

IntoWork Conference, May 15-16, 2003, Athens

Workshop 1: "Social Inclusion for Disabled People through Work and Social Dialogue "

Presentation by Ms Marianne Becker Andersen, Head of Secretariat, The Union of Commercial and Clerical Employees in Denmark, the Commercial Sector.

Thank you for the invitation to speak at this workshop on this very important issue on "*Social Inclusion for Disabled People through Work and Social Dialogue* "

The Union of Commercial and Clerical Employees in Denmark has about 375.000 members of which about 100.000 members are organised in the Commercial sector – primarily shops and stores - which I represent.

My presentation will focus on diversity and an inclusive labour market.

Seen from our point of view, time is right to focus on the issue of a socially responsible labour market – at a national level and at European level. More than ever trade unions, employers' organisations and governments are committed to jointly address the balancing act between competitiveness, sustainability and social cohesion.

In Denmark we have discussed corporate social responsibility – the inclusive labour market – for the last 10 years.

A socially responsible labour market is a common concern. Local communities, voluntary organisations, unions, enterprises and others – all have a role to play.

Within our special branch in Denmark we have made a number of agreements with our counterpart in the employer's association that is not only targeted on persons with a physical disability, but on a number of persons with a "disability" in a wider sense.

These agreements – in daily talk called "the Social Chapters" or "Agreements on the Inclusive Labour Market" – aim at promote employment for

- Present employees whose working capacity become reduced for physical, mental or social reasons
- Rehabilitation employees with reduced working capacity – reduced for physical, mental og social reasons
- Persons with other ethnic backgrounds than Danish
- Senior citizens

So, the agreements are not only targeted on persons whose reduced working capacity is due to physical conditions, but also mental illnesses, lack of integration in the society and age.

The reason why we, as a trade union, have made these agreements, is our fundamental wish to:

- Keep the employees in the work place
- Avoid social exclusion
- Keep up knowledge/experience on the labour market
- Counteract labour shortage
- Counteract discrimination

However, we must face the fact that not everybody shares our opinion when it comes to the necessity of talking – and practicing – social responsibility.

The objections we frequently encounter are that:

- It requires considerable resources in the workplace
- There is a need for persons whose performance is 100%
- Persons employed on special terms replace/undercut those employed on ordinary terms

These objections must be countered by persuasive efforts in relation to employees as well as employers and by local agreements on the individual workplaces to ensure that persons, who are employed on special terms do not replace, but complement the existing labour force.

As we all know, it is not enough that the organisations (employees' and employers' organisations) make good and socially conscious agreements – these agreements must also be realised in practice.

In Denmark we are so fortunate to have a tool to realise the visions indicated in the above agreements. The tool is called "The Cooperation Agreement". According to this agreement it is possible for employers and employees on the individual workplace to make binding agreements on local staff policies – such staff policies may just handle mentally/physically/socially weak or elderly employees and employees with another ethnic background than Danish.

As a trade union we feel that it is our special responsibility to prompt agreements on such local staff policies. Therefore, this task is of high priority and we offer courses to our local shop stewards to support them in their work to make agreements on local staff policies.

As mentioned there are many actors when it comes to "the inclusive labour market"; locally it is mainly the enterprises and their employees, nationally it is primarily the employers' organisations and trade unions and internationally it is the EU and Union Network International – UNI.

As a matter of fact UNI – Europe Commerce meets for the first conference these days in Stockholm.

On the agenda is - among lots of other issues – the need for strengthening the efforts to create an inclusive labour market through social dialogue.

I hope that my presentation has shed some light on the necessity that we jointly work for an inclusive - and socially responsible labour market.

Thank you very much.