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EUROPEAN COMMUNITY BEGINS PREMIUM PLAN TO COMBAT YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

In an effort to alleviate severe youth unemployment throughout its nine member states, the European Community this month began sharing the costs of a \$40 per person weekly premium to be paid to employers who give jobs to young people under 25.

The premiums, established in late November by the EC Council on Social Affairs, will amount to about \$97 million expenditure by the European Community on 100,000 youths. "This is the first time in history that the Community has taken direct responsibility for the problem of out-of-work teenagers," said Social Affairs Commissioner Henk Vredeling, in announcing the decision.

Youth unemployment has been an increasing problem in Europe, just as it has been in the United States. Unemployment among teenagers is three times higher than the overall average, and for young people between 20 and 25 years it is double the average. In 1977, 37.4 per cent of the total 6 million unemployed were under 25.

The decision by the Council on Social Affairs to stimulate recruitment and employment of young people is an attempt to create new jobs that will give young people stable work experience. The employers may be private companies, associations, local or regional public associations that provide jobs to meet public needs, such as in the fields of health, help to senior citizens, education, social services or the environment. The premiums will not be available for jobs created directly by the state or for new jobs that are simply an increase in public administration staff. Costs of the premium plan will be shared 50/50 by the European Community's Social Fund and the member state concerned.

The jobs creation and recruitment plan is a modest beginning, Vredeling acknowledged in Brussels, but he noted that it was the first time the Community as such has directly intervened against youth unemployment.

At the Brussels press conference Vredeling also announced another far-reaching decision agreed by the Council on Social Affairs: to extend the principle of equality in social security benefits to women. Because of the complicated legislation necessary in some Community nations to achieve equality, the Council directive allows a grace period of six years, to 1984, for member states to enforce the directive.

The directive ordering equality in social security rights is the third such order dealing with equality of the sexes, as established in the Treaty of Rome that is the "constitution" of the European Community. The first, in 1975, called for equal pay. The second, in 1976, called for equal access to jobs, vocational training and promotions, and equal standards in conditions of work.

The new directive establishes that social security systems -- or social aid measures that replace them -- should provide equal protection for women against the risks of sickness, invalidism, old age, accidents at work, occupational diseases and unemployment. Benefits not covered by this directive, such as family allowances, are subject to later Commission proposals for action by the Social Affairs Council.