



EC Social Policy

Traditionally, the European Community has had relatively little involvement in social policy compared to national governments, though a number of EC programs and funds complement national strategies and their impact is growing, particularly in the less developed parts of the EC. The Community's Structural Development Funds help to close the gap between rich regions and poor, by financing development programs, infrastructure development, restructuring of depressed regions (worker retraining, etc.) and industrial and services projects in poorer regions. EC funds are also provided for vocational training programs for migrant workers and their children.

While its social programs are important complements to national programs, the European Community also acts as a forum where national governments can agree upon common practices and standards to improve or protect the quality of life of Europeans. The EC has passed directives dealing with the protection of surface and underground water, quality standards for drinking water, atmospheric pollution, chemical manufacture and disposal, and other issues. Lists of permitted food additives and acceptable levels of pesticide residues have been agreed upon as have general principles regarding education and the rights of citizens, workers and women.

European Community involvement in social issues is growing and is seen by many as the logical extension of the economic and financial measures aimed at unifying the Community.

Charting an Ambitious Course

Since the early 1980s, the European Community has been actively involved in industrial research, and plans to spend about \$10 billion over five years on research and development (R&D). This concerted effort illustrates the new impetus with which the member states of the European Community are working together to remain competitive in an increasingly competitive world. That ethic of co-operation is also behind Europe 1992, the plan to remove some 300 non-tariff trade barriers. But renewed R&D efforts and Europe 1992 are just the latest steps in the European Community's evolution. Already the Council of Ministers is discussing the next step — how economic and monetary union might be achieved.

The achievements of the European Community in its first three decades are substantial. Liberalized trade has increased European living standards and promises to continue to do so. But perhaps more importantly, the institutions of the European Community have provided a forum for dialogue and co-operation among nations that have seen their share of war in the past. Economic integration has indeed proven to be a most effective mediator.

This publication is part of a series dealing with various aspects of Canadian foreign policy. Additional copies can be obtained from the Domestic Communications Division (BFC), External Affairs and International Trade Canada, 125 Sussex Drive, Ottawa K1A 0G2.

(Publié également en français)

