

Conference Presentations

Workshop no 1 "Social Dialogue and Inclusion in the Labour Market of People with Motor Disabilities"

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The title of this workshop was Social Dialogue and Inclusion at the Labour Market of People with Motor Disabilities. Our first speaker was Marianne Becker Andersen. Marianne spoke about social dialogue mechanisms, putting disability issues on employment agendas across Europe. Marianne explained that her responsibilities with regard to this matter extended beyond persons with motor disabilities and in fact disabilities generally into, for example integrating people with refugee status, that kind of thing. But this was very much an issue for social responsibility and that was the way in which she and her colleagues would act in unions across Europe. Marianne thought that it was very important, to address employers and argue for an inclusion on ongoing basis, but also is important to be careful that situations didn't rise when there was unfair competition and people for instance were kept out of jobs because of mechanisms that were put in place by way of positive action.

She explained what has been done is the use of social chapters within collective bargaining in particular and that this has been attempted right across Europe. She was asked whether it was being done just within bargaining with large companies and she said no. That it was a feature across all collective bargaining but that the implementation tended to happen faster and better within what we might call "leading companies" and she said, particularly in Denmark, that municipalities were very positive and very supportive within the area.

Our next speaker was Winfred Detmar, from Germany who spoke about a labour market initiative that he is involved in. The title of his presentation was "sensitization of employers through social dialogue and co-operative social responsibility". He explained that there has been a lot of change in the last 2 to 3 years, there have been two new laws, and two important initiatives, one being a public relations effort to say; "look we need to employ and we can employ more people with severe disabilities", and then there was another initiative out of which the work that he is involved in had really sprung and it was really an action plan out of which have grown specialized integration services SIS of which his organization is one. They were operating as a pilot project for a number of years but are legally established in the last two years. Within Germany they had supported 18.000 people with disabilities and placed over 6.600 people with disabilities into employment. Most of those jobs came up through questioning but still, you know being in those jobs, those jobs continue on into the long term. A small percentage 10-15% wouldn't last into the long term but the vast majority would.

He explained 2 points that I picked up, because I think it is very much the same situation within Ireland, is at the greatest success tended to be within SME's. He did say that within his area the companies are primarily SME's but regardless of that I think that right across Germany my experience has been that it has been easy to get people into SME's and into larger organizations.

Interesting as well, he said that when they were selling to companies, they always sold on the basis of the advantage that the person employing that particular person, and the benefit that the employer would drive from that, they didn't know and say "look you have a social responsibility, you know, why don't you take this person almost as a part of that?" The person was employed because the employer felt that this made good sense for him or her.

Next speaker was Christos Economou speaking on the developing work opportunities in the telecommunications industry. He has been on both sides in terms of, as I understand in trade unionism within the industry and also as a work director and has good international experience as well as the Greek national experience. He felt that we have come into a time of great opportunity primarily because of international linkages and the kind of one country learning best practice from another. And also in terms of new technology and that the kind of opportunities that sprang from that.

He felt that there was a huge challenge, and that this can be tackled by way of social dialogue. And the way that they have been pushing it was really that the union needed to continually push employers to agree that there were more work opportunities that could be made available to the people with motor disabilities. Secondly that a priority had to be put on the provision of appropriate training for people with motor disabilities and thirdly was the area of physical access and providing people with motor disabilities with equal rights within work places.

He made a point about alternative forms of work and was excited about the area of teleworking. Thought that there was a lot opportunity there for people with motor disabilities, but was keen to point out that it needs to be planned and appropriately worked-through and, managed appropriately so that most was got out of the opportunity that existed.

Our fourth speaker then was Nikos Voulgaropoulos and he spoke about, sorry he was asked to speak about the expectations of people with motor disabilities from 2003- the year of disabilities. He choose to talk about a lot more, wider things and he made a very interesting presentation and got us all to sit up very close to lunch. He felt that something as terribly important as you know as a starting point he said obstacles needed to be removed.

He made a plead that we give universal design a chance, you know it's tried out on a really proper basis for what we see is a possible, so that we can live in a world that fits people who are not disabled or are physically disabled.

He stressed the point that equality offers the opportunity to allow people reach their full potential on an equal rights basis. He felt that information provision was a huge-huge issue and if anything was to be done over the next year or this year, the year of people with disabilities, something - or as much as could be possibly done - on information provision would be a great help.

He asked us to celebrate disability and when he was asked a question about what people concerned about disability should do, he made a plea that, if we could think about disability, and many think it through as an issue, not just as a personal thing affecting one person, but as a concept and really what it was about and the issues that sprang out of that.

Out of that what I tried to do was make some conclusions here, and four conclusions, which as they so happened, tend to fit in with the conference declaration.

The first conclusion, the point that Marianne was making about legal and political basis for positive action, I would see that being very alike with the declaration that we take note, that there is a legal and political basis in place.

The next point I made very much reflected what Winfred spoke about, sorry his point was the next one, that employers need to be aware of the capability of people with disabilities, and that would be very much like, I guess point three there in the declaration.

Next point, I am going back one, is the point of barriers continue to exclude people with disabilities. This would be very much reflect Christos' point and would be reflecting point number two.

And lastly of course what Nikos spoke about, the points that Nikos made, and that all members states and everyone within society need to pull together on this and I think that would very much reflect point 1 here, in the declaration. Thank you.