

Conference Presentations

1st Plenary Session

Mr Hans Christian Knudsen (Denmark), Head of NetJob Department, Danish Centre for Technical Aids for Rehabilitation and Education.

At the Lisbon summit in 2000, the European member states committed themselves to making Europe the most dynamic and competitive knowledge based economy in the world by 2010.

At NetJob, where we work in the area of vocational training for disabled people, this political commitment raised some important issues for us and the people who we work with. For us it is perfectly clear that people with disabilities must not be left out of the new economy. That means that every citizen, including persons with disabilities, must have the opportunity to acquire information technology skills through their education and vocational training. And then go on to use these skills in their employment.

In fact we have found that IT skills can become an **empowering tool** for people with motor disabilities and can give greater scope for employment. I am not going into details about the statistics about employment of disabled people but it is well known that in Europe we still have a long way to go. There are about 37.000.000 people in Europe with disabilities, they have generally lower education levels, lower employment levels, lower incomes, and people with disabilities are excluded from the work force by a combination of forces. To name a few: prejudice, misconceptions about disabilities and lack of knowledge about accessible work places for disabled people.

We have established the SDV NetJob project to tackle some of these problems by raising awareness of disability in the labor market and carrying out actions to support this. And then, we are using vocational training methods, focusing on new technologies, because we believe that IT can place disability outside the primary focus.

Here are a few facts about the project. We have a 2.6 million euro budget with 75% funding from the European Communities, DG employment and social affairs (Mrs Schulte-Braucks office for “European Social Funds, Article 6 innovative measures and adaptation for the new economy within the framework of social dialogue”. Our project period started in November 2001 and will last until the end of October 2003. [Editor: The project has since been extended to 31.12.2003]

The promoter is the Danish Centre for technical aids for education and rehabilitation, or “Hjælpe-middelinstituttet” in Danish, and we work with 11 partners. Two Danish, two Irish and seven Greek.

The partners consist of a mixture of social partners NGO's of disabled people and training organizations. The Danish Centre is promoter and the Danish Council for association of disabled people DSI is one partner, the REVA centre Aarhus, Institute of Labor/ Confederation of Greek Workers INE/GSSE, from Greece. The trade union of Greek Telecommunication Workers OME-OTE, Social Work Foundation IKE, IRIDANOS inter-municipal training centre in Zografou, the E-WORX company, INTERFACE business and information training, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Chania. And the REHAB group from Ireland and the Work Research Centre from Ireland as well.

In the SDV NetJob project, one of the major work packages consists of the production and implementation of the Internet portal called <http://www.socialdialogue.net/>

The Web site's theme, is about social dialogue. As its motto says, it is "Providing accessible information on employment and disability" issues and discussion forms. It focuses on the ESF article 6 themes.

IT and social dialogues corporate social responsibility, lifelong learning, social inclusion and disability issues, and economic and social change. The website is accessible for Greek, Danish and English readers.

Another big work package in the SDV NetJob project is the establishing of the NetJob Hellas vocational training scheme. It consists of the transfer project of NetJob a vocational training scheme from Denmark to Greece.

In Denmark 85% of our NetJob students get into work through our course. The training focuses on training disabled people technical IT skills, but it also focuses on other skills, such as responsibility for one's own learning process, project work and presentation techniques. Trainees also have to learn to cope with demands from the employer about quality, deadlines, etc. It can be hard if you have never or you have hardly been on the job market.

Three partners have created "NetJob Hellas" together. There is INTERFACE, Social Work Foundation IKE and IRIDANOS inter-municipal training centre in Zografou. 12 disabled trainees are now in the second of the job training periods in companies in Athens, working with designers, database developers, and IT managers. NetJob in Denmark is providing guidance in monitoring the transfer process. And now we should have a picture of the team. The happy team, I hope. I believe that some from the team are present at this conference.

Another activity still going on is the IT skills survey. The IT skills survey is examining the needs of employers and the existing IT skills of employees in Greece. It consists of an on-line questionnaire in the Greek language area of the social dialogue website and there is a questionnaire for employees and a questionnaire for employers.

Another big task is to establish an e-learning programme for company human resource managers on how to adapt management policies, practices and work places to take account of the requirements of disabled people. The plan is to make an on-line training programme for human resource managers and to provide information about resources, tools and tips and to make a dialogue with a community on the Internet. You can read more about the initiative at the socialdialogue.net as well.

Finally, I will say that we are heading towards the European knowledge based society, free of discrimination, built on social dialogue and equal opportunities from now on.

In November 2000, the European Council of Ministers adopted a proposal for an EU Directive that set up a general framework for equal treatment at work and in employment. Among other things, this Directive prohibits discrimination on the grounds of disability.

The Directive comes into force in December 2003, by which time it should be transformed into national legislation in all the Member States of the EU. However member states can ask for a three year extension. But we say: "Why wait any longer?" - With the right knowledge and the right tools, workplaces can be open for all.

Thank you.