

Conference Declaration

We are over 200 representatives of social partner organisations, companies, non-governmental and public sector organisations in Europe, who have come together at the "INTO WORK Conference 2003" in Athens on 15 - 16 May, to address the theme of "Promoting the Employment of People with Motor Disabilities";

We, the conference participants, have agreed on this Declaration, which is addressed to European governments, regions and municipalities, social partners, private and public organisations and non-governmental organisations, all of which are encouraged to act in their own sphere, and in collaboration, to improve the situation of disabled people in vocational training, in employment and at the workplace.

1. We recognise that people with motor disabilities are being excluded from employment by many barriers which have no place in European society - including physical and architectural barriers to mobility, inadequate means of transportation, restricted access to education, vocational training and employment, negative and indifferent attitudes, difficulties of access to new technologies, and a general lack of awareness and knowledge about how working life can be designed to accommodate disabled persons;

2. We support the spirit and aims of the *European Year of People with Disabilities 2003*, drawing particular attention to the need for working together with all stakeholders to mainstream the requirements of disabled people in vocational training and employment policies and practices throughout the EU, coupled with concrete and positive actions to combat discrimination and to ensure equal opportunities for people with disabilities;

3. We believe that empowering disabled people to take control of their own affairs and realise their ambitions is essential for achieving an equitable employment market, accessible for all. Those working with and for disabled people should seek to increase disabled peoples' independence wherever possible, enabling individuals to use their own resources and initiative;

4. We confirm that assistive technologies are crucial for giving disabled people access to work. With Information and Communication Technology tools and training, disabled people can help fill the 'IT skills gap' by taking jobs in the Information Technology sector, creating a "Win-Win" situation;

5. We emphasise the need to make employers everywhere aware of the capabilities of disabled people as workers, and the moderate and reasonable requirements and arrangements which can give them access to employment;

6. We take note that the EUROPEAN COUNCIL DIRECTIVE 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 “Establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation” (Official Journal of the European Communities, L303/16. 2/12/2000) provides a legal and political basis for positive actions for improving the work situation of disabled people. Governments should seek to implement the Directive, according to the timetable set, through dialogue with the social partners and organisations of disabled people, and by taking advice from professionals in the employment and disability fields;

7. We call on policy-makers and the social partners to engage in an active dialogue with disabled people’s organisations, to re-examine current policies and practices, to learn from their experiences and listen to their ideas, aspirations and proposals in a spirit of mutual collaboration;

8. We applaud the examples of good practice, shown by far-sighted employers who are exercising their corporate social responsibility by making efforts to recruit, employ and retain people with motor disabilities, for the benefit of the individuals concerned and for their businesses: - such practices should be widely publicised and adopted throughout Europe;

9. We wish to encourage an acceptance of diversity in the present and future Member States of the European Union, whereby people with disabilities will have equal access to employment - both as workers and as employers;

Therefore, we commit ourselves and the organisations we represent to be “champions” for the improvement of conditions and opportunities for the employment of people with motor disabilities.

THE CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS

Metropolitan Hotel, Athens, 16 May 2003

The INTO WORK Conference 2003 was organised by two projects, each of them comprised of a broad network of organisations, specially formed to initiate measures for improving the opportunities of disabled people in the labour market. The projects are:

- *the “PROTEAS” Development Partnership, supported by the European Social Fund through the Greek EQUAL programme of the Ministry of Labour; and*
- *the “SDV-NetJob” project, supported by the European Social Fund’s Article 6 Innovative Measures Programme.*