



4 european symposia

Exchange and information activities

The objective of the HELIOS programme is to assist the economic, social and cultural integration of disabled people, and there is no shortage of resources and ideas in the countries of the European Union to put these aims into practice. What is needed now is access for all disabled people in the Community to information and services, if not identical in form, then at least of equal quality. And society still has to recognise that genuine integration can come about only by means of a series of practical measures and action to combat the prejudice still all too often directed at disabled people.

It is with this in mind that HELIOS II sets out to stimulate, in particular, exchange and information activities (AEI) among 676 partners designated by the 12 Member States. Most of them met for the first time at a series of four symposia held in Brussels in November and December 1993 on the HELIOS programme's four fields of action: **functional rehabilitation, educational integration, economic integration, and social integration and independent living.**

The participants in the exchange activities are generally representatives of initiatives, projects and organisations at local, regional or national level. The conferences, seminars, study visits, training placements, etc. to be organised over the course of the programme will give them numerous opportunities to trade experiences and exchange information. The object of the exercise is to encourage a transfer of knowledge, innovative practices and expertise. In other words, HELIOS creates the opportunity to see what is being done by and for disabled people elsewhere, and adapt the best practice for use at home. It should be remembered, however, that the HELIOS programme provides no financial assistance for existing local activities; nor can it support individual projects outside the AEI framework.

The symposia

Educational integration, 29 and 30 November 1993: the first symposium was attended by more than 130 delegates, members of the HELIOS Advisory Committee, members of the Integrated Education Group, and a representative of the European Disability Forum. All levels of education were represented. There are three priority themes for action in the education sector in 1994: early educational attention, educational work at all levels of education, and teacher training (training of all teachers in dealing with the needs of disabled children, special training, and continuing training).

Economic integration, 6 and 7 December 1993: three main areas of activity were proposed to participants at the second symposium: vocational guidance (for 1994), difficulties and opportunities on the open labour market (1994 to 1996), and sheltered employment with a view to transition towards open employment (1994 and 1995). In addition, participants were asked to consider two sub-themes: new technologies and the economic integration of disabled women. There are also plans for a good practice guide.

Social integration and independent living, 16 and 17 December 1993: the third symposium covered a broad range of issues and attracted a wide variety of participants (members of associations of relatives of disabled people, members of local associations, educationalists, volunteers, etc.). Participants divided into groups to discuss the transition towards independence for people with physical disability, sensorial disability, mental disability or mental health problems.

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Bimonthly
newsletter
of the
Community
action programme
to assist
disabled people



The Green Paper on European social policy: citizens of the Union

have a right to make their voice heard
In mid-November of last year, Pádraig Flynn, member of the Commission with special responsibility for employment, industrial relations and social affairs, presented a green paper entitled "European social policy: options for the Union"*. It is based on contributions from the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee, national governments, the social partners, and a range of organisations and individuals. The intention of the paper is to stimulate "a wide-ranging debate" in all the Member States, with the aim of encouraging reactions and suggestions on the full range of issues in the social policy sphere for the white paper due to be published in the second half of 1994. The white paper will set out guidelines for practical programmes and legislative texts at both national and Union level.

The green paper focuses on 65 issues, covering the whole range of social policy (employment, social protection, equal opportunities, training, etc.), firstly from the standpoint of priority issues for the individual Member States, and secondly in terms of areas of possible convergence at European level. The paper emphasises that "all

interested parties are welcome to contribute to this debate and consider the different options for the future." On the subject of concerted measures to assist disabled people, questions 27 and 28 read as follows:

- "How can we best progress in the area of integration of disabled people?"
- "Should the Union develop specific legislative action in this area? What role would the social partners play in this respect? How to strengthen partnerships between the various actors, NGOs, social partners, local authorities, etc.?"

The European Union is at a turning point. Decisions taken in the coming period will set the direction of social policy for many years to come. In this context, we call on all sections of opinion to put forward practical proposals. The formal deadline for submission of ideas is 31 March 1994.

These should be addressed to:
Commission of the European Communities
Mr H.C. Jones,
Acting Director-General, DG V
"Green paper" RP 11 - 4/17,
Rue de la Loi 200, B-1049 Brussels

* *The green paper is available on request in all EU Member States from the Offices of the European Commission.*

Seminar on new technology

On 17 and 18 January, the Commission organised a seminar in Brussels on the social impact of new technology on the life of disabled and elderly people. The event drew participants from some 15 countries, representing associations of disabled people, ministries, technical aid manufacturers, research and development institutes, and relevant Commission programmes and departments: COST, RACE and TIDE (DG XIII), and HELIOS-HANDYNET, HORIZON and the programme for the elderly (DG V).

Two main conclusions emerged from the seminar. Firstly, a universal approach to new products is needed: they must be designed from the outset to suit all users, including elderly and disabled people. Secondly, potential users and organisations of disabled and elderly people should be closely involved in the design and manufacturing of products based on new technologies.

The conclusions and recommendations of the seminar are available in English and French from the HTE.

Group is composed of one representative of the government of each Member State, a representative of an NGO from the European Disability Forum concerned with the economic integration of disabled people, and representatives of the social partners. Its mandate is to further the practical implementation of the HELIOS II programme by promoting Community-wide cooperation between the Commission, Member States, disabled people, employers and employees. It is also responsible for ensuring that other, more general Community programmes and initiatives in the

field of economic integration, vocational training and the transition to the world of work complement each other and take account of disabled people's interests.

Biennial international HANDI-INSERTION meeting

The international HANDI-INSERTION meeting was held in Lyon on 17 and 18 November, this time with the subheading "European discussions on the occupational and social integration of disabled people". Over the two days of the event, government representatives, businesspeople, pro-

fessionals in the field and disabled people from all over the European Union discussed the problems and prospects of successful integration of disabled people into the world of work, in both open and sheltered employment. The subjects covered ranged from the important considerations of training and employment to issues of access and transport, independent living, medical research and the use of new technologies. Following the debate, the organisation committee approved a series of proposals for genuine improvements to the employment situation of

disabled people throughout the European Union, at all levels. HANDI-INSERTION is an initiative of the non-profit-making business association Mécèneentreprise.

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