

DECLARATION OF THE SOCIAL PARTNERS FOR THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

*Promoting equal opportunities and access
to employment for people with disabilities*



The voice of 60 million workers in Europe

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UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC welcome the fact that 2003 has been designated European Year of People with Disabilities and wish to express their commitment to make a success of the Year through promotion of equal opportunities for people with disabilities, development of employment, access to education and training, lifelong development of competences and qualifications and respect of disabled persons' dignity.

Fostering the employment of people with disabilities constitutes a key element of the Lisbon goal for Europe to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.

In 1997, the European social partners collected examples of good practices on the employment of people with disabilities. This exercise involved companies of all sizes throughout the European Union in various sectors of activity. It helped social partners to outline the challenge of integration and retention of people with disabilities.

Over the last years, social partners have been involved in identifying solutions to the challenges posed to both employees and employers, and in implementing strategies with the aim of fostering occupational integration of people with disabilities.

UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC fully subscribe to the objectives of the European Year of People with Disabilities set by the Union, and notably:

- raising awareness of the rights and situation of people with disabilities;
- fostering equal opportunities for people with disabilities in all areas including employment;

- promoting exchange of experience and implementation of effective strategies devised at local, national and European level; and
- reinforcing cooperation between all stakeholders concerned, including public authorities, social partners and NGOs.

Through the present joint declaration, the European social partners seek to

- make an effective and specific contribution to the European Year of People with Disabilities 2003;
- give impetus so that the occupational integration of people with disabilities is perceived as a shared interest by both enterprises and employees in each Member State;
- acknowledge the broader dimension of the challenge, which calls for a dialogue between various stakeholders.

To that end, the European social partners have identified five key factors for the successful employment of people with disabilities.

KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS IN THE EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

1. Impose a ban on discrimination

ETUC, CEEP and UNICE/UEAPME believe that an equal opportunities 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.

2. Emphasise ability versus disability

The determinant factor for a person's success on the labour market is her/his abilities, whether or not he/she is disabled. Abilities and competences of a person must be the basis for selection, professional development and integration in the working environment. For the enterprise, identification and development of its employees' competences is key to its competitiveness.

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

Good employment practices can contribute to the economic success of a company. Through increased awareness and a greater understanding of disability,

- companies can develop previously unexploited resources and increase their

potential for innovation. For example, the participation of employees with disabilities in the development and marketing of products and services, which are better suited to the needs of consumers, including consumers with disabilities, can favour the emergence of new markets.

- companies 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.

4. Diversify solutions through tailored approaches

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

In the field of employment, it is crucial to find tailor-made solutions, which take into account factors such as the type of disability of the person, the size of the business the nature of the sector and the occupation. Indeed, these factors influence what measures can and should be taken to match the ability of the individual with the specificities of the tasks to be performed.

5. Mobilise all actors in the wider community

Fostering the employment of people with disabilities is a broader challenge as 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 in particular in the fields of education, transport, building accessibility, changing attitudes and prejudices.

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 people with disabilities in Europe, CEEP, UNICE/UEAPME and the ETUC recommend that

- employers develop equal opportunity policies for people with disabilities and

make these policies known to all players in the enterprise: directors, managers, with particular emphasis on raising the awareness of those in charge of recruitment and human resources and employees, employees and their representatives;

- trade unions examine disability issues with their members, develop equal opportunity policies in this area and integrate them in their trade union policies;
- social partners, at the appropriate level, seek to promote through collective bargaining which can lead to collective agreements, or through actions among their members, equal opportunity policies in favour of persons with disabilities taking account of the five key factors for success identified above.

UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC reaffirm their commitment and the commitment of their member organisations to make the European Year of People with Disabilities a success and call on the various players whose responsibilities have an impact on the employability of people with disabilities

- to work together at all appropriate levels and make concerted efforts to define and implement effective strategies for the employment of people with disabilities;
- to adopt a social and labour market inclusion approach mobilising all players;
- to promote the exchange of good practice in these fields.

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