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CONFERENCE ON DISABILITY AND PERSONAL AUTONOMY THROUGH EDUCATION, UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY AND EMPLOYMENT

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Workshop on employment and autonomy

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1. Active inclusion in the labour market – benefits for all

For BUSINESSEUROPE active inclusion is essential in making use of the full potential of the labour force. Active inclusion depends on the way the labour market and society are organised as well as on the capacities, talents and motivation of individuals and organisations.

The **business case** is clear – individual companies need an available workforce, with the appropriate skills and knowledge for which there is demand on the labour market. This is true in times of economic crisis, as well as when the economy recovers. It is important to remember that even in a recession companies hire new workers. The key is being able to match skills with the vacancies on the labour market.

Of course fulfilling the potential of the labour force has much wider benefits than this. It is important for the **economy in general**, in the short term to exit from the crisis but also in the long term when the economy is back on track. At this future point in time, raising employment levels will be crucial to reap the benefits of rises in demand, in terms of ensuring a high level of productivity. This means making sure that everyone who can work is integrated in the labour market. A waste of resources is something that we cannot afford either now or in the future. This is particularly important in view of demographic change. Given the future shift in balance between the working population and those in retirement, it is even more urgent to ensure that all those who can are working. This includes people with disabilities.

Active inclusion is also important for **individuals** that may have difficulties to get onto the labour market. For those people able to work, having a job is indispensable in terms of being a part of society, for individual autonomy and to be able to support themselves. Pathways to employment for all those people able to work, should therefore be encouraged.

In order for employers to provide job opportunities, appropriate framework conditions must exist on the labour market including reduction in non-wage labour costs, so that companies are able to grow and create jobs. In terms of individuals, continual updating of skills and adaptability are very important to enter and integrate in the labour market, but also to ensure continued employability.

Active inclusion is also beneficial for **society and the public at large**, to sustain welfare and social protection systems. This requires increasing employment levels, by



bringing more people onto the labour market. Increasing participation on the labour market is also an indispensable part of making society more inclusive.

2. Policies for improving active inclusion and accessibility to the labour market

In order to reduce unemployment and in the long-term to raise employment levels, the right conditions must exist. Firstly, economic growth is essential to sustain current jobs and for businesses to create new jobs. In addition, the legislative framework at European and national level must not act as a barrier for companies to create jobs.

Welfare systems have an important role in providing income support for those not currently working, however to make sure that they are sustainable, they should also actively motivate people to look for new job opportunities. To encourage people to be active on the labour market there must be incentives for people to move from social benefits to work. In this respect, flexicurity principles should be implemented, including further development of active labour market policies, as well as comprehensive lifelong learning strategies and modern social security systems.

At EU level, attention has been placed on the issue of active inclusion, as a part of inclusive growth in the EU2020 Strategy and in the employment guidelines.

3. Joint social partner agreement on inclusive labour markets

Social partners are well placed to find solutions to correct structural weaknesses on European labour markets. As testament to this, European social partners have recently agreed on a joint framework agreement on inclusive labour markets. This will stimulate social partners at national level to work together to devise strategies to make labour markets more inclusive. The agreement is therefore highly relevant for our discussions. One part of active inclusion is enabling people with disabilities to live independently and participate in society, by improving their employment prospects.

Through this agreement European social partners have acknowledged that an inclusive labour market is a shared responsibility of employers, individuals, workers, and their representatives. The agreement is specifically designed to help those persons who encounter difficulties in entering, returning to or integrating into the labour market, by focusing on factors which can encourage or discourage this. We aim to provide social partners at national level with an action-oriented framework to remove obstacles to inclusive labour markets.

I would like to provide you with **a flavour of this agreement**.

The social partners recognise that people disadvantaged in terms of labour market inclusion face different challenges which require adapted measures. Also within specific groups, people may encounter different obstacles. A number of factors and often a combination may encourage or discourage labour market participation. These may be contextual, work-related or individual. Contextual - linked to economic or work environment. Work-related – work organisation, training, recruitment. Individual – skills, motivation and health.



The agreement highlights some **possible obstacles** for workers and jobseekers. These are related to, for example:

- Training, skills and capabilities
- Recruitment policies
- Attitude of employers, workers and jobseekers
- Work life balance and work organisation

Through this agreement, social partners at national level should **take actions** to remove the obstacles. A number of examples include:

- Improving information for jobseekers about the availability of jobs and training schemes
- Developing education and training schemes to better match the needs of the labour market
- Introducing individual competence development plans
- The promotion of apprenticeship and trainee contracts

Of course this list is not exhaustive. Also, it is very much up to the national social partners to decide which actions will be most effective to realize an inclusive labour market in their own country.

The social partners acknowledge that they are not the only actors which have a role and impact in this field. Public authorities and other actors have responsibilities in terms of ensuring that there is a framework which encourages and promotes inclusive labour markets. The agreement therefore makes some **recommendations for other actors**. This includes:

- Effective employment and career advice services
- Access to health, education, housing etc
- Active participation of adults in further education and training
- Availability and affordability of social and physical infrastructures, such as transport, care, schooling
- Facilitating business creation
- Right conditions for tax and benefit systems to help people to enter, remain and develop in the labour market

The implementation process will now start in the member states and should be finalized within three years. Social partners really hope and expect that these actions will seriously contribute to active inclusion.