



UNION OF INDUSTRIAL AND EMPLOYERS' CONFEDERATIONS OF EUROPE
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Declaration of the European social partners
on the employment of people with disabilities

Preamble

UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and the ETUC fully recognise the challenge of improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities on the open labour market. As representatives of employers and workers at European level these organisations would like to make a contribution to promoting the occupational integration of people with disabilities in Europe.

In 1997, the social partners undertook to collect examples of good practices adopted by companies to improve integration and retaining of people with disabilities. They gave preference to examples of partnership initiatives, though they did not exclude unilateral initiatives taken by employers or trade unions. The result of this exercise was a collection of case studies from the open labour market, involving companies of all sizes throughout the European Union in various sectors of activity.

The ETUC, CEEP and UNICE/UEAPME addressed their compendium on the employment of people with disabilities to the European summit in Vienna in December 1998. The social partners believe including the promotion of employment of people with disabilities in the employment guidelines is the right approach. This declaration supplements the collection of case studies and attempts to draw some lessons from the experience gained on this occasion. By identifying solutions to the challenges posed to both employees and employers, the social partners intend to make a useful contribution to the debate, thus expressing their commitment to the occupational integration of people with disabilities.

Promoting equal opportunities for people with disabilities

The ETUC, CEEP and UNICE/UEAPME believe that an equal opportunity approach is the right path to follow in order to improve the employment opportunities of people with disabilities in the open labour market. Discrimination based on factors which are irrelevant to the task in question is socially unacceptable and economically inappropriate. It is detrimental to the individual concerned, to good work relations and to the efficiency of the company.

Emphasising ability, not disability

The determinant factor for a person's success on the labour market is their ability, whether he/she is disabled or not. A Selection based on abilities avoids problems related to preferential treatment for one or other group of employees.

In the first place, the emphasis on an individual's skills makes it possible to improve the opportunities of developing their potential and facilitates their acceptance and integration into the working environment. Furthermore, only a recruitment policy based on skills can improve a company's competitiveness and its capacity to create jobs.

Promoting the employment of people with disabilities: a positive factor for the company

Good employment practices can contribute to the economic success of a company. Through actively promoting the employment of people with disabilities, companies can develop previously unexploited resources and increase their potential for innovation.

Increased awareness and a greater understanding of disability in companies may lead to the development and marketing of products and services which are better suited to the needs of consumers, including consumers with disabilities. The latter represent a diversified market of more than 30 million people Europe-wide. The participation of employees with disabilities in the development of these products and services can favour the emergence of new markets.

Improving work relations by taking account of disability questions

Companies with a high level of awareness of disability are better equipped to respond to the needs of disabled employees. Taking these needs into account allows the employees concerned to carry out their tasks and duties more successfully. Employing people with disabilities can thus bring added value to the company and the staff as a whole.

Diversified approaches require made-to-measure solutions

The definition of disability varies considerably from one European country to another and reflects the diversity of social and cultural approaches to the issue. For this reason, the legal framework and integration policies for people with disabilities at the workplace also vary from one Member State to another. This diversity is important to ensure that policies are suited to the needs of each individual and to the cultural, social and economic environment.

From the point of view of employment, a number of factors must be taken into consideration.

- Firstly, disability comes in many forms. This alone means that there must be a variety of specific, personalised measures, which is incompatible with a policy of “categorisation”.
- Secondly, companies which employ people with disabilities range in size from micro-enterprises to large businesses. The size of the business may have a significant impact on the kind of obstacles encountered and the solutions given to encourage the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace.
- Thirdly, the nature of the sector and the occupation also influence what measures can and should be taken, in matching the ability of the individual with the specifics of the task.

The wealth of practices in this field reflects the diversity of situations. In order to facilitate awareness of the challenges and opportunities linked to the employment of people with disabilities, it is important to disseminate information and encourage exchange at European level.

Encouraging employment by acting outside the workplace.

Many aspects of the physical and cultural environment outside the workplace affect the chances of people with disabilities gaining employment. Policies aimed at removing societal barriers for people with disabilities are needed

For example,

- The school environment is not always adequate for children with disabilities, creating problems for them in later life. Without access to equal levels of education, the aspirations and employability of the disabled adult are fundamentally impaired.
- Means of transport which are unsuitable for a considerable proportion of people with disabilities are a major obstacle to their inclusion in the labour market and in society.
- The architectural design of the physical environment, particularly residential accommodation, public buildings and workplaces, has a major impact on the occupational integration of people with disabilities.
- Attitudes and prejudices with regard to disability, notably in public opinion and the media, influence disabled persons’ perception of their own abilities and the way they are perceived by employers, work colleagues, the professions, service providers and customers.
- The measures that need to be taken involve various players whose respective responsibilities vary depending on their field of action. However, dialogue between these various stakeholders, public authorities, non-governmental organisations and social partners is essential to put in place appropriate and effective policies and to bring an end to prejudice and discrimination.

Recommendations for the employment of people with disabilities

To improve employment opportunities for disabled people in Europe, CEEP, UNICE/UEAPME and the ETUC recommend that:

- employers envisage developing equal opportunity policies for people with disabilities and make these policies known to all management and employees, with particular emphasis on raising the awareness of recruitment and human resources.
- trade unions endeavour to examine disability issues with their members and develop equal opportunity policies in this area.

The social partners, at the appropriate level, will seek to promote among their members equal opportunity policies in favour of persons with disabilities taking account of the following elements:

- make known when recruitment notices are published that candidates with disabilities will be considered solely on the basis of their abilities
- ensure that selection and recruitment procedures are not discriminatory and allow disabled people to apply and take part in the recruitment process;
- ensure that career possibilities are open to disabled employees on the same basis as to other staff members, according to their abilities and potential, and that employees with disabilities have equal access to training;
- offer support to employees who become disabled so that they can keep their position or find one which corresponds to their experience and abilities .
- ensure that the implementation of the policies adopted is followed up and evaluated .

UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and the ETUC invite the public authorities to:

- take account of the needs of disabled people in an integrated way in order to create a culture of inclusion rather than separation;
 - encourage the various players whose responsibilities have an impact on the employability of people with disabilities to work together and make concerted efforts to improving effectively the physical, educational and cultural environment of people with disabilities;
 - publicise the wide range of innovations in this area and encourage their exchange across Europe.
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