

## THE REYKJAVIK DECLARATION

### "A BLUEPRINT FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE IN EUROPE"

Workability International – Europe is Europe's largest employer body representing providers of work and employment services to people with disabilities. It makes this Declaration as a contribution to the European Year of People with Disabilities, 2003.

Our member organisations employ and provide work and employment services to over 800,000 Europeans with disabilities every year. We believe our collective knowledge and experience in this field is unsurpassed. Our Declaration states our Vision, the Code of Practice we have set ourselves and proposals which will lead to a fully inclusive Europe in terms of work and employment.

We acknowledge our responsibility to champion the right to work of our service users - people with disabilities - at every level of society throughout Europe, including the European Parliament & Commission, National Governments, Medical, Social and Rehabilitation Services, Education and Training Services, Employers, Trade Unions and organisations of disabled people and their representatives.

We speak with one voice and will ensure that all our future strategies will have one underlying purpose: to remove all barriers to work so that equal opportunities for all prevail.

### PREAMBLE

In March 2002 the European Congress on Disability produced and published The Madrid Declaration, "Non-discrimination plus Positive Action results in Social Inclusion", which has been taken into account in drafting this Declaration. It speaks on behalf of over 50 million Europeans with disabilities and provides their vision of an inclusive European Society based on Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Non-discrimination. Employment is seen as a key for social inclusion:

*"Special efforts need to be made to promote the access of disabled people to employment, preferably in the mainstream labour market. This is one of the important ways to fight the social exclusion of disabled people and to promote their independent living and dignity. This requires not only the active mobilisation of the social partners but also of the public authorities which need to continue to strengthen the measures already in place."*

**Workability International – Europe endorses The Madrid Declaration.** In particular we respect the new vision of people with disabilities for an inclusive society and we shall act accordingly in our relationship with people with disabilities when providing services to them.

The voice of people with disabilities is being heard as never before. In Europe, with initial support and encouragement from the European Commission, the European Disability Forum has established itself as the focal point on all disability matters. As

such, it has become a powerful influence on the development of Europe's socio-economic policy.

Employment options for disabled people are much influenced by demands of the Market and job creation as well as by their access to education, public transport, the information society and general access to goods and services. Therefore **Workability International – Europe strongly supports the proposal made by the European Disability Forum** to launch the process towards an EU disability specific directive based on Article 3 of the EU Treaty, which would combat discrimination on the grounds of disability in areas beyond employment.

Over recent years the European Commission has produced many reports on disability issues. European disability policy has shifted away from the notion of 'accommodating' people with disabilities, to a more 'rights based' approach. This was the focus of the Commission's communication 'Towards a barrier-free Europe' published in 2000 on how best to ensure access and inclusion across a broad range of EU policy areas from anti-discrimination to employment, transportation and information technology.

*Integrating people with disabilities makes not just social sense but economic sense. Research shows that they are far more likely to be jobless - and for longer periods - and to bring home a wage packet below the average. Their marginalisation in the jobs market means huge financial costs for governments and society although it is known that many disabled people want to work, given the opportunity and appropriate support. This is why disability is one of the explicit categories covered by the directive on equal treatment in employment and in the anti-discrimination action programme.*

**Workability International – Europe urges the swift and proper implementation in all EU Member States, as well as in accession countries, of the EU Directive on equal treatment in the workplace.** This directive was formally adopted in November 2000 and is designed to protect disabled people from discrimination in employment and training.

In the world scene **Workability International – Europe welcomes the initiative taken by the United Nations to start the process towards a United Nations Convention on the rights of people with disabilities.** We believe that the right to employment is a central element in this future Convention and we are willing to give active support in the drafting process. In this respect, **Workability International – Europe welcomes the recent report published by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) entitled "The Right to Decent Work for People with Disabilities".**

*The primary goal of the International Labour Organisation is to promote opportunities for women and men, including people with disabilities, to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.*

In conjunction with the ILO, business itself has published a document addressed to the business community and entitled "Unlocking Potential - The New Disability Business Case". **Workability International – Europe applauds this business initiative.**

*Businesses that have the vision and will to create an enabling environment for diverse parts of the community will prosper. Disabled people can and want to be a part of that equation of success. Such a pathway will also benefit society more generally and so help to build a virtuous circle that better balances social cohesion with economic competitiveness.*

But until now and in respect of employment and work, there has been a missing link to the debate - the collective voice of those who, day in and day out, convert visions, policy and programmes into practice. These are the Service Providers. Without them the aspirations of very many people with disabilities to take their rightful place in the world of work and employment would come to naught.

Whilst the intention for equality of opportunity to and in employment is well stated, in reality it remains an aspiration only to many disabled people. By acting as that vital bridge between government programmes and employers and between disabled people and employment, Service Providers can and do convert intentions and aspirations into reality. Their unique contribution will be made all the more effective if heard with a separate and distinct voice.

Over the past 15 years, Workability International – Europe has studied in depth many aspects of work and employment for people with disabilities and has produced reports and recommendations. These include:

- ❑ Paid jobs for people with disabilities
- ❑ Good practice in specially supported work places
- ❑ Co-operation between supported companies and other commercial organisations
- ❑ Economic analysis of specially supported workplaces
- ❑ Employment of the Most Severely Disabled People
- ❑ Opportunities and Threats of New Business Sectors and Methods
- ❑ Adapting to the New Trends of Mainstreaming and Social Inclusion
- ❑ Supporting the Employment of People with Intellectual and Psychological Impairments
- ❑ ICT and Lifelong Learning for People with Disabilities
- ❑ Accommodations and Adjustments for Equal Opportunities
- ❑ Progression and transition of disabled people in employment

At its Annual Conference held in the capital of Iceland on 27-30<sup>th</sup> May 2003, the members of Workability International – Europe reviewed all of its accumulated knowledge and experience. This resulted in The Reykjavik Declaration - Championing the Right of People with Disabilities to Work. It has universal support from our members and will, we hope, have similar support from all European Providers of Employment and Work Services to people with disabilities.

The Declaration is in three parts:

- ❑ Our Vision and Objectives
- ❑ Our Code of Practice
- ❑ Our proposals for advancing equality of opportunity for people with disabilities in the world of work

## **OUR VISION AND OBJECTIVES**

**VISION:**

**Our vision is for a European Society in which equal employment opportunities are a reality for people with disabilities.**

**OBJECTIVES:**

**To reach a position within 10 years where the proportion in employment of working-age Europeans with disabilities equals that of the rest of the Europe's population of working age.**

**To adapt employment and service provision to meet the needs of each individual with a disability, including positive measures to equalise opportunities to work.**

**To work with employers and employer organisations to develop ways of maximising opportunities for people with disabilities to access the labour market.**

**To have reliable statistics with which to monitor the success of measures to address equality of opportunity for employment for people with disabilities.**

**OUR CODE OF PRACTICE**

- (i) We shall champion people with disabilities in their search for jobs in the regular labour market, in self employment, on placements and in our own establishments.
- (ii) All those employed in our organisations shall have contracts of employment or similar agreements, fair wages or compensation and access to those labour laws pertaining to their country, including the right to join trade unions.
- (iii) Where access to mainstream employment is not possible and we have services available, we shall offer worthwhile and rewarding work in our establishments, facilitating advancement and career progression, all within a commercial environment.
- (iv) We shall make it our business to build relationships with employers and to understand their needs as suppliers, customers and as actual or potential employers of disabled people.
- (v) Our services will be focused on the needs, aspirations and circumstances of the individual and on empowering the individual.
- (vi) Our services will provide each individual with choice and sufficient information to make informed personal decisions.
- (vii) Individuals participating in our services will be involved in all decisions which affect them - "nothing for disabled people without disabled people."
- (viii) Our services will be geared to encouraging and enabling our service users to gain access to the regular labour market for decent and sustained employment.
- (ix) The needs of people with very severe disabilities to participate in the world of work will be emphasised, particularly in the context of new opportunities being created by technological innovations.

- (x) Our services will provide, or make available, training in social and basic skills and vocational training and will encourage national vocational qualifications to be obtained. For those employed, life-long learning will be facilitated, particularly in IT skills.
- (xi) In all our dealings we shall concentrate on ability not disability, unlocking potential and on removing the barriers faced by individuals to gain access to work and employment.
- (xii) By keeping abreast of experience, our services will adopt best known practices and we shall continually strive to improve through constantly measuring effectiveness.
- (xiii) Workability International – Europe will continue to build effective working relationships and partnerships with other Service Provider organisations, disability related NGO's and other related agencies.
- (xiv) Where our own methodologies are suitable, our services will be open to other excluded groups, when requested.
- (xv) We shall respect the vision of people with disabilities as described in the Madrid Declaration.

## **OUR PROPOSALS**

In making these proposals we concentrate on just a few of the many issues which are affecting the rate at which people with disabilities are entering the labour market and remaining in employment, as follows:

- Without reliable statistical data at E.U. and national levels, the proportion of disabled to non-disabled people in work cannot be measured; nor can the effectiveness of policies, programmes and actions designed to correct the known imbalance. Because so many disabled people are economically inactive, unemployment figures alone are not indicative of the numbers who would like to work, given the right opportunity and support.
- The financial resources being devoted to resolving this imbalance have to be compared to the much larger and long term costs to society of doing nothing or too little now.
- As service providers, we believe that there is now considerable knowledge on how to make significant progress and in ways that are acceptable to people with disabilities. Rather than diverting resources into an endless round of research and new programmes, they should be used to bolster and develop those programmes that are proven to be successful. In this way more people with disabilities would have access to these successful services, thereby accelerating their rate of entry to employment or keeping their jobs whilst in employment.
- Everyone has a part to play in securing an inclusive Europe. At one end of the spectrum Governments must give the lead and set the agenda. At the other end, employers must accept their responsibilities and act accordingly. In between are disabled people themselves and their representatives, medical and rehabilitation services, education and social services, trade unions and service providers who all need to work in partnership.

PROPOSAL 1 - PROGRAMMES AND RESOURCES

Within the continuum of employment services there is a lack of adequate funding. We propose that more resources should be switched to those programmes known to be successful in securing mainstream employment for people with the whole range of disabilities, recognising their individual abilities and requirements. In this context sustainable funding of service providers must be guaranteed to allow them to invest in their services within a policy of continuous improvement and best practice.

PROPOSAL 2 - PROVISION OF SPECIALLY SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

It must be recognised that there is a continuum of employment requirements to suit the situations of people with disabilities. Mainstream employment is not an option for many people with more severe disabilities, either in the long or short term. Like everyone else, they should have the opportunity of contributing, through their work, to the economy of their countries, thereby reducing the number of disabled people who are economically inactive. We propose that special employment provisions (e.g. sheltered workshops or supported placements) should be strengthened and resourced for this purpose within a commercial environment which actively promotes progression to the mainstream whilst providing a secure base to return to, if it becomes necessary.

PROPOSAL 3 - THE VITAL ROLE OF EMPLOYERS

Like everyone else and wherever possible, most disabled people want to join mainstream employment, either directly or via another employment provision. Therefore it is vital that service providers understand the concerns, needs and demands of employers. Employers should take steps to facilitate this, whilst publicly demonstrating their good intentions. We propose that mainstream employers in each Member State of the E.U. should establish and join a body like an Employers' Forum on Disability and similar organisations elsewhere. An European Employers' Forum on Disability should be established as well.

PROPOSAL 4 - COLLECTIVE VOICE OF EUROPEAN SERVICE PROVIDERS

To bring influence to bear on the European Parliament and Commission via established consultation arrangements, it is important for providers of employment and work services to people with disabilities to speak with a single voice. It also strengthens dialogue with other European partners who are already so organised, e.g. UNICE, ETUC, EDF. We propose that Workability International – Europe and other similar service providers take immediate steps to establish an effective body to provide a unified voice as the bridge between disabled people and employment.

**PROPOSAL 5 - MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS AND TRENDS**

We understand that Eurostat will soon be providing annual employment statistics, which will include information on the number of disabled people of working age in employment or unemployed. Firstly, we propose that the term 'unemployed' should include all economically inactive disabled people of working age. Secondly, this information should be used each year to monitor progress towards equality of employment rates as between able-bodied and disabled people in the labour market and as a basis for national action plans to accelerate progress towards equality.

**PROPOSAL 6 - THE ACCESSION COUNTRIES**

Positive measures should be taken to support Accession States to improve employment opportunities for their disabled citizens. The experience of Workability International – Europe can be of significant assistance to the development of services for people with disabilities in these and other emerging European countries. We propose to set up a working group of our members to develop an action plan to ensure that our experience is made available to them in practical and accessible ways.

**THE END**