

Council conclusions of 1st and 2nd of December 2003 on the follow up of the European Year of People with Disabilities and the promotion of Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

RECALLING THAT:

1. The Council Decision 2001/903/EC of 3 December 2001 establishing the European Year of People with Disabilities 2003¹, engendered a high level of mobilisation and participation of stakeholders throughout the European Year of People with Disabilities (EYPD), demonstrating a broad desire to move with determination towards comprehensive social inclusion and the full achievement of equal opportunities;
2. The various initiatives undertaken at EU level and by the Member States during the European Year of People with Disabilities demonstrate that the European Year has provided a new political impetus to promote the integration and participation of people with disabilities, which also support actions already defined in the National Action Plans on Employment and Social Inclusion;
3. In the general framework established by the Lisbon and the Nice Councils, the Brussels Council of March 2003 renewed the commitment of the European Union to promoting e-inclusion and the elimination of all kinds of barriers that obstruct the full integration and participation of persons with disabilities in the knowledge-based economy and society;

¹ OJ L 335, 19.12.2001, p. 15.

4. The Council Resolution of 15 July 2003² called for the promotion of the employment and social integration of people with disabilities;
5. The Commission Communication of 24 January 2003, "Towards a United Nations legally binding instrument to promote and protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities", supports the United Nations work on a convention, aimed at ensuring the equal effective enjoyment of human rights and freedoms by persons with disabilities through combating discrimination on the grounds of disability, including the promotion of equal treatment and the accommodation of the needs of people with disabilities;
6. The Political Declaration adopted by Ministers of the Council of Europe responsible for Integration Policies for People with Disabilities in Malaga on 8 May 2003 underlined that one of the goals of the next decade should be the improvement of the quality of life of people with disabilities and their families;
7. The Commission Communication on the follow-up to the European Year of People with Disabilities : "Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities - A European Action Plan", adopted on 30 October 2003³, provides for a multi-annual Action Plan with the time horizon of 2010 with the goal of mainstreaming disability issues into relevant Community policies and developing concrete actions in key areas to enhance the integration and participation of people with disabilities.

² OJ C 175, 24.7.2003, p. 1.

³ COM (2003) 650 final.

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION:

1. WELCOMES the efforts made by Member States in order to implement the Council Decision on the European Year of People with Disabilities and the Commission action to support the Member States to achieve the goals of the European Year;
2. UNDERLINES that the momentum triggered by the European Year of People with Disabilities has to be maintained beyond 2003 and that future commitments at European and national levels should be based on the results achieved thanks to the European Year of People with Disabilities;
3. WELCOMES the presentation by the European Commission of its new Communication on the follow-up to the European Year of People with Disabilities: "Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities - A European Action Plan" as a contribution towards the full integration and participation of people with disabilities into the economy and society as a whole in an enlarged Europe;
4. TAKES NOTE that the four areas selected for the first phase of the Commission Action Plan (access to, and remaining in, employment; lifelong learning; access to, and use of, new technologies; and accessibility to the public built environment) should also be considered by the Member States in the development and advancement of their policies towards people with disabilities;
5. UNDERLINES the importance of the regular Commission reports on the overall situation of people with disabilities in the enlarged European Union, which will support the process of mainstreaming, taking on board developments in Member States building upon the work of the EU High Level Group on Disability;

6. INVITES the current and acceding Member States to pro-actively mainstream disability issues into relevant policy areas and in particular to take due account of disability matters while elaborating and implementing their National Action Plans on Employment and Social Inclusion within the existing Open Method of Co-ordination;
7. INVITES the current and acceding Member States to transpose, within the agreed deadlines, and fully apply the Directive establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation;⁴
8. WELCOMES the Commission's intention to launch in Spring 2004 a public consultation on the basis of a Green Paper on the future strategy to combat discrimination on the grounds set out in Article 13 of the EC Treaty, including disability, aimed at taking stock of progress made in EU anti-discrimination policy and at addressing the new challenges posed by the enlargement of the EU;
9. UNDERLINES the crucial relevance, within the development of policies for disability, of the contribution that families together with the public sector and other actors, including NGOs, are making towards improvement of the quality of life and independence of people with disabilities;
10. STRESSES the necessity to ensure, with respect to human rights, easy access to comprehensive information, quality services and other organised care actions for all people with disabilities and their families;
11. STRESSES, furthermore, the importance of taking the needs of families especially those with children with disabilities or adults in need of high level support, duly into consideration with a view to enabling quality life within the family, also with the necessary support of adequate structures including those which are community-based, paying particular attention to the reconciliation of work and family life and to gender equality;

⁴ Directive 2000/78 EC of 27 November 2000, OJ L 303, 2.12.2000.

12. REAFFIRMS its commitment to ensuring dialogue and exchange of information and good practices at a European level, especially through the EU High Level Group on Disability;
 13. HIGHLIGHTS the importance of regular involvement of organisations of people with disabilities and their families, social partners and stakeholders in the policy dialogue on disability matters at European and national levels.
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