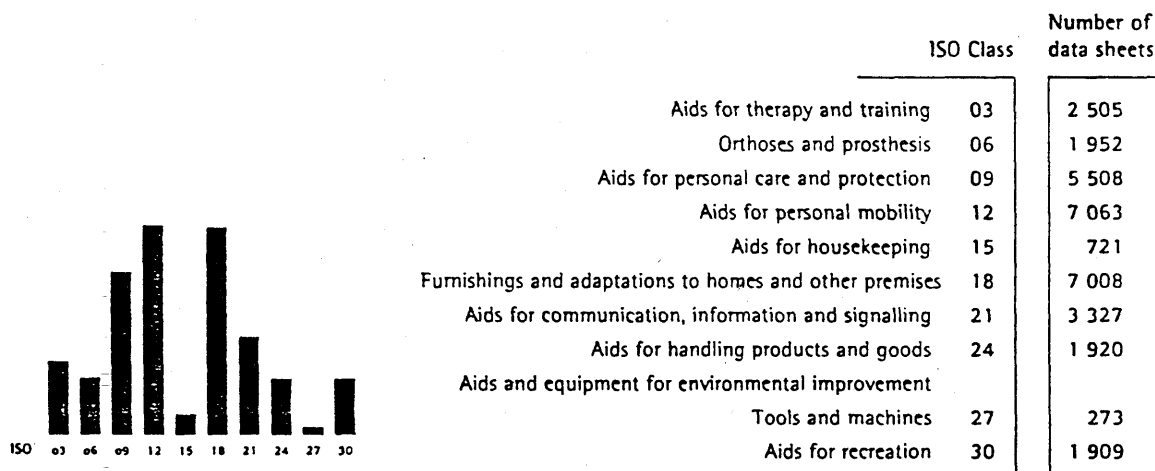
The degree of detail provided on the various statutory procedures is a matter for each Member State.

2.2 COMPOSITION OF THE DATA BASE IN TERMS OF CONTENT

2.2.1 Categories of technical aids in database

2.2.1.1 Number of technical aids described (main categories)

Categories of technical aids in accordance with ISO classification ISO 9999

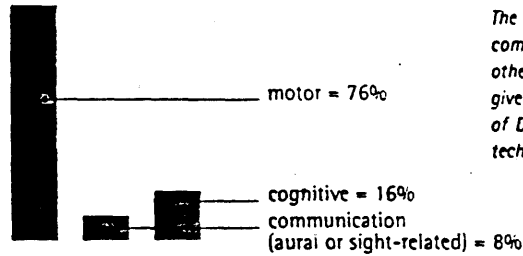


These figures relate to the main use for the aids compared with ISO 9999. A number of aids are registered in more than one ISO category while others are not assigned to any category.

Aids for personal mobility (Class 12) and furnishings and adaptations to homes and other premises (Class 18) account for almost 50% of the technical aids contained in HANDYNET

2.2.1.2 Number of technical aids designed to compensate for

Impairment, disability or handicap



The apparent imbalance between technical aids compensating for motor impairment and the other technical aids is the result of the priority given by the Member States to the appointment of Data Collection Centres for information on technical aids for the motor impaired.

Distribution of specialised collection centres

	Communication		Communication sight-related	Educational software
	Motor	Aural		
Belgium	•			
Denmark	•	•		
Germany ¹	•			
Greece	•	•	•	•
Spain	•	•	•	•
France	•			•
Ireland	•			
Italy ¹	•			
Luxembourg	•			
Netherlands ¹	•			
Portugal	•	•	•	•
United Kingdom	•	•	•	•

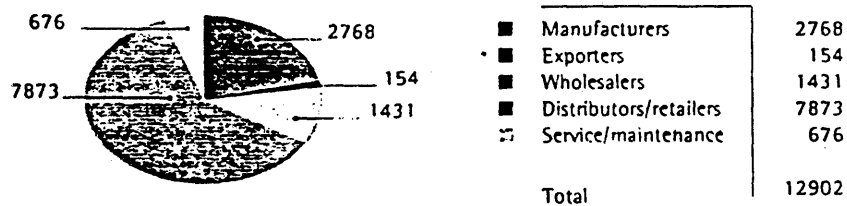
(1) In these Member States the National collection and Coordination Centre for HANDYNET operates also as both coordinator and collection centre

Germany, Italy and the Netherlands have not appointed specialised Collection Centres for HANDYNET but currently provide data for the four areas.

2.2.2 Activities of the organisations listed

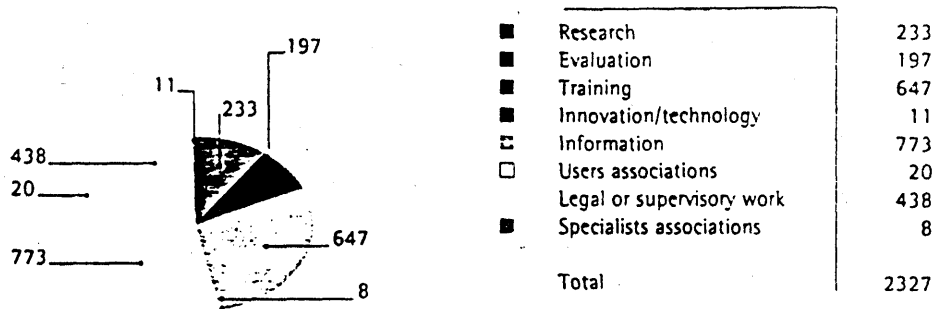
Organisations listed in HANDYNET grouped by nature of business

2.2.2.1 Type of business



It is worth noting that not only are the manufacturers of technical aids listed but also, and more importantly, the distributors located nearest to the consumer.

2.2.2.2 Non-business activities



The National collection and Coordination Centres were to concentrate on the collection of data relating to businesses so that a link can be established between technical aids, their manufacturers and their distributors. However, most of the collection centres had already input other types of organisations into the database.

The organisations listed in HANDYNET are most frequently organisations pursuing a number of activities, either business-type or non-business-type or both.

2.3 The structure of the data

- ▶ The data contained in the database needs to be highly detailed in terms of its structure as regards both the technical aids and the organisations. This way the purpose of the database is served, i.e. the creation of a transparent market allowing the most appropriate product to be found. To this end all the NCCs:
- ▶ take due account of the remarks made during the HANDYNET evaluation sessions organised in the various Member States;
- ▶ take stock of the large number of items of data on technical aids and organisations listed in the HANDYNET database; so that multilingual requirements can be better served.

2.3.1 Information on technical aids

2.3.1.1 General information

General information

Identification of technical aid

- . name of product
- . product category
- . name of manufacturer
- . brand name
- . functional impairments compensated

2.3.1.2 Technical information

Technical information

Technical data

Depending on the category of technical aid

- . material
- . how operated
- . type of battery
- . how fixed, etc.

Numerical data

Depending on category of product

- . overall size
- . weight etc.

2.3.1.3 Economic data

Economic data

Price of technical aid

- . Name of product in each Member State
- . Brand names in each Member State
- . indication of price in national currency of each Member State and in Ecu
- . VAT rate

National recommendations

- . national standards
- . financed by social security bodies

2.3.2 Information on the organisations

2.3.2.1 General information

General information

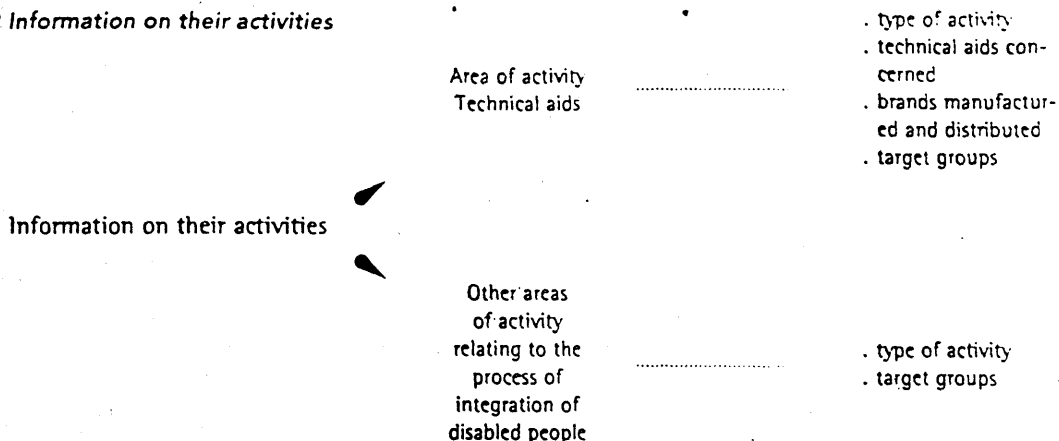
Contact information

- . name of organisation (full name, common name, abbreviated name)
- . telephone
- . fax
- . address for visitors (accessibility of premises)

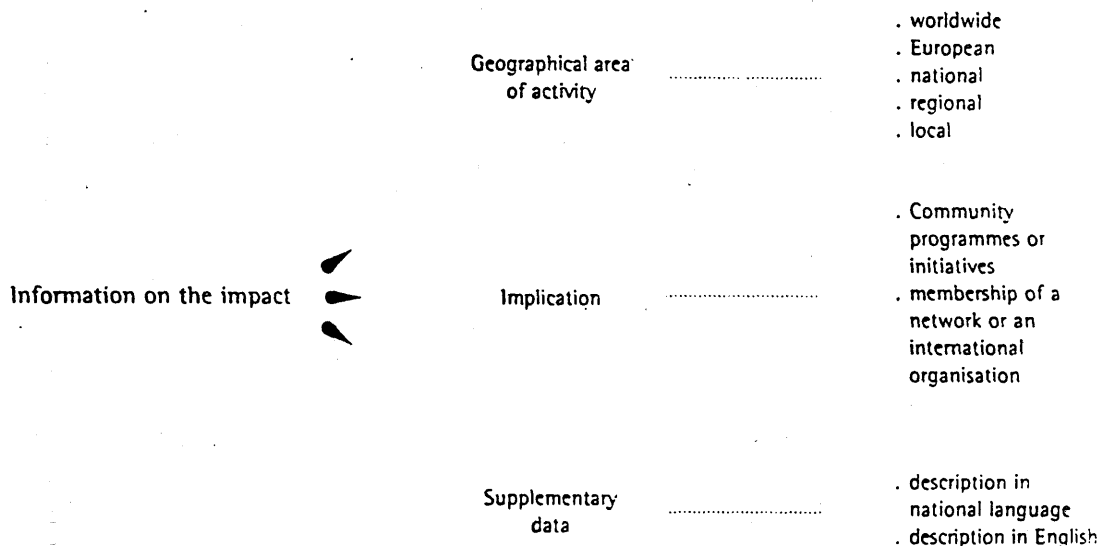
Type of organisation

- . governmental
- . profit-making
- . non-governmental
- . special

2.3.2.2 Information on their activities



2.3.2.3 Information on the impact



2.3.3 The national statutory procedures

Information on the statutory procedures is presented as a flow chart, operating like a dialogue between the user and HANDYNET and describing the regulations applicable in each Member State with regard to their specific case.

The consultation procedure is thus different for each Member State depending on whether national regulations relate to:

- ▶ the type of technical aid;
- ▶ the field of use (private, occupational or educational);
- ▶ the age of the user;
- ▶ the user's membership of a social protection scheme;
- ▶ the cause of the impairment or disability.

The overall aim is to provide the user with a practical guide for consulting the texts of national regulations, to find out about their rights and obligations and to understand more fully the steps that have to be taken and the bodies that have to be contacted in order to obtain a technical aid.

2.4 THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF THE DATABASE

Up to the end of 1990 the HANDYNET database operated online with the National collection Coordination Centres connected via telephone to the server of the European Space Agency (ESA) in Frascati, Italy. The main problems that arose with this type of operation were the following:

- ▶ slow response speed of server;
- ▶ many breakdowns of communication lines during interrogation;
- ▶ server inaccessible at certain times of the day and at weekends;
- ▶ not particularly user-friendly interface for interrogation;
- ▶ high cost of telephone links;
- ▶ problems with introducing multimedia method (merging of texts, pictures and sound);
- ▶ insufficient flexibility to extend dissemination of data to organisations other than HANDYNET's National collection Coordination Centres (12 Information Centres in Europe).

Following an examination existing alternatives for the technical management of the HANDYNET database it was decided to opt for the CD ROM compact disk and to:

- ▶ retain as far as possible the type of computer system already installed at the National Coordination Centres;
- ▶ adopt some of the software developments produced at the ESA;
- ▶ simplify the interrogation procedures for the user.

2.4.1 Why CD ROM was chosen

Since early 1991 HANDYNET has used CD ROM for the following reasons:

- ▶ large information storage capacity (650 megabytes of texts, graphics or pictures, the equivalent of 470 computer diskettes or 470 000 pages of text (A4 size));
- ▶ guaranteed lifetime of the data of at least 10 years. The data remain stable and retain their original quality;
- ▶ direct consultation to avoid the cost of telephone links for each consultation of a server on line;
- ▶ low-cost support for disseminating large quantities of data;
- ▶ multimedia application options;
- ▶ the cost of producing CD ROMS is inversely proportional to the number of copies manufactured;
- ▶ CD ROM technology is expanding worldwide;
- ▶ computer equipment is developing continuously and most equipment now incorporates a CD ROM reader.

(The equipment needed to use HANDYNET is described in Annex 1).

2.4.2 The interrogation software

It is important to point out that the database operates with two types of interrogation software, one program runs on Windows software and the other on DOS

The DOS version of the program has been developed for use by the visually impaired and severely motor disabled who can connect their own equipment to HANDYNET (voice synthesizer, track-ball etc.)

Options available with the two programs

HANDYNET with Windows	HANDYNET with DOS
Use of the mouse to move around the database	Use of the computer keyboard to move around the database
Language can be changed at any time during interrogation	Language can be changed only at the beginning of the interrogation
Font can be enlarged on the screen	Information output can be by voice synthesizer or in braille
Different formats for information output can be set up	Various formats for information output can be selected
Complete ◀	▶ Complete
Address labels ◀	▶ Address labels
Easy to use ◀	▶ Easy to use
Others ◀	
Data can be printed out in format selected	Data can be printed out in format selected
Visualisation of products by a succession of pictures	Visualisation of products by a succession of pictures or several on the same screen (mosaic)
Zoom function for particular details of the picture of the technical aid presented on the screen	Output of statistics as tables or diagrams

2.4.3 Multilingual aspects



HANDYNET is the only database operating in 9 languages

This technical feat was made possible by:

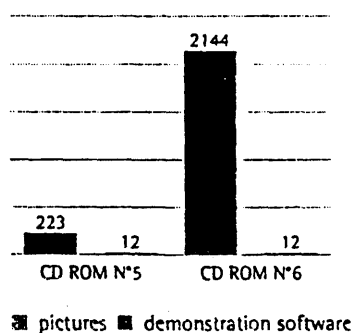
- ▶ the work of a group of experts from the various Member States to prepare the structures to receive the data;
- ▶ using international classification system (the ISO 9999 International Technical Aids classification and the WHO's (World Health Organisation) International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps);
- ▶ setting up lists of terms offering accurate technical and functional descriptions of the technical aids and organisations in the nine languages of the Community on the basis of definitive translations;
- ▶ limiting to an absolute minimum free text descriptions in national languages.

The multilingual facility gives real added value to the HANDYNET database because:

- *HANDYNET allows disabled European citizens to consult information of relevance to them in their own language irrespective of the Member State in which they are located and it thus promotes mobility and equal opportunities for disabled people;*
- *a large proportion of potential users in non-EU countries have a knowledge of at least one of the nine official Community languages;*
- *HANDYNET can be adapted to other languages.*

2.4.4 Multimedia data

Every person who has used the database considers that the illustration of textual data is of fundamental importance. Following a detailed study by a group of experts from the various Member States HANDYNET introduced the multimedia aspect in 1993.



The multimedia facility offered by HANDYNET is:

- ▶ the addition of pictures, 256 colour pictures for all types of technical aids;
- ▶ the addition of software demonstrations for the technical aids listed in the education, reeducation and communication software.

The coordinating centres once set up will prepare pictures for inclusion in digitised form (scanner input) the same way as they prepare textual data.*

* *Collection of software demonstrations is still at an early stage. Continuation with the collection and training of experts will depend on the appointment (by the Member States) of further collection centres specialising in education software.*

the operating structures of the HANDYNET system



Operation of the HANDYNET system is based on:

- ▶ shared collection of data;
- ▶ decentralised processing of the information;
- ▶ decentralised distribution of the information.

This participatory approach relies on national and European partnerships between organisations whose roles are clearly defined.

3.1. THE PARTNERS



3.1.1 National Data Collection and Coordination Centres (NCC)

These are organisations appointed by each Member State to ensure coordination of the data collection at national level as regards planning and quality control of the data collected. These Centres preserve the cohesion of the HANDYNET system at national level and offer technical advice to the various collection centres and Information and Advice centres. At European level they constitute the HANDYNET Technical Coordination Group.

3.1.2 Data Collection Centres (DCC)

These are organisations appointed at national level to collect data at intervals agreed with the National Coordination Centre. The Data Collection Centres specialise in one or more technical aid categories and collect data at national or regional level depending on what the Member State decides.

3.1.3 Information and Advice Centres (IAC)

These organisations, appointed at national level, use the HANDYNET database to provide information and guidance for disabled people in choosing a technical aid suited to their needs.

3.1.4 Information Centres (IC)

These are non-specialist organisations in the field of technical aids which provide each user with access to the information contained in the database, and encourage those concerned to seek further assistance from the specialist Information and Advice Centres.

3.1.5 The HANDYNET Technical Coordinating Unit of the HELIOS Team of Experts

This unit, which is made up of experts who assist the Commission in implementing the HELIOS programme, has the task of coordinating the system at European level. It gathers data from the various Member States, carries out quality control of the data collected, organises the European network of collection and coordination centres, and monitors the technical development of the system on the basis of proposals from the HANDYNET Technical Coordination Group composed of experts from the 12 National Coordination Centres. The HELIOS advisory bodies regularly receive reports on activities developed within the general HANDYNET framework, with particular reference to the Technical Coordination Group.

3.1.6 Numeric overview of the HANDYNET network

	CNC	CCD	CIC/CI
Belgium	1	2	3
Denmark	1	2	2
Germany	1	1	-
Greece	1	7	9
Spain	1	3	30
France	1	16	20
Ireland	1	1	1
Italy	1	1	58
Luxembourg	1	2	2
Netherlands	1	1	20
Portugal	1	4	131
United Kingdom	1	7	87
Total	12	47	363

The figure for the Information and Advice Centres, showing current dissemination of the CD ROM, gives the truest indication of the HANDYNET network.

Germany has not appointed any Information and Advice Centres, choosing to disseminate material freely to any interested person or organisation.

The network of Information and Advice Centres in Italy mirrors the network set up for dissemination of the SIVA (Servizio Informazioni e Valutazione Ausili) database.

The Netherlands have not officially appointed Information and Advice Centres, although the HANDYNET CD ROM has been distributed to 20 institutions in a pilot phase.

Distribution of the HANDYNET CD ROM to organisations which are capable of providing disabled people with professional advice (rehabilitation physicians, ergotherapists, physiotherapists) is in keeping with the conclusions of the evaluation sessions. A large majority of the participants consider that HANDYNET is known more as a service than an information tool.

3.2 THE BENEFITS OF NETWORK-BASED OPERATION

The HANDYNET database is the result of the joint efforts of partners in the twelve Member States. Able-Data, a database on technical aids produced in the United States, is the outcome of a wholly centralised operation. The network-oriented approach is more complicated than the centralised approach but the resultant benefits are worthy of mention.

3.2.1 ... as regards the HANDYNET system itself

- ▶ Quicker, more exhaustive collection of data, since the task is shared by twelve Member States;
- ▶ less time spent on data collection in each Member State;
- ▶ greater likelihood of information being objective, since checks may be carried out by all the partners of the network;
- ▶ concerted technical development of the system;
- ▶ system has greater potential for dissemination.

3.2.2 ... as regards the partners' development

- ▶ Ongoing training for the Data Collection Centres and Information Centres; they provide one another with support services (training sessions + instructional material);
- ▶ pooling of expertise in terms of both content and methodology of data collection (reference group on classification);
- ▶ belonging to a group working towards the provision of better information to disabled people on the basis of a common tool.

3.3 COMMUNICATION = ELECTRONIC MAIL AND JOURNAL SYSTEM

In order to facilitate exchanges of information between partners in the HANDYNET network, a computer-based message system has been developed comprising:

- ▶ a standard message-sending function;
- ▶ a newspaper function giving details of Europe-wide events.

A pilot phase linking the National Data Collection and Coordination Centres and the HELIOS/HANDYNET Technical Coordinating Unit has been established (Y-NET under the ESPRIT programme).

While the network's partners have requested technical improvements, a communication tool of this kind serves a useful purpose only if a large number of organisations can access it.

A proposal for developing the HANDYNET computer-based message system in terms of attracting more users is being studied.

The service should comprise the following facilities:

- ▶ sending and receipt of standard messages (letters, memos, invitations, general information);
- ▶ forum for the discussion of a subject by groups of people;
- ▶ schedule of European events relating to disabled people;
- ▶ sending of computerised files.

The HANDYNET electronic mail system is to operate from a host computer of the Commission, with the aim of gradually embracing all the partners in the HELIOS programme.



the cost of the HANDYNET system

4.1 OVERALL COST IN ECUS

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	TOTAL	1994 BUDGET
Activities	383678	752428	607168	801347	774944	800455	4120020	990000
Staff	81727	205647	249675	214313	322025	295699	1369086	312090
General Expenses	314392	378237	294657	479190	584042	439511	2490029	302102
Overall Total	779797	1336312	1151500	1494850	1681011	1535665	7979135	1604192

4.2 COST OF DEVELOPING HANDYNET IN ECUS

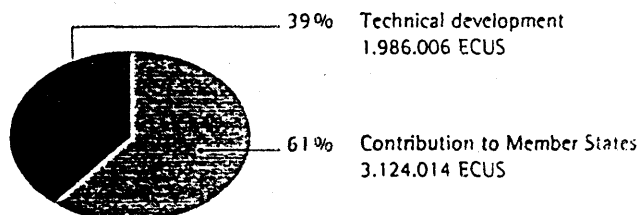
In connection with activities, part of the budget has gone into technical development, with a larger proportion being allocated to the Member States as a contribution towards:

- ▶ their expertise in study groups;
- ▶ training of experts in data collection and use of the system;
- ▶ collection of data;
- ▶ production of the CD ROM and mail system.

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	TOTAL	1994 BUDGET
Technical development	383678	505000	251500	406242	100587	318999	1966006	20000
Contribution to Member States	-	247428	355668	395105	674357	481456	2154014	970000
Total	383678	752428	607168	801347	774944	800455	4120020	990000

NB: A breakdown of expenditure for the period 1988 to 1994 is contained in Annex 2.

Budget - HANDYNET activities 1988-94



4.3 ALLOCATION OF EXPENDITURE

The budgetary analysis shown reflects trends in the last two accounting periods and the current period, viz.:

- ▶ 1992 from 16 January 1992 to 31 January 1993
- ▶ 1993 from 1 February 1993 to 31 January 1994
- ▶ 1994 from 1 February 1994 to 31 January 1995

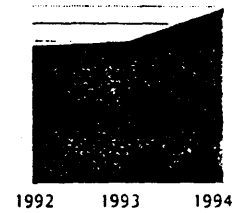
The HANDYNET budget may be divided into three main items:

1. activities;
2. staff costs;
3. general expenses.

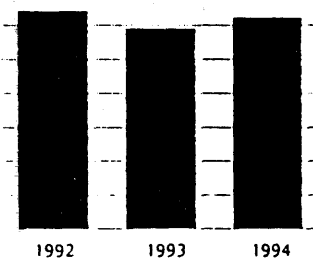
4.3.1 Allocation of expenditure for activities in ECUS

ACTIVITIES	1992	1993	1994
Technical development			
Development of the system	96423	317407	10000
Documentation	4164	1592	10000
Sub-total	100587	318999	20000
Contribution to Member States			
Study groups	150160	31630	230000
Training and evaluation session	142182	123324	100000
Data collection	144000	255000	540000
Production of CD ROM and mail system	172793	25002	100000
Consultation	65222	8500	-
Voice synthesizer	-	38000	-
Sub-total	674357	481456	970000
Total	774944	800455	990000

Expenditure - activities



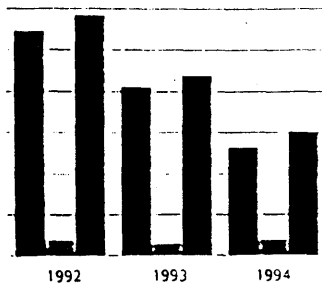
4.3.2 Allocation of expenditure to cover staff costs in ECUS



	1992	1993	1994
Staff	322025	295699	312090

Estimated budget for the current accounting period (1994).

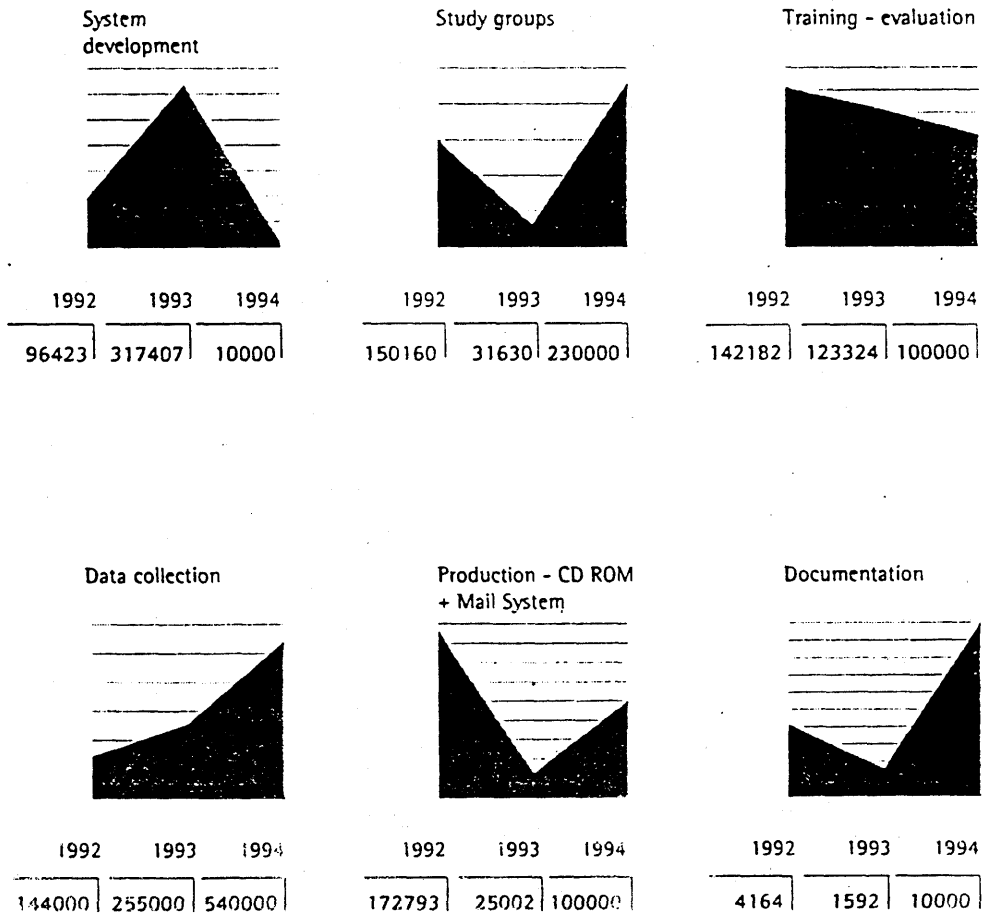
4.3.3 Expenditure for general expenses in ECUS



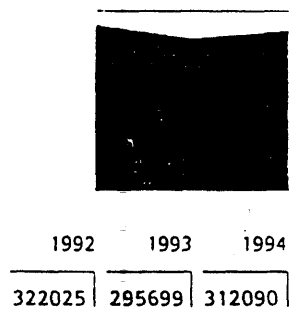
	1992	1993	1994
■ Administrative	546673	411026	264672
■ Missions	37369	28485	37430
■ Total	584042	439511	302102

4.4 TRENDS IN EXPENDITURE FOR EACH BUDGET ITEM IN ECUS

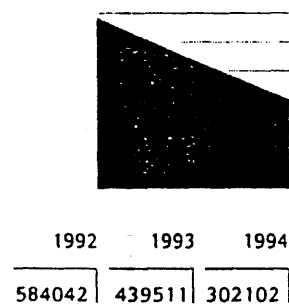
4.4.1 Expenditure for activities



4.4.2 Staff costs



4.4.3 General expenses (missions and administration)



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evaluation of the HANDYNET system by the users

Although the HANDYNET National Data Collection and Coordination Centres carry out ongoing evaluation of the system, it is essential that potential users of the database who are not involved in its construction or in the collection of information state their own views on:

- ▶ achievement of the objectives set for this information tool;
- ▶ the user-friendliness of the system and its content;
- ▶ the social consequences and impact of such a tool,

and give their opinion on:

- ▶ the profile of potential users of the database;
- ▶ meeting the cost of implementation;
- ▶ distribution of the CD ROM.

To this end, evaluation days were organised by the National Data Collection and Coordination Centres in different Member States:

Italy	▶ 26 July to 1 August 1992
	▶ 19 October 1992
Belgium (French-speaking)	▶ 19 to 22 January 1993
France	▶ 24 and 25 June 1993
	16 November 1993
	22 and 23 November 1993
	7 and 8 December 1993
Luxembourg	▶ 2 and 3 June 1993
Ireland	▶ 14 and 15 June 1993
United Kingdom	▶ 27 and 28 October 1993
Spain	▶ 11 and 12 November 1993
Denmark	▶ 5 and 6 April 1994
Portugal	▶ 6 and 7 April 1994
Germany	▶ January to March 1994
Netherlands	▶ 2 March to 22 June 1994
Greece	▶ -

Two other evaluation sessions were conducted with representatives of non-governmental European organisations for disabled people.

- ▶ European Blind Union (EBU)
5 April 1993 in Brussels
- ▶ Spanish association for persons of restricted growth, CRECER
15 and 16 November 1993 in Madrid

5.1 THE EVALUATORS OF THE HANDYNET SYSTEM

Country/ organisation	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	TOTAL
Belgium	10	30	-	12	8	60
Denmark	-	-	-	-	-	-
Germany	4	1	5	3	4	17
Greece	-	-	-	-	-	-
Spain	-	-	45	-	-	45
France	15	147	3	18	42	225
Ireland	30	23	-	3	3	59
Italy	21	11	9	-	-	41
Luxembourg	-	18	-	5	-	23
Netherlands	5	8	3	3	1	20
Portugal	4	5	23	15	3	50
United Kingdom	19	16	5	11	-	51
EBU	3	-	-	-	-	3
CRECER	12	-	-	-	-	12
TOTAL	123	259	93	70	61	606

(A) - disabled people
 - families (including those of mentally handicapped persons)
 - disabled people's organisations
 (B) - rehabilitation specialists
 - organisations for disabled people
 (C) - information specialists
 (D) - administrations
 (E) - manufacturers/distributors

V

5.2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Participants

Mixed groups composed of:

- ▶ disabled people and their families
- ▶ rehabilitation specialists
- ▶ information specialists
- ▶ administrations
- ▶ manufacturers and distributors of technical aids

Selection of participants

- ▶ by the National Data Collection and Coordination Centre for the Member State concerned

Session programme

- ▶ presentation of the objectives of evaluation
- ▶ presentation of HANDYNET to all the participants at the session
- ▶ explanation of the evaluation sheet
- ▶ practical work on computers in small groups
- ▶ completion of the evaluation sheet by each participant

620

Results

- ▶ exploitation of the results by the National Coordinating Centre
- ▶ report to the Member State concerned and to the Commission

Evaluation tools

- ▶ the latest edition of the CD ROM in use at the time of the evaluation
- ▶ standardised evaluation sheet supplemented by additional questions reflecting the situation in the Member States concerned
- ▶ suitable computer equipment employing, where necessary, voice synthesizer for the visually impaired and track-ball for the severely motor disabled.

Points to note in connection with the methodology:

- Ireland has adopted the methodology outlined above and has, in addition, asked five groups of users to evaluate HANDYNET in greater depth over a three-month period;
- in Germany, the evaluation sheet has been sent out to all the organisations using the HANDYNET CD ROM (i.e. 30 organisations known to the Commission);
- in the Netherlands, where evaluation is in progress, a phased approach has been adopted, with 13 organisations being asked to evaluate the HANDYNET CD ROM over a three-month period, holding interim meetings:

5.3 RESULTS OF THE EVALUATIONS

5.3.1 Distribution of the HANDYNET system

Actual distribution of the CD ROM No 6 (February 1994)

Member States	Number of copies of the CD ROM	Member States	Number of copies of the CD ROM
Belgium	7	Italy	39
Denmark	2	Luxembourg	10
Germany	55	Netherlands	25
Greece	36	Portugal	12
Spain	46	United Kingdom	21
France	20		
Ireland	7	Total	280

Assessment, by the 606 evaluators, of potential users of the HANDYNET CD ROM... (in %)

Rehabilitation specialists	67
Associations of and for disabled people	56
Health workers	51
Disabled people	50
Manufacturers and distributors of technical aids	49
Centres providing information and advice on technical aids	49
Social workers	35
Administrative bodies	29
Mutual insurance companies and other bodies	17
Libraries and other sources of information	1

Other potential users:

- ▶ schools, colleges and training organisations for health workers, rehabilitation specialists and architects;
- ▶ businesses;
- ▶ research and development centres in the field of technical aids;
- ▶ promoters of sports and recreational activities.

Evaluators' assessment of locations at which it should be possible to consult the HANDYNET CD ROM.... (in %)

in centres providing information and advice on technical aids	58
in rehabilitation centres	57
within associations of and for disabled people	54
within mutual societies and social security organisations	33
at specialist and other libraries	27
within administrations	23
in hospitals	20
within social services and cooperatives	14
in private households	12

Evaluators' comments concerning distribution of the HANDYNET CD ROM

- "All disabled people and any person with an interest in technical aids should be able to consult HANDYNET"
- "A distinction must be made between the HANDYNET system and the information contained therein. The information should be available to all, whereas effective use of the system itself calls for appropriate equipment and, in particular, a basic level of knowledge".
- "The services of professional staff capable of advising disabled people on the choice of technical aids appear to be essential, regardless of where the system is consulted"
- "Selection of a technical aid constitutes an element of functional rehabilitation and rehabilitation specialists must be suitably trained. HANDYNET could act as a teaching tool in the training of specialists"
- "Every interested person must have access to the information"
- "The place of consultation depends on:
 - the cost of the CD ROM;
 - the user-friendliness;
 - the frequency of use;
 - the possibility of professional guidance"
- "A flexible approach should be adopted to the dissemination of HANDYNET:
 - on CD ROM;
 - on-line via national networks such as Minitel, Prestel TV etc."

5.3.2 User-friendliness of the HANDYNET system

The user-friendliness of a database lies in its ease of use during the interrogation process and in the degree of user satisfaction with the outcome of information retrieval.

The user-friendliness of the HANDYNET database has therefore been measured:

- ▶ in general terms;
- ▶ in relation to each of the files (technical aids, manufacturers and distributors, and national rules and regulations).

Ease of use of HANDYNET

CD ROM	evaluators	date	Satisfied	Unsatisfied	No opinion	Total
N°2	Italy	August and October 1992	28	13	-	41
N°3	Belgium (FR)	January 1993	15	26	19	60
	EBU	April 1993	2	1	-	3
N°4	Luxembourg	June 1993	11	12	-	23
	Ireland	June 1993	28	20	11	59
N°5	Spain	November 1993	33	12	-	45
	Creceer	November 1993	10	2	-	12
	United Kingdom	October 1993	40	11	-	51
	France	December 1993	182	43	-	225
	Germany	January 1994	3	12	2	17
	Portugal	April 1994	40	10	-	50
		% Total	67%	28%	5%	
						586

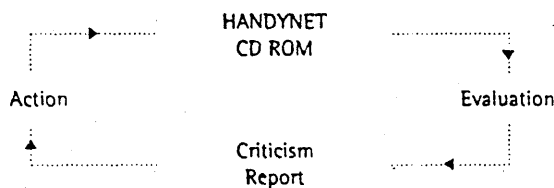
Netherlands: results incomplete.

On average, among the evaluators:

- 67% of participants consider HANDYNET to be a user-friendly tool;
- 28% consider HANDYNET to be insufficiently user-friendly.

From CD ROM No 5 (October 1993) onwards, 80% of the evaluators are satisfied with the ease of use of the HANDYNET system.

It is important to note that the evaluators' opinions relate to the latest CD ROM available at the time of the evaluation. The results of each evaluation have been taken into account in the interest of progressively improving the database by the following process:



The process is outlined in the following table which shows the comments of evaluators and the steps consequently taken.

Comments made by evaluators

Steps taken to improve HANDYNET

Interrogation procedure entailing too many stages between the beginning and end of the search.

Reorganisation of screens and listed criteria.

Too many functions to be activated before reaching the conclusion.

Removal of superfluous functions.

Difficult to mix interrogation criteria.

Organisation of interrogation logic with removal of non-essential mixed criteria.

No stored pattern of questions or interrogation strategies.

Possibility of storing interrogation strategies.

Help function inadequate and not linked to the interrogation context.

Help function linked to the stages of interrogation. Preparation of teaching software to be incorporated into the program (September 1994)..

Difficulty in using listed criteria organised on a hierarchical basis.

Criteria accessible alphabetically in the nine languages.

Inability to understand the terminology used in some parts of the database.

Introduction of a multilingual thesaurus containing definitions of the terminology used and equivalent terms (1995).

Inconsistencies in the use of function keys.

Reduction in the number of function keys; greater consistency sought.

Lack of interrogation by key words.

Work in progress on the multilingual thesaurus which will allow interrogation using the textual descriptions in the nine languages.

Search time too slow.

The response speed depends partly on the power of the computer used, on the quantity of data recorded in the database and on the number of interrogation stages to be covered. The steps taken to reduce the number of search stages will increase the response speed.

Poor quality of voice synthesis.

HANDYNET was designed for use with voice synthesizer available on the European market which, more often than not, were already used by the blind and visually impaired for purposes other than consultation of HANDYNET. Linguistic quality varies greatly from one voice synthesizer to another. Few are multilingual. The Commission intends to look into the development of a high-quality European voice synthesizer. However, in terms of the interrogation programme for HANDYNET itself, improvements are being made to help blind and visually impaired users to find their way through the system.



Evaluation of the HANDYNET database by persons not involved in devising the structures or in collecting the data is conducive to the development of the system.

It is felt in some quarters that the ultimate users of this information tool ought to have been involved from the outset.

In any case, an ongoing process of obtaining feedback from target groups should be applied more systematically in the future, in order to ensure that development of the system is tailored to the actual needs of the users.

5.3.3 Content of the database

The usefulness of any information system depends on two essential parameters:

- ▶ the functionality of the system and its ease of use;
- ▶ the content of the information recorded.

The content of the information contained in HANDYNET is dependent on the efforts of the National data collection and Coordination Centres in quantitative terms and, more particularly, in qualitative terms.

The attention of the database evaluators was drawn particularly to the qualitative aspect.

They examined in turn:

- ▶ the textual information;
- ▶ the multimedia information (pictures and education and retraining software demonstrations).

5.3.3.1 Textual information

5.3.3.1.1 As regards technical aids

Some views of the evaluators:

A The technical aid should be described more fully:

- ▶ functional description;
- ▶ technical and numeric information;
- ▶ price.

These descriptions must be systematically accessible in all the languages.

Results of analysis of the qualitative content of CD ROM No 6:

Presence of functional description in the national language	100%
Presence of functional description in English	53.16%
Presence of technical and numeric information	32.01%
Presence of price indication	74.01%

The National Data Collection and Coordination Centres were asked to supply descriptions of the technical aids in their own language and in English, with the English versions serving as a basis for translation into the other languages by the National Centres.

The average percentage figure for descriptions in English is attributable to the fact that, for Italy, Germany and Denmark, the data supplied for HANDYNET derive from interfacing with national databases which contain few or no descriptions in English.

Some translation work is therefore needed to ensure that the information can be read by all.

The presence of price indications depends largely on the willingness of manufacturers or distributors to give this information to the Data Collection Centres. More effort should be made to strengthen contacts between the collection centres and the manufacturers and distributors of technical aids.

B Product name searches are not satisfactory since the term depends on the language used by the manufacturer.

Each technical aid is recorded in the database:

- ▶ according to its category = ISO 9999 = multilingual;
- ▶ according to a generic term = multilingual glossary;
- ▶ according to the name given by the manufacturer = unilingual, as well as the type and model.

C Coverage of technical aids for the visually impaired is inadequate.

The extent of information on technical aids for the visually impaired depends on the appointment of specialist collection centres in the different Member States.

D The quality of information varies depending on which Member State supplies the information.

Since the beginning of 1993, the National data collection and Coordination Centres have focused more on the quality of information than on the quantity of technical aids listed. This is the result of an agreement between the centres concerned and the Commission, the latter making a financial contribution.

E Functional restrictions for which the technical aid compensates may not be consistent with the international classification system.

The International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH) of the World Health Organisation (WHO) is used as a criterion for analysing technical aids on the basis of the impairments and disabilities addressed (since September 1993).

F Products which are no longer on the market should be deleted from the database but should be consultable in an archive file.

The National data collection and Coordination Centres are responsible for monitoring the quality of the data collected for HANDYNET. They alone are entitled to add or remove data.

G Information on a technical aid should be available in summarised or detailed form according to the wishes of the users.

The interrogation software affords every user an option in terms of the information output format, whether summarised or detailed. Such flexibility is geared to the different target groups which may use the system.



H Information on a technical aid must be accompanied, as a matter of course, by information on the manufacturer or distributor.

Only the manufacturer's name is contained in the files on technical aids. Since the aim of the system is to give an idea of the commercial network for each technical aid, there would be little point in having a long list of distributors' names and addresses within each technical aid description. HANDYNET makes it possible to move from consultation of the product to manufacturer and distributor references according to the needs of the user.

I It ought to be possible to sort technical aids in terms of adult or child users.

This facility is being incorporated into the information structures in the light of proposals from the group of experts from different Member States who have worked on the structures and protocols of the HANDYNET system.

J The sort criteria need to be more explicit, with explanations of their meaning.

Explanations are being inserted in the help function and in the teaching software which is to be incorporated into the HANDYNET interrogation program (September 1994). Moreover, a study group is currently preparing definitions of the HANDYNET terminology.

5.3.3.1.2 As regards organisations

- ▶ The points made regarding the quality of information and the lack of explanations for the interrogation criteria in connection with technical aids are repeated for the organisations file.

The comments are therefore the same.

Moreover, the evaluators are in favour of steps being taken:

A to supplement the structured information on organisations with a description in the form of free text so as to detail the objectives and activities of the organisations listed. The present data collection structure for HANDYNET is geared to describing organisations in this way. It has to be made clear that such an addition means extra work for the collection centres, which must ensure translation into English then into the other languages.

B to list more organisations which are not businesses (associations, research centres, rehabilitation centres etc.)

The HANDYNET file for collecting the information on organisations is designed to be highly flexible. It is possible to include in the database references to all organisations associated with disability in general.

A pilot phase for the inclusion of organisations specialising in sports for the disabled in the HANDYNET database was successfully implemented in 1993. The European Committee on Sport for the Disabled is currently revising the data so that they can be updated and reinserted into the database some time in 1994.

The flexibility of the HANDYNET file on organisations makes it possible to insert straightaway any references to European or national non-governmental organisations and to activities playing a part in the process of integrating disabled people.

- C to remove the distinction between commercial and non-commercial organisations
This division into two categories is removed in the current structure of the database.

5.3.3.1.3 As regards national rules and regulations

The evaluators are in favour of steps being taken:

- A to make national rules and regulations available in all the languages.

The file on national rules and regulations is in the form of free text. Priority has been given to the version in the national language and in English. The ideal situation would be availability in all the languages. This once again raises the problem of translations to be provided in the Community languages by the National data collection and Coordination Centres.

- B to have the regulations updated more regularly

Updating the information on a regular basis is a matter for the National data collection and Coordination Centres, which are responsible for quality control of the data supplied for HANDYNET.

- C to expand the information content, particularly as regards standardisation

Aspects of standardisation and the authorising of reimbursement in respect of technical aids by the responsible bodies are incorporated in the description of the technical aids themselves.

- D to make the interrogation procedure more direct

The rules and regulations file was devised as a decision tree, entailing closely guided progression which may at times appear lengthy. The introduction of research based on key words prepared by a group of experts from the various Member States in connection with work on the HANDYNET thesaurus will address this concern (1995).

5.3.3.2 Multimedia information

The supplementing of HANDYNET's textual information with pictures and education and retraining software demonstrations is a welcome development.

It seems necessary to have at least one picture for each technical aid.

However, the blind and visually impaired, who are denied the added value provided by such illustrations, are calling for a description of the picture content in voice form similar to that which already exists in the arts sector (cinema/theatre).

Since all the National data collection and Coordination Centres have been trained in photographic techniques and the digitization of pictures, the aim of fully illustrating all the technical aids should be achieved by June 1995.

There are two possible approaches to the preparation of education or retraining software demonstrations:

- ▶ obtain the demonstrations directly from the producers;
- ▶ prepare the demonstrations in each collection centre on the basis of an appropriate computer program.

The latter method appears more satisfactory in terms of enabling the specialist collection centres to build up a software library.

5.4 THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE HANDYNET SYSTEM

The HANDYNET database on technical aids is intended for fairly widespread dissemination. It is important to gauge the social impact of such dissemination on the main target groups who are likely to use HANDYNET.

The HANDYNET evaluators have therefore successively examined:

- ▶ the advantages of such a system for the various target groups;
- ▶ the advantages of a European system compared with a national system;
- ▶ the drawbacks of a European system compared with a national system.

5.4.1 Advantages of HANDYNET dissemination

For disabled people/families:

- ▶ practical advantages:
 - information on the European single market;
 - greater variety of products presented;
 - enhanced technical and financial selection of the most suitable technical aid;
 - better information on disabled people's rights.
- ▶ cultural advantage:
 - lending a European dimension to the concept of a more independent way of life.
- ▶ equal opportunities for disabled people with regard to information.

For associations:

- ▶ availability of information on technical aids enabling comparisons to be made;
- ▶ addressing the European dimension in the technical aids market;
- ▶ availability of information on other associations with the possibility of forging Europe-wide contacts.

For professional workers:

- ▶ fuller, more relevant information helping to improve the quality of advice given;
- ▶ time savings in seeking information;
- ▶ information on technical developments;
- ▶ enhanced knowledge;
- ▶ means of changing the approach to advising disabled people;
- ▶ instructional tool to improve the training of technical aid users.

For administrations:

- ▶ saving in resources needed to construct a comparable information facility;
- ▶ improved service;
- ▶ reduced expenditure thanks to product comparison;
- ▶ Europe-wide standardisation of the "technical aids" concept.

For manufacturers and distributors of technical aids:

- ▶ better knowledge of what is available on the market;
- ▶ opportunity for price comparison, thereby enhancing competition;
- ▶ possibility of listing contracts for importation;
- ▶ potential advertising tool with more extensive outlets outside the European Union.

For other target groups:

- ▶ For researchers and inventors:
 - possibility of gearing research and development towards new products or improving existing ones;
 - promoting contacts and cooperation at European level.
- ▶ For policy-makers:
 - availability of information on the activities of organisations, thereby avoiding unnecessary duplication.
- ▶ For the public in general:
 - greater awareness of disabled people's problems.

5.4.2 Advantages of a European system compared with a national system

- ▶ Greater depth of information as a result of shared collection work.
- ▶ Improved competition between producers from different Member States, encouraging them to choose the best product, drawing on the most useful experience and the most appropriate legislation.
- ▶ Europe-wide information less likely to be construed as commercially-oriented.
- ▶ Greater transparency in the European single market.
- ▶ Incentive to create new products on a larger scale.
- ▶ Single cultural reference enabling data from the technologically most advanced countries to be passed on to the less advanced countries.
- ▶ Cultural vehicle employing a common terminology (classifications and descriptive criteria).
- ▶ Contribution to development of common policies in the field of rehabilitation technologies.
- ▶ Improved coordination and standardisation of information.

HANDYNET is perceived as an information tool whose European dimension can only enhance:

- ▶ the transparency of information;
- ▶ cooperation;
- ▶ research and innovation;
- ▶ higher quality technical aids at more competitive prices;
for the greater benefit of disabled people.

The vast majority of evaluators of the HANDYNET system:

- ▶ have welcomed their involvement in the evaluation of this European information tool;
- ▶ wish to see HANDYNET disseminated more widely;
- ▶ think that the HANDYNET system should be considered as an information service supplemented by personal advice from experts;

- ▶ feel that the users should be given training in its use;
- ▶ suggest that the system's operation could be improved by simplifying the interrogation procedures;
- ▶ are seeking collection of data on all the technical aids available on the European market;
- ▶ wish to receive publications deriving from the database (technical files, catalogues);
- ▶ wish to be kept informed of the development of the HANDYNET system.

5.4.3 Drawbacks of a European system compared with a national system.

- ▶ The large quantity of data recorded:
 - makes choice more difficult;
 - increases the difficulty of keeping the database up-to-date;
 - calls for supplementary information for purposes of evaluation.
- ▶ A European approach highlights inequalities between Member States, particularly in the legislative field.
- ▶ Increased demand for technical aids on the part of users may outstrip the resources available to meet their needs.
- ▶ More widespread distribution of products on the European market may give rise to problems of maintenance and after-sales service.
- ▶ Local information becomes secondary to general information of interest at European level.
- ▶ The cost of maintaining such a system is liable to be higher.

cooperation with Community initiatives

VI

HORIZON, TIDE, COST 219, RACE

Cooperation between HANDYNET and the above Community initiatives is directed towards three specific areas:

- ▶ The training of professionals responsible for collecting data for HANDYNET as well as for assisting disabled people in their choice of technical aids.

Bilateral training activities have been implemented under the Horizon initiative. Professionals from the following Member States were involved in these activities, either as trainees or as instructors: Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France, Italy, Portugal.

- ▶ The relationship between the European market for technical aids and research and development taking place in this field.

Cooperation between HELIOS-HANDYNET and the TIDE and RACE programmes and the COST 219, COST A4 and COST A5 cooperation projects was consolidated as a result of a seminar on the social impact of new technologies on disabled and elderly people (17 and 18 January 1994), though there had been regular exchanges of information prior to that. An inventory of research and development in the field of rehabilitation technologies is to be drawn up on the basis of this cooperation, supplementing the information on technical aids already available on the European market.

- ▶ Availability of the instruments and experience acquired during implementation of the HANDYNET project for use in other applications developed at European level.

The first practical application of this is the databank of Horizon projects set up jointly by HANDYNET and Horizon.

As a result of greater cooperation, it will be possible for the Horizon initiative to have direct access to the HANDYNET databank, CD-ROM providing greater access to information concerning organisations involved in the Horizon projects.

VI

cooperation with international organisations

7.1 THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The Council of Europe convenes meetings of a Committee of experts for the application of the international classification of impairments, disabilities and handicaps (ICIDH/WHO) twice a year. These meetings are attended by a representative of the Commission.

This classification of items relating specifically to impairments and disabilities has been included in the HANDYNET system as a search criterion, making it possible to select the technical aids listed on the basis of the functional disabilities for which they compensate.

HANDYNET, along with other data media, is one of the fields covered by the ICIDH.

A member of the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts represents that committee as an observer during work on the development of the classifications used in the HANDYNET system, thus providing a link between the HANDYNET system and the Council of Europe.

7.2 ISO (INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS ORGANISATION)

ISO (International Standards Organisation) has been closely associated with the HANDYNET reference group on classifications since 1991. The amendments to ISO classification 9999 proposed by the HANDYNET reference group have been taken into account by ISO's ad-hoc working party on amendment of the classification.

Likewise, cooperation between HANDYNET and ISO concerning the compilation of a multilingual thesaurus on ISO is very encouraging.

ISO is in favour of the HANDYNET thesaurus becoming an international terminological standard.

A representative of ISO (Terminology working party) attends the meetings of the HANDYNET study group on the thesaurus.

A member of the HANDYNET thesaurus group chairs ISO's terminology group.

On the basis of the Council Decision of 25 February 1993 establishing the HELIOS II programme, in particular the Annex supplementing Article 4, the developments in progress relate to:

- ▶ orthoses and prostheses;
- ▶ the HANDYNET thesaurus;
- ▶ the inventory of applied research activities in the field of technical aids;
- ▶ information on the quality of technical aids;
- ▶ products from non-member countries available on the European market;
- ▶ educational material for users of the system.

8.1 ORTHOSES AND PROTHESES

According to ISO classification 9999 (International Standards Organisation) on technical aids, orthoses and prostheses are included among technical aids. A study group responsible for defining the description of this very special type of technical aid will present its report before the end of 1994.

The databank collection and interrogation structures will then be adapted to enable information on these technologies to be incorporated.

8.2 THE HANDYNET THESAURUS

At the request of present users and those evaluating the HANDYNET system, an interrogation system based on key words accompanied by their definition will be introduced into the HANDYNET system.

A study group comprising experts from the various Member States has been assigned the task of defining the concepts used in HANDYNET and thus compiling a multilingual dictionary. This will be included in the databank for automatic access. The HANDYNET thesaurus will also facilitate the work of European translators in the field of rehabilitation technologies.

8.3 THE INVENTORY OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Information on organisations, research centres, industries, etc. involved in or connected with research and technological development in the field of information technologies and communications applied to the needs of disabled or elderly people is available in the form of a database under the TIDE initiative.

This database meets the organisational and monitoring requirements of the TIDE initia-

tive, which are similar to the requirements of DG XII's and DG XIII's other R&TD programmes. Nevertheless, the need for compatibility with HANDYNET and the principal ICIDH classifications has been taken into consideration and the file structures have been developed by taking into account the file structures of organisations used by HANDYNET. The transfer of data is therefore very quick and no additional investment in data processing technology is required.

In order to facilitate and maintain compatibility, the HANDYNET and TIDE teams will establish a permanent coordination procedure.

8.4 INFORMATION ON QUALITY

In accordance with the Council's Decision and the European Parliament's opinion and further to the comments made in particular by end users of the information contained in HANDYNET, the system has been adapted to enable references on the quality of technologies to be introduced.

This involves:

- ▶ references to tests by approved laboratories;
- ▶ references to consumer tests;
- ▶ references to technical, scientific or consumer publications.

With the help of these references, the user may receive specific information on test reports and publications. This information must be submitted by the National Coordination Centres responsible for data collection which maintain contact with laboratories and consumers' associations.

conclusions and future prospects

IX

The work carried out so far to render the HANDYNET system operational is the result of close cooperation between the Member States, experts and the European Commission, assisted by the HELIOS team of experts.

HANDYNET is practical and functional and meets the information needs of disabled people.

The information is available on CD-ROM and each Member State is responsible for its dissemination.

The HANDYNET CD-ROM is available from the technical aids Information and Advice Centres designated by the Member States, which provide guidance and advice as well as the information product.

The structure of the HANDYNET system makes it possible for the organisations file to be extended directly to any organisation associated with disability.

The information contained in the system is available in the nine languages of the European Union.

HANDYNET has social implications because it promotes the social and economic integration of disabled people, provides greater equality of opportunity for disabled people with regard to information on technical aids which are essential for greater mobility and independence in their daily and professional lives.

In economic terms, HANDYNET provides greater transparency within the rehabilitation technologies market and, as a result of greater competition, undoubtedly has a beneficial effect on the quality of technical aids and on pricing levels.

On the communications front, HANDYNET makes it possible to develop contacts between organisations associated with the disabled by providing information on the activities undertaken by such organisations, thus increasing opportunities for synergy at European level.

On a political level, HANDYNET provides those administering Community policies at national, regional or local level with a factual, statistical basis with which to examine the measures taken or which they wish to develop in the field of technical aids.

HANDYNET is a source of information to which any interested party may have access and whose prospects under the HELIOS II programme might be the following:

IX

9.1 THE TECHNICAL AIDS MODULE: PROSPECTS

9.1.1 Technical and data processing developments

All major technical and data processing developments can be considered to have been completed. Only the following activities should be envisaged:

- ▶ introduction of structures relating to orthoses and prostheses;
- ▶ introduction of new languages with the accession of the EFTA countries (Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish and Icelandic) under the EEA agreement;
- ▶ incorporation of the work of the thesaurus study group to provide more flexible access to information (search using key words);
- ▶ incorporation of teaching software on the use of the data bank.

9.1.2 Developments relating to information content

As the quality of information depends on Member States' efforts to collect information, it is desirable to:

- ▶ update data already collected (textual data, images and demonstrations of educational software);
- ▶ continue to collect technical aids manufactured in non-member countries and available on the European market;
- ▶ supplement the information concerning technologies currently available on the market with information on research and development in the field of technical aids, in cooperation with the TIDE and RACE programmes and the COST 219 cooperation project;
- ▶ monitor the use of classifications and suggest possible improvements (ISO - ICIDH).

9.1.3 Dissemination of the HANDYNET CD-ROM

- ▶ An information system is only of any real value if it is widely disseminated and accessible.
- ▶ On the basis of requests from Member States and others, the HANDYNET Technical Coordination Group establishes the number of CD-ROMs to be produced and distributed to the National Coordination Centres and the Commission.
- ▶ Distribution in the Member States is carried out via the National Coordination Centres which collect annual subscriptions at national level.
- ▶ Distribution in non-member countries and to international organisations is carried out directly by the organisation appointed following an invitation to tender by the Commission for the production and distribution of CD-ROM on the basis of annual subscriptions recorded by the Commission.
- ▶ A single production price for the CD-ROM will be fixed on the basis of information supplied by the appointed organisation, taking into account the following factors:
 - preparation of data,
 - production of a master-copy;
 - production of the number of copies necessary;
 - labelling;
 - cost of dispatch to National Coordination Centres responsible for collection and to non-member countries and international organisations;
 - marketing costs;
 - administrative costs of the organisation responsible for production and distribution;
 - cost of after-sales service.

- ▶ The relevant bodies are consulted.
- ▶ The single production price is applied to each copy distributed.
- ▶ The Commission is responsible for the cost of production of the copies intended for the National Coordination Centres and any national collectors.
- ▶ The CD-ROM may be sold or distributed free of charge to users nationally by the National Coordination Centres.

In the case of sale, the monies collected at national level flow directly to the National Coordinating Centre which fixed the selling price in agreement with the national authorities. The sale takes the form of an annual subscription so that users can be identified and, when new editions are issued, the old copies can be recovered and returned to the organisation designated to produce and distribute the CD-ROM.

- ▶ The selling price of the CD-ROM for non-member countries and international organisations will be fixed on the basis of the highest selling price within the Member States. The monies received will be divided among the National Coordination Centres in proportion to the amount of data collected and updated.
- ▶ The HANDYNET Technical Coordination Group regularly examines CD-ROM production and distribution activities and the planning of future activities.
- ▶ The organisation appointed to produce and distribute CD-ROMs must present a half-yearly report, comprising a clear statement of its accounts and a list of users and the number of CD-ROMs supplied.
- ▶ The Commission provides technical support with regard to the training of CD-ROM users to those National Coordination Centres which request it.
- ▶ Any modifications to the system as a result of general technical developments in the field of data processing are the responsibility of the Commission.

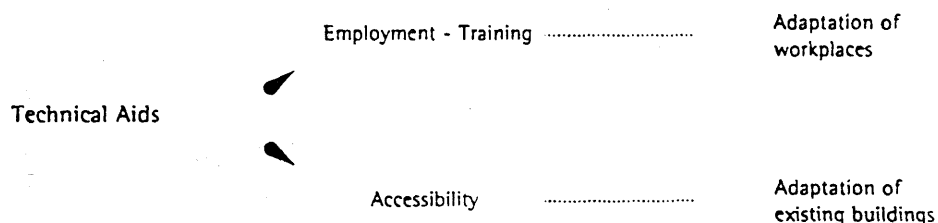
9.2 SUPPLEMENTARY MODULES

The main objective of the HANDYNET European computerised information system is to meet the information needs of disabled people in all areas affecting their daily and professional lives.

Two particularly important areas should be dealt with in terms of information:

- ▶ vocational training and economic integration;
- ▶ accessibility of public places.

Technical aids, the subject of an existing module, are a feature common to both these areas:



If we take the adaptation of workplaces as an example, it is interesting to note that steps are already being taken towards the setting up of a databank on case studies relating to the adaptation of workplaces. Several Member States are involved and the work will provide a basis for a future module on employment and training.

The HANDYNET system's multifunctional approach is appropriate because it offers users a basis of unique, reliable information for use in other fields of application which are complementary to the process of integrating disabled people.

The methodological approach towards the development of these two new modules will differ substantially from that which existed when the technical aids module was implemented.

It is not intended to create an instrument from scratch, but to use what already exists to locate relevant organisations in the existing HANDYNET file.

The procedure will involve:

- ▶ Adding a European dimension to information tools existing in the Member States provided that these meet the information needs expressed by:
 - disabled people (NGOs from the Forum);
 - professionals working in one of the areas concerned (partners involved in the HELIOS programme's exchange and information activities).

A study phase will be launched under the HELIOS II programme in cooperation with the other programmes (HORIZON, TIDE, RACE) and projects (COST 219) involved.

This study phase will be divided into three stages:

- ▶ analysis of information needs;
- ▶ analysis of existing material;
- ▶ gathering of opinions from consultative bodies;
- ▶ report and proposal from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament.

9.3 ELECTRONIC MAIL SYSTEM

This is a modern and essential communications instrument.

It deserves to be extended to all partners involved in the HELIOS programme during 1995, i.e. 676 posts for exchange and information activities and also posts for European non-governmental partner organisations.

annex 1

Equipment necessary for the HANDYNET databank on CD-ROM

When using CD-ROM HANDYNET, WINDOWS version, it is recommended that each workstation be equipped with the following:

- ▶ IBM compatible PC (386 or higher);
- ▶ CD-ROM drive (internal or external), complying with ISO standard 9660, preferably with voice output capacity for future developments;
- ▶ Diskette drive (3.5" for 1.44 megabyte diskettes) solely for installation;
- ▶ SVGA (super video graphic adaptor) and monitor. The SVGA is necessary to give an improved image;
- ▶ 4 megabytes of random access memory (RAM) recommended for image processing;
- ▶ Minimum of 10 megabytes of free space on the disk;
- ▶ Microsoft mouse or 100% compatible;
- ▶ DOS 3.3 (or higher);
- ▶ Windows 3.1.

annex 2

(Chapter 4) The cost of the HANDYNET system in ECUs

Activities	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	Total	Budget 1994
	383678	-	-	-	-	-	383678	-
Documentation	-	-	-	1719	4164	1592	7475	10000
ESA activities	-	266000	154500	75000	-	-	495500	-
ESA missions	-	197000	97000	76000	-	-	370000	-
ESA management	-	42000	-	-	-	-	42000	-
Study group on motor disabilities and training	-	150912	234259	183994	-	-	569165	-
Group on visual aids	-	37746	40060	-	-	-	77806	-
Group on software	-	58770	52966	-	-	-	111736	-
Group on communication	-	-	28383	35425	-	-	63808	-
Study group on classification	-	-	-	37220	50425	15973	103618	-
Study group on structures and protocols	-	-	-	21472	53364	15657	90493	-
Study group on images and graphics	-	-	-	27358	10789	-	38147	-
Study group on special interfaces	-	-	-	9636	15321	-	24957	-
Study group on the thesaurus	-	-	-	-	20261	-	20261	-
Consultation of centres	-	-	-	20000	-	-	20000	-
Studies and planning	-	-	-	253523	-	-	253523	-
Consultant	-	-	-	34000	34000	8500	76500	-
External work	-	-	-	26000	31222	-	57222	-
Equipment, materials, software	-	-	-	-	15078	29697	44775	-
Translations	-	-	-	-	40677	-	40667	-
Data processing developments	-	-	-	-	40668	287710	328378	10000
Teaching materials	-	-	-	-	5000	-	5000	-
Improvement of voice synthesis	-	-	-	-	-	38000	38000	-
Bilateral training	-	-	-	-	121664	-	121664	-
Training sessions	-	-	-	-	-	66323	66323	50000
Evaluation	-	-	-	-	15518	57001	72519	50000
Image collection	-	-	-	-	24000	95000	119000	240000
Data collection	-	-	-	-	120000	160000	280000	240000
Production of CD-ROM+ message system + newsletter	-	-	-	-	172793	25002	197795	60000
Implementation of orthoses/prostheses module	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	50000
Implementation of thesaurus and classifications	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	80000
Inventory	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	50000
Quality labels	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	60000
Extension of the message system	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	40000
Statistical study on technical aids	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	50000
SUB-TOTAL	383678	752428	607168	801347	774944	800455	4120020	990000

Personnel expenses

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	Total	Budget 1994
Personnel expenses	81727	205647	249675	214313	322025	295699	1369086	312090

General expenses

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	Total	Budget 1994
Missions	18114	34326	38411	39806	37369	28485	196511	37430
Administrative	296278	343911	256246	439384	546673	411026	2293518	264672
Total	314392	378237	294657	479190	584042	439511	2490029	302102

annex 3

List of National Collection and Coordination Centres

BELGIUM

Cepiath

Rue J. Stallaert 1 bte 8
B-1060 Bruxelles

M. L. VOLON

Tél: 32/2/344.25.34

Fax: 32/2/343.89.90

Vlicht v.z.w.

Tervuursevest 101
B-3001 Leuven

M. Prof. SPAEPEN

Tél: 32/16/20.79.88

Fax: 32/16/29.32.53

DENMARK

DANISH CENTRE for technical aids for rehabilitation and education - Gregersensvej

DK-2630 Taastrup

Ms E. KAMPMANN
HANSEN

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Herr Dr. S. ISTANBULI

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National Rehabilitation Board 44 North Great Georges Street IRL-Dublin 1

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Institute of Computer Science- Foundation of Research and Technology - Hellas

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E-28038 Madrid

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