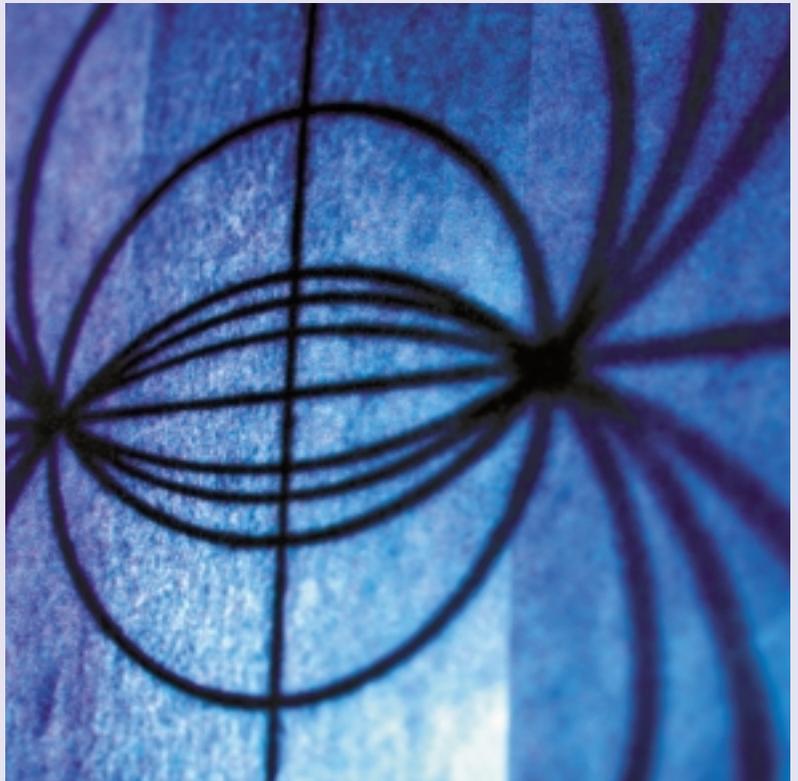




European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

# Access to employment for vulnerable groups



Foundation paper



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# Foreword

The aim behind the Foundation papers is to highlight knowledge and analysis from Foundation research over many years in the areas of employment, equal opportunities, social inclusion, time use and diversity. The objective of the papers is to make past, present and future work of the Foundation relevant and accessible in a concise format. The subject of each paper will be linked to current social policy issues and provides therefore a timely contribution to the debate at European level.

Improving access to employment, specifically for groups who are disadvantaged in the labour market, is the focus of this paper. It draws on research carried out by the Foundation over the past ten years into the problems facing people in vulnerable groups, the policies and strategies identified to address their needs, and, particularly, what has been learnt about how to successfully implement these strategies at a local level.

Raymond-Pierre Bodin  
Director

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Deputy Director

# Introduction

At the heart of the European social model is the idea that all citizens, or as many as possible, can share in the wealth that is created and hence can participate fully in society. Having a job is, for most citizens, a prerequisite to wider social and political participation, while losing or finding a job is a key factor in moving in and out of poverty (European Commission, 2001a). Some social groups are consistently less likely to have a job, but unemployment statistics tell only part of the story: most people of working age who are not in employment want a job, but only a proportion of these are registered as unemployed (Atkinson, 2000).

Clearly, arguments for improving the employment of people in vulnerable groups are related to labour market and economic conditions, but there are deeper concerns about social justice and equal opportunities, and regarding the costs of social exclusion. The need for specific measures to strengthen opportunities for people in disadvantaged groups has been a feature of European Union debate over the last decade and this was reiterated at the Barcelona Summit in March 2002.

Access to employment and investment in people are priorities of the EU in terms of both policies and budgets. The Nice European Council of December 2000 emphasised the need to promote employment, particularly among the long-term unemployed, disabled workers, older workers and ethnic minorities. It set objectives specifically to facilitate participation in employment for the most vulnerable. The Council underlined the need for an integrated and multidimensional strategic approach. The Commission's Social Policy Agenda, recognising the multifaceted needs of vulnerable groups, calls for enhancement of employment policies and further modernisation of social protection, alongside improving systems for education, housing and health (European Commission, 2000).

The European Social Fund, mainly through the Equal initiative, will allocate billions of euro over the next five years to combat labour market discrimination and to improve the employment situation of disadvantaged groups. However, responsibility for deciding and implementing these policies rests with the Member States. Moreover, it is essentially at local level that policies engage with people in vulnerable groups, and where projects are launched and sustained. This is the level at which the key policy agencies, service providers, social partners and community organisations are mobilised.

Over the last decade, the Foundation has looked extensively at measures for the social and economic integration of vulnerable groups. Research (documented in references throughout this paper), mainly through local case studies, has examined experiences in employment and active labour market measures across the European Union. The studies have focused on different groups – people with disabilities, older workers, minimum income recipients, people from ethnic minorities, long-term unemployed, adults with mental illness, and family carers – each with their particular problems and employment prospects, but, of course, often overlapping categories. Moreover, the same basic strategies to improve access to employment are often common to the different groups.

This paper will present lessons from the Foundation’s research in order to address some of the challenges of employment insertion strategies and to highlight some of the issues for future policy and practice.

## Vulnerable groups

There is no universal or common definition of vulnerability, but, in relation to employment, the concept of vulnerable groups denotes the risk of marginalisation from the labour market and social exclusion. Such a concept would include people who are long-term unemployed, and also others who are inactive but not registered as unemployed. It should include workers who are in some form of employment but are at a high risk of losing their jobs. It is, therefore, a very heterogeneous group, whose members share perhaps only the involuntary character of their present status (Atkinson, 2000).

Vulnerability may be associated with regional or economic factors, with the local labour market or company management, as well as with individual or social characteristics. However, vulnerable groups are typically categorised in social terms according to age, sex, ethnicity, disability or family status. This obviously reflects the complex interplay of individual and societal factors, such as discrimination and access to education, which affect employment prospects. Lilja and Hämäläinen (2001) have identified key factors for determining employment prospects at different phases of life: the education system at a young age; the family care system in middle age; and public services to care for the elderly as an important influence on the employment of older workers.

Rapid social and economic changes affect the employment prospects of different groups and also influence the characteristics of those who are vulnerable. For example, middle-aged men have been excluded through the decline in manufacturing, while older workers have been particularly at risk through the outsourcing of some production and services (Walker, 1997). Economic restructuring, technological change, new trade regulations and environmental policies may now impact on new groups of workers in industries such as steel, agriculture and tobacco.

Vulnerable groups are not an operational category as such, but some specific groups have been identified as a policy priority. The 1994 Essen European Council provided a basis for developing a policy to tackle unemployment that pointed to the need to improve measures for those groups hardest hit by unemployment, including young people, older workers, women and the long-term unemployed. Similar groups were highlighted in the ILO's Employment Report for 1998-1999, which included people with disabilities among the most vulnerable groups. The Barcelona Summit of March 2002 paid particular attention to older workers, while a

special report to that summit also highlighted the situation of disabled people and others with chronic ill-health, and people from ethnic minorities (European Commission, 2002a). The EU's Employment-Integra programme was designed to find ways of integrating the 'most vulnerable' into employment: eligible groups included people who were long-term unemployed, lone parents, homeless people, migrants, refugees, ethnic minorities, itinerants and travellers, offenders and ex-offenders and recovering substance abusers – representing more than half the unemployed people in Europe. It can be seen, therefore, that the population of vulnerable groups is made up of a range of overlapping social categories.

Research on vulnerable groups consistently underlines the need to address a wide range of personal and social problems in addition to the issue of employment exclusion: debt, housing, family difficulties, substance abuse, education, transport (Pillinger, 2001; Ditch and Roberts, 2002). It is the multiplicity of difficulties, rather than their nature, which different groups share. Some distinctive needs are also common to specific groups: older workers experience age discrimination while younger workers lack job experience; disabled people have difficulties in finding work also in the informal economy, while people who are long-term unemployed are often excluded because they lack a good basic education. In general, and for a variety of reasons, vulnerable groups are particularly characterised by low levels of education and skills (European Commission, 2002a).

## The experience of vulnerability

The multiple difficulties of people in vulnerable groups are often compounded by living in poor environmental conditions and in a local economy characterised by low growth and high unemployment.

### **The local environment: complex social and economic problems**

**In many parts of the city of Naples in Italy, the unemployment rate exceeds 40%, with peaks of 60%. Young people are particularly affected. Long-term unemployment is prevalent, with 70% of those registered at the employment exchange having been seeking work for more than a year. There is a widespread informal and illegal economy, which does not provide adequate earnings or support transitions to regular work. In many families, the balance between those employed and those being supported does not produce an adequate standard of living, and much of the housing is dilapidated. There is multi-dimensional poverty, concentrated in certain quarters, but spreading out into fresh concentrations. (Ditch and Roberts, 2002)**

Despite the higher levels of young people in education and training nowadays, some of them continue to face severe and multiple forms of

exclusion, disaffected with school and having a poor educational attainment. These young people are prone to homelessness, substance abuse and inadequate incomes. However, they may also be outside the reach of public employment or welfare services. In Finland, for example, the imposition of training measures led to the further marginalisation of young people who remained indifferent to this training, to the extent that thousands of 'hard core' unemployed young people remain beyond the reach of training and manpower policies (Pillinger 2001). There is evidently a need to break down this mistrust of statutory services to bring the most disadvantaged young people within their scope.

At all ages, people excluded from employment lose access to on-the-job training and risk their job experience being perceived as increasingly irrelevant – even if, as Atkinson (2000) points out, a very high proportion of unemployed people have a decade or more of experience in employment, and therefore familiarity with the world of work. Once people in vulnerable groups become unemployed, they are at an even higher risk of long-term unemployment (Watt, 1996). There is a 'vicious circle' at work here, in the sense that, without early action to address needs, certain groups progress into a situation of severe disadvantage and of economic and social exclusion. To redress the balance, intensive, targeted action is needed and this is likely to be very resource-intensive.

### **Impact of the local environment: A case study from France**

**The local integration project in Isère, France, operates against a background of alternating economic growth and stagnation. The focus in the late 1980s was on maintaining contact between the labour market and unemployed people. The recession of the 1990s gave rise to a new set of target groups and a new set of needs, based on providing specific social and personal support to people who had become very detached from the labour market. As these more personalised efforts continue, so the labour market is opening up again, and once again the profile of beneficiaries is changing, polarised now into two very distinct groups: people who are in dire straits on the one hand, and jobseekers who only need training on the other. A further factor is the changing nature of the jobs available: there has been an increase in 'atypical' jobs, with efforts now focused on temporary jobs as a means of building confidence and forming a bridge back to permanent work. (Ditch and Roberts, 2002)**

Access to essential reintegration services is often more difficult for people in vulnerable groups. For example, few older workers participate in adult learning or skills development, whether in employment or community-based initiatives (Walker, 1997). Indeed, persistent age discrimination, combined with changes in work organisation and incentives in social security policies, has increased the vulnerability of older workers to redundancy, lay-offs and pressure to withdraw completely from the labour market. People in vulnerable groups may be viewed by both public

authorities and employers as lacking the qualities or attributes (skills, energy, flexibility) in which investment is regarded as worthwhile. Paradoxically, this reinforcement of exclusion is happening at time when continuous change is putting a higher premium on learning and maintaining employability. Changes in technology risk worsening the employment situation for vulnerable groups and reducing their opportunities and incentives for training.

There is a great deal of debate about the role of temporary work as a stepping stone to regular employment. It is argued that training or placement in workplaces can overcome employers' hesitancy to hire people who have been unemployed for long periods. However, Storrie (2002) reports that there is a lack of clear research to support this assertion; in any case, it seems that most agency workers are recruited from among people currently employed. Transition rates from temporary to permanent work are greatest for prime age men (European Commission, 2001b): both young and older temporary workers are at significantly higher risk of subsequent unemployment. Nevertheless, in some Member States (for example, Austria and Belgium) temporary work agencies are used as a tool for integrating some vulnerable groups, such as older workers, long-term unemployed and people from ethnic minorities, into the labour market. The opportunity to earn a wage while gaining experience with different jobs and employers may make agency work an attractive option for marginalised or stigmatised groups.

The first Foundation paper focused on the changing nature of work and the quality of jobs, demonstrating a relationship between poor working conditions and vulnerability to exclusion from employment (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2002). Recent analysis of data from the European Community Household Panel survey underlines this point (European Commission, 2001b). People in 'dead-end' jobs (low pay, lack of training and little security) are clearly more prone to social exclusion due to a low level of job quality and a significantly higher risk of becoming unemployed. People in these poor quality jobs are more likely to be women, young workers, people with little education, unskilled manual workers, and workers in agriculture or elementary professions. Transition rates out of unemployment are reported to be low, and, of those previously unemployed who took up a job, two-thirds were found to be in jobs of relatively poor quality (European Commission, 2001b).

The Nice European Council of December 2000 concluded that employment is the best protection against social exclusion, and the emphasis is increasingly being placed not simply on employment *per se*, but also on the quality of jobs. A difficulty here is that current socio-economic trends may make it increasingly problematic to (re)engage excluded communities

within a mainstream labour market where skills, adaptability, mobility, innovation and knowledge are becoming important. Indeed, these trends will tend to marginalise those unable to adapt to mobile and flexible work patterns or unprepared to acquire the skills required for new tasks within the knowledge economy. People in the most vulnerable groups have relatively little chance of finding suitable work through the normal channels. Given existing labour reserves of better educated unemployed people, there is little reason to expect that extra training alone will be sufficient.

The recent Commission Communication on labour force participation identifies four main, and inter-linked, determinants of labour market participation: availability and attractiveness of work; the balance of financial incentives; education and training; and availability and access to services such as care, transport or counselling (European Commission, 2002a). Clearly measures to improve employment access for vulnerable groups cover a wide agenda for labour market, workplace and public policies. This means that promoting social inclusion will require coherent and integrated actions across a range of social welfare and labour market interventions.

## **The current labour market**

While structural changes in the labour market, demography and technology are creating new employment opportunities, there are new risks that the more vulnerable will be left further behind in employment.

Across the EU, both conditions of employment and conditions of work have changed in the last decade (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2002). Many of these changes are likely to continue: the trend towards more employment in services; growing application of information technologies; increasing professionalism of the workforce; ageing of the working age population; a steady increase in the proportion of female workers; and a growing diversity of employment contracts to reinforce the flexibility and adaptability of the workforce.

These changes alongside other business measures to improve the competitiveness and efficiency of enterprises – downsizing, quality management, outsourcing, sub-contracting – are having an impact on the demand for skills, as well as on the health and mobility of workers (Merllié and Paoli, 2001). The need for labour market flexibility and the skills revolution are tending to increase the gap between the work-rich and the work-poor.

Analysis of changes in work organisation and processes point to some underlying factors, including the increasing pace and intensity of work, the increasingly client-oriented economy, involving both more contacts and a rhythm of work increasingly determined by consumers, as well as growing pressure to reconcile time in work with time for other aspects of life (Merllié and Paoli, 2001). Of course these general trends can mask important differences between occupations and sectors. Nevertheless, the recent data show a clear relationship between reporting of higher levels of work intensity and reporting of health problems such as backache and stress. In general, these health problems are reported more often among employees in precarious employment relationships, on fixed-term contracts, and in low-skilled manual jobs (European Commission, 2001b; Merllié and Paoli, 2001)

The main trends in labour market participation have changed markedly over the last 30 years, with a sharp increase in the activity rates of women aged 25-60 and a fall in participation rates for men at all ages (European Commission, 2002a). The gender gap in employment, associated with childcare responsibilities, remains, as do significant differences in the employment rates of high- and low-skilled workers. There are important country, and especially regional, differences in these rates.

Activity rates are much higher among EU nationals for high-skilled, non-manual work, and they are higher among migrants for unskilled manual work. Two-thirds of disabled people are outside employment, as a result of difficulties in entering the labour market and remaining there. Illness and disability, alongside family responsibilities and lack of education or training, are identified as the major reasons for inactivity in the labour market (European Commission, 2002a).

In the year 2000, employment growth in the EU was the strongest for a decade, with an employment rate of 63%, but still with 8%, or 14.5 million people, registered as unemployed (again emphasising that most non-active people of working age are not unemployed). There are significant differences between countries regarding employment and unemployment rates, with countries like the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK having unemployment rates below those of the United States. On the other hand, unemployment rates for females aged 15-24 are over 30% in Greece, Spain and Italy (European Commission, 2002b). The differences in non-employment rates range from more than a fifth in Denmark and Sweden to over half in Italy and Spain. The low employment rate of older workers, 38% on average, ranges from 27% in Belgium to 69% in Sweden – and over the next 15 years the population aged 55-64 in the EU is projected to increase by about 20% (European Commission, 2002b).

The great and growing diversity of patterns of employment and unemployment is also a feature of local labour markets. This diversity and the changing needs of local markets must be monitored in order to inform employment services and should be taken into account in the drawing up of measures to improve access to employment (Watt, 1996).

## Policy priorities

Despite the current growth in employment in the EU, it is clear that some people still have poor labour market opportunities and that unemployment remains highly concentrated among particular groups. Economic growth alone will not resolve the employment problems of vulnerable groups. There is a need for specific measures, with the recognition that actions for one group may not be appropriate to meet the needs of another.

The general consensus across the Union is that social policy towards the unemployed, as well as others not in work, should shift away from passive income support towards active measures to help get them into employment. Such measures can be divided into two broad categories:

- measures aimed at helping the unemployed find a job, either by assisting them in their job search activities or by improving their employability through training or work experience;
- measures which provide the unemployed either with direct access to employment, through subsidising jobs or reducing the taxes and/or social contributions which employers have to pay, or with assistance to start up their own business and become self-employed.

### **Current policy direction: An example from the UK**

**The New Deal in the UK is a prominent example of a 'single gateway' approach, under which those out of work – lone parents or people with disabilities as well as the unemployed – have a single point of contact with the various services, in the form of a personal adviser, providing help on child care arrangements and benefits as well as assistance with job search and advice on training programmes. At the same time, the people concerned are expected to take up the advice offered and will be more liable to lose their benefits if they fail to cooperate.**

**The intention, increasingly elsewhere as well as in the UK, is to take account of individual needs, to tailor personal support to these and to monitor progress through regular meetings. Extra resources are, therefore, being provided for additional staff to work in guidance and counselling roles – as in France and Spain. (Ditch and Roberts, 2002)**

In addition, there is widespread agreement on the need to coordinate active and passive measures to ensure that those who become unemployed or who have been out of work for some time are properly advised concerning the active programmes available, as well as about their responsibility to

find a job, an aspect increasingly emphasised in a number of countries. One of the aims is to put in place a preventative policy which stops people from becoming unemployed long term.

The more attention paid to the individual needs of unemployed people has been accompanied in many cases by a decentralisation of employment services and the granting of greater autonomy to local offices in decisions on the different programmes available for the unemployed, so that due account can be taken of local labour market conditions and needs. As a result, there has been increased interaction with local organisations – both private and public – in the design and provision of work and training opportunities (Pillinger, 2001; Geddes, 1998).

The European employment strategy (EES) comprises a set of guidance frameworks and reporting procedures intended to dovetail the existing labour market policies of Member States. The aims of employment policy can be broken down into several related objectives: to increase employment rates, to improve job quality, to reduce occupational segregation, to bridge regional gaps, to adapt education and training systems, and to provide access to suitable job opportunities adapted to the personal choices of women and men.

The employment guidelines include specific attention to groups and individuals who are experiencing particular difficulty in acquiring skills and accessing the labour market.

The employment guidelines for 2002 include a number of cross-cutting, horizontal themes: transition from passive to active measures, lifelong learning, a more inclusive labour market, modernising work organisation and gender mainstreaming. Essentially these horizontal approaches have been in place since the launch of the EES but their priority or visibility has now been enhanced. Active labour market measures address both the supply and demand sides of employment, including a central role for training and labour market counselling, as well as a range of financial incentives (subsidies, tax breaks) and services, for example, for rehabilitation. The purpose of these measures is, however, mainly to redistribute opportunities rather than to create employment (Ditch and Roberts, 2002).

The European Social Fund (ESF) is the main tool through which the EU translates its employment policy into action. With aims that are both preventive and remedial, the Fund uses its resources to improve prospects for those who face the greatest obstacles in finding, keeping or regaining work.

For nearly a decade, major ESF programmes, first Employment and Adapt and now Equal, have been implemented in all Member States specifically to develop access to employment for vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. The strategies underlying these programmes have emphasised building partnerships, supporting coordination, integrated approaches, combating discrimination and evaluation.

Welfare and work are explicitly linked by measures that support activation to the labour market. Social protection policies increasingly seek to create skills and competencies which enhance employability (Cousins, 1996). In the past decade, the link between employment activity and receipt of social benefits has been reaffirmed, in ways which seek to enhance the status and employability of clients (Heikkilä, 1998). This is related to the evidence that employment is the most effective way of combating poverty and promoting social inclusion (Ditch and Roberts, 2002; European Commission, 2001a).

A commitment to the pursuit of coordinated strategies, aligning labour market and social security policies and delivery mechanisms has been agreed in all EU countries. This is underlined throughout the Commission's Social Policy Agenda (European Commission, 2000) which emphasises the need for improved access to the labour market for all social groups. Under the objective of promoting social inclusion, key elements of the overall strategy (to promote integration and participation of all into economic and social life) are set out in the Agenda:

“This requires an integrated and comprehensive approach, which draws upon relevant policies and includes a gender perspective. Education and training play a particularly important role here by providing basic skills. Fighting social exclusion also requires a strong partnership at all levels, between public authorities, social partners, non-governmental organisations and other interested parties. (European Commission, 2000, p. 20).

Research has shown, however, that these key elements of the strategy – integrated approach, partnership, coordination, equal opportunities – are themselves both problematic to implement and challenging to realise. The next section identifies some lessons for successful practice based on results from the Foundation's research.

# Overview of Foundation research

The Foundation has a relatively long-standing programme of research and debate activities looking at the interrelationships between social protection and labour market strategies. Debate has focused on developments in active strategies (Cousins, 1996; Naegele, 1999) while most of the research has drawn on analysis of policies and assessment of local case studies (Walker, 1997; Geddes, 1998; Pillinger, 2001; Wrench, 1996; Watt, 1996; Ditch and Roberts, 2002).

## Integrated and comprehensive approach

A dedicated, tailored combination of resources is increasingly being developed in order to address the complex and multifaceted needs of the most disadvantaged regarding employment, as the following two examples of good practice from Finland and Germany demonstrate.

### **Providing integrated services: Good practice example from Finland**

The **Dynamo Kakkonen workshop**, run by a municipality, aims at tackling the problems associated with early school leaving, substance abuse and criminality among young people. It provides sheltered work, guidance, rehabilitative work activities and employment for people who face difficulty in finding work. Services include education, workshop guidance and activities, rehabilitation through job preparation, on-the-job training, work experience and assisted employment, services (including transport and removals, a shop, etching and framing services, nutrition advice) and productive work activities. There is good collaboration with parents, police, schools and local services. The workshop has put in place multidisciplinary teamworking practices and quality indicators. (Pillinger, 2001)

### **Providing integrated services: Good practice example from Germany**

**Kate e.V.** is an independent registered associated founded in 1986 to provide integrated services for people with mental disabilities, including housing, leisure, education and employment services, in order to facilitate their integration into mainstream work and allow them to lead as independent a life as possible. The support services are funded from statutory benefits under the Federal Social Welfare Act – an integration allowance and a subsistence allowance – as well as by additional resources from charitable foundations and investment grants. Kate also provides group residential care and supported shared housing. Coordination has evolved gradually as more needs have been identified beyond housing needs. There is a high level of user participation. (Pillinger, 2001)

Many key lessons from such initiatives were already highlighted in an examination of Foundation research projects in the mid-1990s (Ball, 1994):

- the needs and circumstances of marginalised groups require a response which is comprehensive and integrates social with economic and environmental policies;
- those experiencing the most diverse and complex needs are best helped by high quality, intensive programmes;
- the earlier the intervention and the more clearly it is targeted, the greater the long-term cost-effectiveness;
- strategies to actively involve vulnerable groups in the design, planning, implementation and monitoring of policies and services enhance the development of programmes which are flexible and fit for their purpose;
- policies and programmes must be based on proper coordination between all the people and agencies involved, both horizontally and vertically between the various responsible authorities and agencies at local, regional and national levels;
- partnerships for action, involving marginalised groups, public, private and non-governmental sectors can facilitate the implementation of integrated programmes, optimise the use of resources and contribute to effective coordination.

These messages for more ‘integrated and comprehensive’ policy development are already incorporated in many aspects of the Social Policy Agenda, as well as in principles underlying European Social Fund initiatives, such as Equal, and in initiatives in many other policy areas. However, the development of effective coordination, partnership, citizen/worker involvement and other such strategies is itself highly problematic. More recent Foundation studies have examined in detail how to put these principles into practice.

## Activation

‘Activation’ involves education and training, guidance and counselling as key measures to increase the capacities and competences of excluded groups (Watt, 1996; Heikkilä, 1998; Ditch and Roberts, 2002). Evidently this involves direct contact with people at the local level but raises a host of issues regarding identifying, involving and maintaining involvement in activation programmes for those who need them most.

Vocational education and skills training are only a part of the needs of vulnerable groups in order to promote effective reintegration into the workforce. Assistance is also required to navigate an increasingly complex and competitive labour market, particularly in regions of high economic

inactivity and weak job opportunities. Moreover, job seekers may need help in rebuilding their confidence and self-esteem, especially if they have been out of work for a long time or if they become unemployed after many years in one job. Atkinson (2000) reports that confidence about finding work is not widespread, and that take-up of help and advice about the labour market is generally low even among the unemployed. Becoming an effective job seeker may involve strengthening basic skills, as well as intensified sessions of case-working.

### **Activation measures: Good practice example from Italy**

**Mediation officials work with Milan's Training and Employment Office and the Office for Adults in Difficulty. A striking feature of their role is its intensity. The official engages in a series of meetings with the two other institutions, also involving the client, in building up a picture of the client and their needs and possibilities. The mediator then consults directly with the client, visits the company chosen to be the site of work or training, and may also accompany the client on their first visit. In addition, the mediator aims to maintain contact with the client and the employer for the duration of the insertion programme. (Ditch and Roberts, 2002)**

Active labour market measures may improve vocational and workplace skills but their effectiveness in finding employment depends on the existence of sufficient jobs for people to move into (Cousins, 1996). In the past, many training initiatives have failed to achieve their goal because participants had no clear prospect of securing a job at the end. Over time, those who have experienced disappointment in this way also become disillusioned, and they become suspicious that training courses may be used as a means of reducing the numbers on the unemployment register. In other words, complementary actions are also required on the demand side of the labour market.

Active policies may incorporate positive job creation initiatives, especially in some of the para-public sectors. This issue is specifically addressed in the Foundation's report on social public services. The strategy of a number of countries has been to develop job creation and job rotation programmes to provide work opportunities for young unemployed people in the social public services (for instance via the leave schemes in Belgium, Denmark and Finland) and subsidised job creation programmes (in Austria, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Sweden). There can, of course, be a danger that such projects, intentionally or otherwise, create a dual labour market with lower terms and conditions of employment prevailing for subsidised or temporary workers. But some projects do appear to have successfully created temporary jobs for young unemployed people who, through training and other measures, maintain links to mainstream employment and move on to better paid jobs within the wider economy (Pillinger, 2001).

Eurocounsel, an innovative action research programme, showed how guidance and counselling services are becoming increasingly important in addressing potential mismatches between labour force skills and job opportunities (Watt, 1996). Increasing numbers of the unemployed, but also the employed, will be seeking out life-long counselling advice in relation to education, training and employment opportunities: this is a key element of human resource development, to both support reintegration to employment and the prevention of exclusion. Employers should be more involved with local services in retraining employees at risk of redundancy in order that they may be subsequently redeployed, or at least so they would be better placed to find other work. This could mean providing help to employers to organise retraining, but employers and unions should be able to give high quality information on local labour demand to inform the provision of such retraining.

Public employment services and education in training establishments are likely to continue to be the main source of guidance and counselling for the unemployed and those excluded from the labour market. The demands for tailored and intensified support, for more attention to the prevention of exclusion, and for reaching groups of the most vulnerable will put additional pressure on counselling services. Meeting new demands will require: establishing and updating local labour market data systems; maintaining knowledge and skills of counsellors in a rapidly changing labour market; exploiting new opportunities in technology; and promoting linkages between sectors and organisations across the labour market. These kinds of measures can improve local counselling services, but their success will, of course, be conditioned by support at other levels; so, for example, at the national level there is a need to foster linkages among the economic, social, training and educational sectors, and to ensure the full involvement of employers and trades unions, in developing counselling services.

## Coordination

An increasing number of EU Member States are coordinating national policies with an emphasis on cross-cutting and inter-departmental measures to promote the integration of excluded people into society. At the level of the client, this means more effective coordination of services to meet their multiple and diverse needs. This demands not only coordination between services and agencies at the local level, but also integration between policies and services at the local, regional and national levels (Ditch and Roberts, 2002).

Meeting the needs of clients in vulnerable groups requires, as shown in previous examples, ensuring access to a wide range of supporting and intermediary services concerned with, for example, literacy, social skills,

health, housing and confidence-building, as well as directly job-related services. This may well give rise to new services or institutional arrangements.

### **Better coordination of services: Good practice example from the Netherlands**

In the Netherlands, substantial restructuring has resulted in the creation of new organisations at local level, called Centres for Work and Income. These result from the government's national project to achieve better coordination between social security and labour market policy and delivery (the Partnership for Work and Income and the Structure for the Administration of Work and Income – the SUWI project). The centres bring together a number of functions previously performed by other bodies, and seek to provide a more coherent approach to clients who are claiming benefits and looking for work. The change is based on a 'one-stop' philosophy, and brings together staff from the former employment authority, the local authority and the private benefit-paying agencies. It is also intended that other bodies with related aims (reintegration agencies, employment agencies) will be able to acquire space in the same buildings. (Ditch and Roberts, 2002)

In addition to the growth of one-stop shops where different services come together under one roof, there is also extensive development of new styles of working and new types of case worker, as the French example below illustrates.

### **Better coordination of services: Good practice example from France**

In Ille-et-Vilaine, France, local integration counsellors have been appointed whose role is to examine the needs of minimum income recipients, identify employment and training solutions, construct a personal integration plan and monitor clients during the integration process. The counsellors are employees of the city administration. From the clients' point of view, their welcoming and listening role is very important in providing moral support and re-motivation. The counsellors' strength is also shown in their ability to direct clients to a wide range of different resources. Clients may be directed to social services to deal with any social problems, to training and re-training schemes, to sheltered worksites, and to the National Employment Agency for job-related services. (Ditch and Roberts, 2002)

Coordination is generally regarded as an unambiguously good thing, capable of promoting improved effectiveness and efficiency, but there are costs and risks associated with establishing, maintaining and monitoring coordination. Effective coordination is exceedingly challenging, and appears to demand fundamental pre-requisites such as common understanding and sense of purpose among the organisations and staff involved; the development of a 'professional orientation' which bridges traditional organisational cultures, for example of employment and social

welfare services; the ability to plan strategically as well as function operationally; adequate and supportive human resource and budgetary arrangements; and commitment to ongoing evaluation. These are significant challenges to the culture and working methods of service providers. Effective decentralisation for local coordination demands building 'administrative capacity', and building the skills and capacities of the local service providers as well as those of the clients.

## Partnerships

'Partnerships' have increasingly become the model for developing policy and action at all levels: European, national, regional, and, perhaps especially, local (Geddes, 1998; Pillinger, 2001; Ditch and Roberts, 2002). There are many examples of innovative and effective partnerships across the EU, involving the active contributions of employers and trade unions, local authorities, voluntary and community organisations in developing policies and services for vulnerable groups.

Many cases of local partnerships have a clear focus on employment creation for disadvantaged people. Often one problem of such local employment projects is the long-term sustainability of the jobs created. In this situation, local partnerships can help in finding support and resources in the communities for the continuation of the activities and the preservation of the new employment generated, as the following example from Germany shows.

### **Local partnership: Good practice example from Germany**

**After a number of industrial factories moved away, the district of Wedding in Berlin experienced a serious decline in employment, with approximately 25% of local jobs disappearing between 1970 and 1987. In 1997, a local partnership was formed, the first of its kind in the city. The goal was to initiate employment schemes for the socially excluded and create jobs designed to improve living and working conditions, leisure activities and the environment. The partnership currently involves four public agencies, five private bodies and 14 third sector organisations.**

**One successful project that has benefited from the partnership is the senior citizens' assistance service. This project, established by local authorities in 1994, hired 40 long-term unemployed persons to provide care for the elderly, with the objective of building skills and creating jobs in the personal services sector. (Geddes, 1998)**

European institutions and regulations, notably those governing the Structural Funds, have helped to create a supportive framework for partnership working, and there are many examples of effective and innovative partnerships across the Union. Some of the most interesting ones emerged as a result of initiatives undertaken by social partners. In

Rennes, France, for instance, the CFDT trade union adopted a partnership approach to combat social exclusion, involving the cooperation of numerous actors including employers and financial institutions.

Across the Member States, employers and trade unions have concluded pacts for employment and competitiveness (PECs) at inter-professional, sectoral and company/workplace levels, some of which specifically aim to improve employment opportunities for vulnerable groups (Freyssinet and Seifert, 2001). In practice, the central thrust of most PECs has been employment preservation rather than employment creation, although a number of agreements include provision for groups such as temporary employees and apprentices. Other projects (e.g. Pillinger, 2001; Watt, 1996) emphasise the added value of involving the local social partners because of their closeness to local labour market information, involvement with training and their role in the development of integrated strategies to assist the unemployed.

There is evidence that working in partnerships can help engender a strong collaborative culture, empower key actors and agencies, improve the delivery of services, and enhance the performance of all mainstream social and economic agencies; but there are often problems and difficulties too. Partner interests and responsibilities may require clarification and resources are often needed to build capacity and to develop skills among all partners. It takes a considerable time to develop and secure relations of trust, collaboration and reciprocity.

Many partnerships have been based on short-term funding, which tends to inhibit longer-term strategic thinking and to undermine sustainable inter-agency relationships. A report from the Foundation identifies a range of measures necessary to realise the obvious potential of the partnership approach, emphasising the need for attention to: longer-term financial resources and transparency in use of funds; the building of professional, managerial and communication skills; the need for a strong and sustained commitment to evaluation; and the need for systematic attention to issues of gender and equal opportunities within partnerships (Geddes, 1998).

## **Involvement of people from vulnerable groups**

‘Involvement’ and commitment of a full range of interests is essential to the effective operation, and perhaps also legitimacy, of partnerships and programmes to assist vulnerable groups. There is a particular need to ensure the effective involvement of disadvantaged groups and their representatives. The involvement of socially excluded people can bring considerable benefits to job creation or local development programmes through: increasing the sensitivity and relevance of programme planning; creating a resource through which to implement programmes; providing job

and other opportunities for those who are unemployed or otherwise not active in employment; and submitting employment measures to the critical review of those intended to gain from them.

Involvement of excluded groups in the design or development of services and programmes can contribute to increasing their employability, by offering social reinforcement to overcome demoralisation, by maintaining information and involvement in the local area, and through providing opportunities to learn skills as well as contribute knowledge for cooperative working (Chanan, 1997).

### **Involvement of the socially excluded: Good practice example from Ireland**

**Pavee Point is a Dublin-based partnership which works with travellers. Travellers often depend on social welfare, and their high risk of poverty is compounded by their primitive housing and living conditions, often resulting in low life expectancy rates. Pavee Point is a partnership organisation consisting of travellers and settled people working together in partnership to promote the well-being of travellers. Initially funded as a training agency, it has diversified its activities with support from EU community initiatives and the Irish government. Pavee Point has succeeded in developing partnership relationships which enable travellers to exercise management and control while creating a bridge between them and the settled community, the public sector and other organisations. (Geddes, 1998)**

There is a strong sense from extensive case studies across the EU that the involvement of vulnerable groups in services, projects and partnerships is often a critically important ingredient in more successful initiatives (Walker, 1997; Geddes, 1998; Pillinger, 2001). Local employment initiatives may recruit and train unskilled or other disadvantaged people, involve them in the running of the initiative and offer sustainable jobs (Pillinger, 2001).

However, it is often difficult for disadvantaged groups to achieve effective representation in programme, project or partnership structures, or full involvement in decision-making along with other interest groups (Geddes, 1998). It may be difficult to identify appropriate representatives of the interests of vulnerable groups, while relatively well established groups may not be receptive to participation by the most disadvantaged groups. Moreover, when excluded groups become involved in projects as paid workers, they may be especially vulnerable to short-term funding and unrewarding work.

However, a range of strategies are available to improve the involvement of excluded groups (Deakin et al, 1995): for example, advocacy services can

be created for those less able to speak for themselves (Pillinger, 2001); representatives of the unemployed can be given particularly strong roles, for instance chairperson, in a partnership initiative; and workers in training or other activation measures can be more systematically involved in evaluation (Ditch and Roberts, 2002). Participation in local community activity can build confidence and skills which improves readiness to participate in partnership and other local community programmes (Chanan, 1998).

## Combating discrimination

‘Discrimination’ is often experienced as a central element of the disadvantage to which groups outside, and inside, employment are exposed. The Foundation’s research offers some lessons for tackling disadvantage and discrimination in employment for people from ethnic minorities (Wrench, 1996), those with disabilities (Carpenter, 1998) and older workers (Walker, 1997). Although combating discrimination has some common features for all these groups – changing the attitudes of managers and co-workers; involving representatives of vulnerable groups in the development of policies and practices; special measures to compensate for long-term disadvantage, for example in access to training; and development of unbiased recruitment procedures – there are also a number of more specific priorities.

The study on *Preventing Racism at the Workplace* (Wrench, 1996) found that, in some countries, unemployment rates for migrant and ethnic minority communities were four times as high as those for the indigenous population. Evidence of racial prejudice on the part of employers and managers was uncovered in a number of Member States, and, in some workplaces, the practice of recruiting the children of existing employees was found to contribute to the under-representation of ethnic minorities. Some employment agencies colluded with employer prejudice and discrimination.

Some important obstacles to progress were identified, including inadequate information and research on the employment circumstances of migrants and ethnic minorities; the practice of indirect discrimination in the workplace, such as in recruitment; a lack of awareness of the problems of racism and discrimination in employment by many employers and trade unionists; resistance to anti-discrimination measures; weaknesses in existing legislation against discrimination in employment in many countries and the absence of a political will to enforce the existing legislation.

In response to the persistence of racial discrimination as a factor in the labour market, the report called for: an EU directive on racial

discrimination; a code of practice; action in relevant Member States on citizenship rights; voluntary and social policy initiatives against discrimination; and improved minimum standards of employment protection. Some of these actions have subsequently been developed, testifying to the relevance of this kind of work.

A report on the employment of people with disabilities in SMEs showed that employment quotas and anti-discrimination legislation were not very influential determinants of behaviour in SMEs (Carpenter, 1998). Women and older people with disabilities appeared to have particular problems in accessing jobs. Health and safety and insurance regulations were perceived by employers as an impediment to employing people with disabilities.

There is a need to ensure, possibly through legislation, that legal or administrative barriers do not discriminate among vulnerable groups with regard to access to education and training. Among the steps that could be taken to (re)integrate people with disabilities were: improving information to employers on regulatory frameworks; and strengthening the role of specialist mediating organisations in easing barriers between SMEs and the disabled, through providing training and personal support to people with disabilities and their employers.

## Promoting diversity

### Ethnicity

#### **Promoting diversity: Good practice example from Belgium**

**Electrocoat-Genk recruited via an agency which had been set up to provide assistance to unemployed miners. Only people who were 'just about employable' on the labour market were sought out. Another criterion for selection was a readiness to work with and be tolerant of people of a different ethnic origin. For two out of three of the training courses it was decided to aim for a minimum of 50% immigrants.**

**The training consisted of six months' familiarisation on the shop floor, and included technical training, working attitude and disposition, language mastery and intercultural cooperation. The aim was to establish among the multi-ethnic workforce a working climate in which each employee felt respected and had a sense of belonging to the firm. (Wrench, 1997)**

A number of Foundation studies have examined the role of non-legislative measures to improve the employment opportunities for specific groups. Legal prohibition, through anti-discrimination legislation is necessary, but not sufficient to tackle the problems of direct or indirect discrimination resulting from ethnicity (Wrench, 1997). Legal measures provide the context for more voluntary actions, at the level of the company or organisation, for equal treatment, equal opportunity or anti-discrimination

measures. At the national or sectoral level there may be collective agreements among the social partners.

## **Disability**

The new emphasis in policies for disabled adults is evidenced by a shift away from sheltered or community workplaces towards their active integration into society, training and work. There is an increasing focus on empowerment, self-determination, dignity, normalisation and integration. For example, in Finland since the 1970s there has been a policy shift away from institutional to open care for adults with learning disabilities and mental illnesses, as the example in the box below illustrates.

### **Promoting diversity: Good practice example from Finland**

**The KEKKU municipal project in Mäntsälä aims to rehabilitate mentally ill people through open employment, and to foster independence by providing a tailored employment path, with training, support for integration into work, information and awareness. Several different models exist, depending on the needs of the user: assisted work, protected work placements and training contract work. A work tutor provides support. (Pillinger, 2001)**

For adults with mental illness, the aim of measures for social and economic integration is to enable them to lead as normal a life as possible and to promote independence, by means of either supported or open employment. This demands high levels of internal and external coordination and good links with local groups, agencies and employers.

### **Promoting diversity: Good practice example from Denmark**

**The 'Psychiatric patients at work' (PIA Group) project began in 1989 at the initiative of the local municipality in Aarhus, and is now run as a private foundation. A board of management, including local public and private representatives, ensures the firm's economic viability, e.g. by securing preferential contracts from public bodies and private firms. The operations of the firm involve integrating mentally ill people with a work capacity into stable, sometimes sheltered, work. This is achieved through targeted, phased and individualised rehabilitation programmes, designed and coordinated with the municipal social and social-psychiatric services, who are responsible for the employees' situation and treatment outside work. (Pillinger, 2001)**

## **Age**

The changing demography of Europe is leading to ageing of both the workforce and the general population (European Commission, 2002b, Pearson, 1996). In the first study of its kind, the Foundation looked at company and community based initiatives to reverse the trend to early exit and long-term unemployment among older workers (Walker, 1997).

## **Promoting diversity: Good practice example from the UK**

The POPE recruitment agency assists people over the age of 50 into jobs (POPE stands for 'People of previous experience'). The project has four main strands:

- The creation of a register of unemployed people aged 50 and over seeking work in the Bradford area;
- The marketing of the service to employers and the identification of suitable vacancies;
- The provision of a computerised matching service which was free of charge to both unemployed people and employers;
- A £2000 subsidy to employers who took on someone from the register (this was paid in two parts: when the person was first taken on and after they been in the post for six months).

**Employers were eligible to receive the subsidy if the person taken on was taking up a newly created post, and the recruit had to be aged 50 or over and to have been unemployed for 26 weeks prior to being recruited. The project employs five staff. All the trainers are older people, have experience of working in industry in executive positions and were unemployed prior to being recruited. (Walker, 1997)**

Measures to increase employment opportunities for older workers, and to extend the effective age of retirement have become priorities at EU level (European Commission, 2002a). Many aspects of employment can be addressed at organisation or enterprise level to manage the ageing workforce more productively: recruitment, training, flexible working, job design, changing attitudes within organisations. Many businesses have begun to develop more comprehensive approaches, as the example from Germany on the facing page shows.

The essential dimensions of an active ageing strategy are: the need to secure the backing of senior management; the existence of a supportive human resource environment; commitment from older workers themselves; and careful but flexible implementation, involving open communication at all stages and attention to all relevant workplace features (Walker, 1997).

Now, and in the future, there is a need to maintain and strengthen a 'dual strategy' for access to employment for older workers, practising both active and integrated policies and fighting against age discrimination (Naegele, 1999). However, many older workers today are experiencing disadvantages, for example in skills and training, for which remedial action is needed. So, a 'dual approach' is necessary, addressing specific problems for some older workers, as well as improving employability throughout working life.

### **Promoting diversity: Good practice example from Germany**

Despite the difficult employment situation and job losses in the steel industry, Stahlwerke Bremen, a large German steel company, views the skills potential of older workers as increasingly important. This can be partly explained by the fact that the number of young skilled workers will drop considerably in the medium term. In response, it has developed and implemented a training strategy for an ageing workforce and has so far implemented the following projects:

- A pilot scheme providing non-age-specific training of instructors in industrial and technical fields: the open learning format of the training and its provision close to the workplace made it particularly suitable for older colleagues;
- Training for workers in steel roller production with particular consideration of older employees working in production processes – the training concept was developed by a 65 year-old former employee in cooperation with younger staff;
- The development of a strategy for the reintegration into the working environment and training of workers, mostly older, undergoing some form of rehabilitation – in conjunction with the company health insurance fund and the regional government. The scheme is intended to facilitate permanent reintegration into the workplace. (Walker, 1997)

### **Gender**

Atkinson (2000) argues that women's access to employment is significantly inhibited by the poor fit between arrangements for childcare and the way the job is organised. The existence of care services for the dependent elderly also plays a key role in the labour market participation of older women workers (Lilja and Hämäläinen, 2001). Apart from better sharing of care responsibilities within families, public policies, such as care leave and developments in services, as well as action by employers, through flexible working, advice, support, and practical help (Phillips, 1996) can improve the situation for working carers – and for those who are excluded from employment due to care responsibilities.

A recent study looked at the nature and scale of employment in household services and the role that these might play in the reconciliation of working and family life (Cancedda, 2001). The research focused on five main areas of household work: childcare, eldercare, domestic cleaning, catering, and home maintenance and gardening. These jobs were overwhelmingly taken up by women. A key consideration was the quality of the jobs being created in this sector. In general, it was found that they attract low pay, have low status and poor career prospects, are often part-time and can result in high levels of stress. While there may be personal compensations, particularly in the care occupations, the overall picture is one where household services may help others to reconcile work and family life, but this is seldom the case for those working in the sector themselves. There is clearly a need for improved knowledge and awareness of the potential contribution such

services can make. However, the supply of workers in these jobs needs to go hand in hand with a number of other measures:

- improvement of wage rates and social security in the sector;
- tackling the competition posed by undeclared work;
- development of clear and mutually recognised qualification and accreditation systems;
- promotion of higher levels of male participation; and
- exploration of the packaging together of different types of household services as a more robust platform for business development.

With current demographic change, care needs are increasing for adults and older dependent people. Up to now, it appears that only a small number of companies have instigated flexible working arrangements for people who provide care to elderly relatives (Phillips, 1996). However, some more comprehensive measures are developing, as the example below illustrates (Naegele, 1999).

### **Promoting diversity: Good practice example from Germany**

**Employed carers in Germany report high levels of stress and very often experience work interruptions or have to miss work altogether; they are prone to financial loss, for example, due to unpaid time off; and they often miss business meetings and training opportunities and lose out on promotions. The strongest negative consequence for employers can be seen in the loss of qualified, committed and experienced employees.**

**Siemens is one of the few German companies to have put in place a policy for carers who are in employment. The measures involve flexibility in working time and place of work and leave options, as well as an information and referral service, and counselling and advice in connection with company-based social work measures. (Naegele, 1999)**

On the basis of experience documented in the research, it appears that programmes and models used for coordinating work and childcare cannot be transferred simply to eldercare. To motivate employed caregivers to make use of existing programmes, they should be offered as an integrated part of a variety of services that a company provides to help all employees in different situations. A family friendly workplace environment is needed to prevent potential users of services from feeling stigmatised.

The maintenance and growth of a workforce of carers, both paid and unpaid (Salvage, 1995) is an urgent issue for the EU, and one that is particularly pressing for women, making it a priority on the equal opportunities agenda. Insofar as care responsibilities are also a major barrier to women's participation in the labour market, it is also a mainstream strategic issue for work organisation.

# Issues for debate and development

Some of the biggest challenges for the future labour supply and access to employment are clear: enlargement, demographic change, regional disparities, and the balance between labour demand and skills available. Migration will not solve the labour supply problem (European Commission, 2002b), nor will a falling population of working age necessarily open up new opportunities for people in vulnerable groups. The political consensus in the EU offers a continuing commitment both to combat unemployment and to raise employment levels. This final section of the paper considers some of the issues raised by the Foundation's research that will need to be addressed by policy makers and practitioners in the future.

## **Targeting of vulnerable groups**

In a dynamic labour market and with the diversity of population changes, it seems that the characteristics of the most vulnerable groups are changing to include women with low skills rather than all women, people with chronic (mental) illness, carers with eldercare responsibilities, and recent immigrants among the ethnic minorities. Some of the most vulnerable – asylum seekers, ex-prisoners, the homeless, sex workers, drug addicts – have hardly been mentioned in this paper. There is a need for more systematic information on vulnerable groups not included in the usual statistics, in order to become more aware of their needs and preferences, and to provide appropriate services.

Of course, there is a sense in which nearly all workers could, at some stage, be vulnerable to job insecurity in the context of globalisation and rapid change, so that more general appreciation of the benefits of developing preventive strategies is timely.

People facing multiple forms of exclusion may slip through the net of general or universal services and this paper has demonstrated how personal and integrated services have become increasingly critical in employment insertion strategies. However, there are also some dilemmas in practice associated with the increasing complexity of measures for both practitioners and employers. There are also concerns about the stigmatising effects of too narrowly targeted measures (Pillinger, 2001).

Measures to help one group may make access more difficult for another: for example, regulations to protect older workers from redundancy may make access more difficult for younger workers. Atkinson (2000) points out that

measures to encourage new entrants into the labour market are unlikely to help the currently unemployed. Emphasis on policies for new entrants may commit the existing unemployed to more or less permanent exclusion.

### **Tailoring the services**

There is growing interest in the ‘reserve’ of people outside the labour market who are keen to work. However, as the case of family carers illustrates, policy makers need a proper understanding of the circumstances and aspirations for employment of those who are currently not active.

There is some information about working time preferences, although not about their requirements in relation to pay and other working conditions. There is little known about these priorities for people in the most vulnerable groups. From the Foundation’s employment options survey (Atkinson, 2000), it appears that a majority of women who want to return to work would like to work part-time, albeit mostly more than 20 hours a week – which is different from what currently exists.

The innovations and developments to improve access for vulnerable groups are characterised by a recognition of multiple needs and difficulties: individual, social, geographical and institutional. New approaches demand tailoring of the services to meet specific needs and a flexible range of measures. The case studies emphasise the role of representatives of vulnerable groups and of workers in the design of these measures, and the need to reinforce this involvement; the case studies also illustrate the need for concentrated intense effort, often over lengthy periods of time. There appears to be a need for more accessible and good quality guidance and assistance for both entrants and re-entrants to the labour market.

### **Whole of life policies**

The situation of older workers is receiving more attention in employment and pension policies. However, it is increasingly realised that disadvantage in employment associated with age goes back to the middle of working life or even earlier. Policies for employment and training need to take a ‘whole of life’ perspective, both because of the importance of earlier life phases for later employment opportunities and because the traditional division of life into education-employment-retirement no longer fits. There is a need for a new life course perspective on training and working and caring, which maintains the employability of workers, and prevents long-term exclusion because of family or social needs.

Flexibilisation of working time over the life course could be a tool to prolong working life on a voluntary basis and thus to decrease early exit. In order to be more successful and accepted on a broader basis, gradual retirement schemes should be strategically integrated in a new organisation of working time over the life course.

Further arguments for the reorganisation of working time are that it is a tool for better adapting change in a person's work capacity over an entire working career, in workloads and in physical and mental job demands. Simultaneously, working time adjustments can promote both occupational flexibility and mobility, and opportunities for further training which are necessary preconditions to (re) enter or to stay in the active workforce. Traditional working time schedules are very often not in harmony with family duties and other personal interests and wishes, which change over the life course.

There is also a need for intensified measures, particularly in the second half of working life, for rehabilitation and reintegration to employment. Considering current rates, there is a case for rethinking, redesigning and reconstructing approaches to employing people with disabilities and older workers.

### **Learning and career development**

Rates of participation in training decline consistently with age. This prompts concerns about the reality of lifelong learning – which is necessary for flexibility and for a more secure transition in and out of the labour market. Welfare policies must recognise the changing needs of the labour market and the relevance of lifelong training and education to facilitate moves from welfare dependency to paid employment. Access to lifelong learning opportunities appears weakest for those who need it most: immigrants, disabled people, under-educated employees, and older workers, as well as for temporary workers (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2001).

The lessons from Foundation initiatives like the Eurocounsel programme have underlined the need to prevent exclusion from employment if at all possible, in order to tackle problems before unemployment compounds difficulties (Watt, 1996). Counselling and job coaching to stay in employment appears to be particularly important to help the integration of people with disabilities and those with learning difficulties.

In a changing labour market, the need for workers to acquire skills to assess and reduce risks in employment or the labour market may become more frequent. In any case, it seems that guidance should become a mainstream rather than a marginal activity. This requires sensitivity to the perspectives of reluctant learners and meaningful inducements to participate; and it requires (as the age barriers research demonstrated) appropriate tools and methods for adults, flexible learning styles and more recognition of prior learning.

There is increasing interest in the role of work organisation as a factor facilitating or hindering career development and acquisition of new skills. While much has been learnt about the principles for improving access to employment of vulnerable groups, there is now a need for more attention to employment retention, skills upgrading and career development.

The flipside of attention to career development relates to concern about the quality of jobs, particularly for workers in vulnerable groups (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2002). Quality of work will be a significant factor in decisions about taking up, maintaining or returning to employment. The EU faces the challenge of how to re-establish a culture of working after the age of 55. More thought needs to be given not only to how these working lives can be extended but also to how they can be made more rewarding.

### **Social and economic integration**

The EU debate on social inclusion has recognised the importance of employment as a means to overcome poverty, but also accepted that employment does not solve all problems. There are still working poor (including significant proportions from among vulnerable groups) and therefore poverty persists in working, as well as workless, households. There is a clear need to maintain, or strengthen, social protection as well as to promote access to employment for vulnerable groups.

The integrated approach is based on recognition of the complex and multiple difficulties of people in vulnerable groups: measures that rely on changing only one feature, whether income or skills, may unintentionally harm those who are least able to participate. The Joint Report on Social Inclusion points to the need not only to develop policies for employment and an inclusive labour market, but also to tackle educational disadvantage, to ensure good accommodation and access to high quality services (European Commission, 2001a).

Many of the case study examples have underlined the importance of support and training to participate in the community and broader society, as well as vocational or skills training. Measures to develop active citizenship may be seen as a prerequisite for gaining access to employment or as benefits in their own right. Quality of life and self-esteem are not only potentially derived from employment but also from other socially useful activities. As the report on activation for recipients of social assistance points out, it is important to achieve a balance between measures for social and economic integration (Ditch and Roberts, 2002).

## **Evaluation and research**

Each of the main strategies raises questions about evaluation regarding both processes and outcomes. For example, regarding activation measures, there are questions about how the clients experience the services, and what they derive from the measures, about the quality of outcomes in terms of the nature and sustainability of employment, about the numbers who drop out of schemes, and the tendency for services to work best with those who are most easily employable.

There are a host of methodological questions about the evaluation of employment insertion measures regarding, for example, the value given to different outcomes by policy makers, service providers and clients.

In assessing the cost benefit of reaching vulnerable groups, it may well be that success rates for the measures are lower than with less disadvantaged groups – but the measure may be much more successful than previous initiatives, and the period of dependency on welfare benefits may be proportionately shorter.

Several of the reports have pointed to the need for more effective sharing of information on evaluation (Watt, 1996; Ditch and Roberts, 2002). This involves more transparency about the purposes, methods and goals of evaluation, as well as sharing of results. There is a need to strengthen mechanisms for learning from experience at local level in order to inform policy-making at national level.

Major gaps in basic information remain, especially in relation to the situation of people in the very vulnerable groups: refugees, ex-prisoners, the homeless, and such groups. The collection of systematic and comparable data is clearly difficult, but more information on employment needs, preferences and experiences is required in order to be able to develop services for these groups.

## **Services and staff development**

The workers charged with the reintegration of people in vulnerable groups face a very challenging job. Intensive, employment-focused work with those who have been sick, or out of work for a long period, or who have been carers, demands great sensitivity and skill. Caseworkers or advisers must be able to assess needs, coordinate with others, involve clients meaningfully, mediate with employers and assemble the appropriate package of measures. These are often entirely new roles and responsibilities which demand training for service providers and attention to the quality of their work-life. The focus on people in vulnerable groups means establishing new client relationships which ideally will be maintained until a successful outcome is achieved.

Services for people in vulnerable groups depend essentially on the performance of front-line staff, but this also requires administrative procedures and processes that support coordinated provision and working together with clients. Services need to be adjusted and adapted to the situation and needs at the local level. This means giving local actors more autonomy in developing and implementing policies, but it also means increased transparency and monitoring.

The Foundation's research has underlined the need for 'quality', well managed services for the integration of vulnerable groups. This demands setting objectives and establishing standards for quality that are relevant to local settings. Such standards are best developed in partnership with staff, management and users.

### **In conclusion**

This paper has drawn on a wide range of sources from Foundation research in order to address a complex issue. The importance of improving access to employment for vulnerable groups is reflected in the scope of the research, as well as the scale of the budgets devoted to this objective at EU, national and local levels.

The reports and case studies demonstrate key roles for governments, social partners, non-governmental organisations and clients in the development and implementation of strategies for the integration of vulnerable groups. The different parties face many common challenges, particularly as they work in partnerships and in more integrated approaches. However, there are also specific demands to develop more effective methods for delivery of services and support to vulnerable groups: this paper is intended as a contribution towards that goal.

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