



Workability Europe Annual Review July 2005 – July 2006

General Secretary's address

Nearing the end of the Workability Europe Strategic Plan 2004-2006, we are quite pleased with the progress made:

- **Business to Business and CSR Pillar** has embarked on some very real and concrete business projects which are expected to generate substantial returns for the entire membership of WE;
- **Enlargement Pillar** is constantly attracting new members and we have reached over 33 member organisations;
- **Communications & Networking Pillar** has equipped WE with a good set of PR tools and is increasing our profile and capacity in European Public Affairs;
- **Routes to Employment & Best Practice Pillar** is working on issues directly influencing service provision and employment of people with disabilities as well as laying the groundwork for involvement in EU-funded projects.

In addition, the secretariat, apart from coordinating and facilitating the work of the members, also invested considerable efforts to enhance and demonstrate the added value from Workability Europe membership by devising a concrete *Menu of Services & Opportunities* answering members' strategic needs and objectives.

Of course, more work awaits us in the coming years. First of all, we need to design and agree our new Strategic Plan 2007-10 on the basis of the conclusions and recommendations put forward by our members during our Annual Conference in May 2006 in Amsterdam. This document will set out the roadmap for Workability Europe.

Secondly, we have to intensify our lobbying efforts in order to have a real say in shaping the policies affecting our future. Additional resources will be employed to meet this need.

Thirdly, we must continue adding value to the work carried out by our members on the ground by providing them with a comprehensive set of services and opportunities. Attracting more good members in order to expand our geographical coverage and representativity is a constant goal.

Finally, I would like to share our firm belief that Workability Europe must continue to strive to be a guiding light in the social employment sector. It must be a network in which the members are able to find new approaches and solutions to such challenges facing service providers as globalisation, competition and a shrinking welfare state. Our foremost mission is to be a proactive and prospective organisation, a real worldwide leader in the sector, enhancing the quality of rehabilitation services and offering good jobs and development opportunities for people with disabilities.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to provide you here with a full account of everything that has been going on in and around Workability Europe during this past year, so in the next few pages we will just try to give you a taste of the main developments and initiatives within our network describing:

- Some highlights in the work of our Four Strategic Pillars
- Our Public Affairs activities in Networking, Lobbying and Representation
- The major events we organised

For more detailed information on our work we invite you to visit www.workability-europe.org or to contact the secretariat at publicaffairs@workability-europe.org

Bertie Hunt
General Secretary Workability Europe

Summary Reports of Activities for the Four Strategic Pillars

Pillar I: Business to Business & Corporate Social Responsibility

Joint Purchasing Consortium

Pillar I has established a Purchasing Group which has undertaken a study of our combined purchasing power as a pan-European Network during 2004 and 2005. This Pillar has been negotiating with a number of multinationals in the IT sector. In June 2005, WE signed an agreement with Microsoft entitling its members to use the Academic License status. When this is fully implemented it will be a great success as it will mean significant savings for our members.

Signed agreements with HP, Dell and Lenova/IBM for the purchase of hardware at preferential prices has recently commenced. Workability Europe member organisations are currently registering their interest with the Secretariat so that they have direct access to purchase product from the relevant web page.

Workability Recycling Partnership

Member organisations from Spain, France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, UK and Ireland active in recycling have been working towards the establishment of a pan-European Group which will be in a position to work with multinational companies to meet new regulations as per the new European Directive on Waste of Electrical and Electronic Equipment.

Currently, our Pillar is shaping a technical team with the aim of participating in meetings with potential clients adding value in processes, quality and other technical issues.

Pillar II: Enlargement

Achievements

The primary target area for WE membership development has been within the New Members States of the EU. Following results have been achieved:

- 2004 - Total number of WE members: 19
- 2006 - Total number of WE members: 34
- 2004 - Number of WE members in New Member States: 2
- 2006 - Number of WE members in New Member States: 13

As can be seen from the above information, whilst there has been some growth of membership within the existing EU, the majority of membership increase has come within the New Members States. This is pleasing as we see positive results from this priority effort. Within the existing 'old' EU Member States, it has been difficult to recruit new members. It is important to do so as we need full representation when negotiating with EU institutions.

At the moment we do not have members in Denmark, Italy and Greece. A devised strategy to remedy this issue is currently being devised. In some countries we have a large organisation that is a member – which is good – but maybe this dominance makes it difficult for other smaller organisations to join. Within the New Member States many of the members have few available resources to cover travel, hotel costs, etc. to participate regularly in Pillar Meetings, this creates difficulties and Pillar II is looking at ways to facilitate participation.

Strategy & Actions 2007-10

There is still much more to do. A number of New Member States are not yet represented – Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia – and in 2007 Bulgaria and Romania hope to join the EU.

Whilst getting new members is desirable, it is equally important to retain these. So it is essential we continue to work hard on delivering benefits associated with WE membership.

Pillar III: Communications & Networking

Action Plan 2005/06

Most of the actions Pillar III set for itself have been achieved. Although much effective lobbying has been done at EU level (mostly via ENSPER), this is an area in which we intend to put more energy in future years. WE's Public Affairs Officer, Martin Ohridski, has been instrumental in implementing many of Pillar III's initiatives and we are grateful to him.

Achievements

- ***WE website:*** having successfully switched to a new webmaster, the public platform of the WE website is now fully up to date and well maintained. During 2005 it was visited on average 212 times per month. Via a new tool, we shall soon be able to detect hits by country of origin. We still need to find out members' opinions on implementing a members' platform.
- ***WE e-bulletin:*** produced and circulated to the membership 3 times a year. Contributions from members are always welcomed.
- ***WE PowerPoint presentation:*** produced by Integracja, Poland and sponsored by Shaw Trust UK available upon request on CD-ROM from the Brussels Office.
- ***WE brochure:*** designed and printed by Integracja to take the place of the original WE Brochure. Copies handed to Members at the WE Annual Conference 2006 in Amsterdam and stocks held at the Brussels office.
- ***Communications questionnaire:*** to be designed for members to complete and return during 2006 in order to help Pillar III to maintain the effectiveness of communications within the network.
- ***Certificates of Membership:*** were designed by Pillar III and given to all members at the Annual Conference. We trust that displaying this Certificate will help organisations to showcase their membership in Workability Europe internally as well as externally.

Strategy & Actions 2007-10

These will be based on the outcomes of the WE Annual Conference in Amsterdam and upon the results of the Communications Questionnaire. Other Pillar Groups and individual members are encouraged to contact Pillar III if they have ideas for improving WE's communications and networking. We plan to continue meeting 3 times each year and are always pleased to welcome new members to our Group.

Pillar IV: Routes to Employment & Best Practice

During the last year the main activities of the Pillar IV Group not covered elsewhere in this report have been as follows:

Funding mechanisms of providers in different member countries

In the beginning of 2006 Pillar IV sent out a questionnaire to all members on how our individual organisations are funded. The compilation of an up-to-date database of funding by country will allow for individual members/countries to use the database to improve their funding potential and use it as lobbying tool to improve our overall funding position.

Partnerships

Pillar IV is all the time looking for the possibilities to engage in and cooperate with different EU-funded transnational projects. Pillar IV members are at the moment involved in the Leonardo da Vinci project: "Vocational Improvement Pipeline Project" (log on to www.vipp.org.uk where you can find more information).

Other subjects

Different perspectives on "Learning and leadership" have been discussed in Pillar IV. Subjects like "Lifelong learning", "The learning centre model in Remploy", "Challenges for leadership in sheltered employment and multiservice centres", "Leadership in employment for multidisabled people" and "Value based leadership" have been brought up in the discussions.

Networking, Lobbying and Representation

During the past year Workability Europe issued position papers/responses on the following dossiers:

- *EU Regulations on State Aids – block exemptions regarding sheltered workshops*
- *Draft Directive on Services in the Internal Market*
- *EC Biennial report on the overall situation of people with disabilities in the enlarged EU*
- *Council of Europe Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society: improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe 2006 – 2015*
- *UN Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities*

Other main issues and developments to which Workability Europe stayed close during 2005-2006 include the *EC White Paper on Services of General Interest* and subsequent *Communication on Implementing the Community Lisbon programme: Social services of General Interest in the European Union, Disability mainstreaming in the European Employment Strategy and the Reform of structural funds and programme PROGRESS*.

In some cases, Workability Europe took the lead in issuing position papers, in other cases contributions were jointly developed with the partners from the European Network of Service Providers in Employment and Rehabilitation (ENSPER) and yet on other occasions, Workability Europe contributed to the work of the Social Platform of which it is a member. The importance of working in different coalitions was again proven as vital.

In its own right, or jointly with other organisations Workability Europe met with key persons from the European institutions including MEPs and officials from DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Also, the President, General Secretary and Public Affairs Officer represented the organisation at key International Conferences such as the European Day of People with Disabilities 2005 and the Annual Assembly of the European Disability Forum held in Barcelona

Major events

ENSPER shines spotlight on Social Services

On 6 December 2005, Workability Europe (WE), the European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR) and Rehabilitation International (RI) in the framework of their cooperation in the European Network of Service Providers in Employment and Rehabilitation (ENSPER), organised an evening event on the hot topic of *Social services in a competitive European market: threat or opportunity?* The event took place in the Hotel Silken Berlaymont in Brussels and was organised as a Discussion Forum over dinner. The evening brought together a diverse audience of nearly 60 participants coming from service providers, organisations of disabled people, policy-makers, public authorities, consultancies and social NGOs.

The evening opened with a reception and a welcome address from Richard Howitt, MEP (UK/PSE), President of the EP Disability Intergroup. Said Mr Howitt, "The Draft Services Directive has been one of the most complex and contentious issues that we have had to deal with in the European Parliament. The organisations that ENSPER brings together are important to this debate and to the disability movement in Europe – we as MEPs do listen to your contributions to this debate so that a legislative framework that best promotes the interests of disabled people can be achieved."

The keynote speaker, Stefan Trömel (Advisor to the European Disability Forum) set the context of the discussion on social services and highlighted the issues at stake focusing in particular on the viewpoint of organisations of disabled people. The keynote speech was followed by reactions from Hans Vrind (President Workability Europe), Simon Wilson, (Director Platform of European Social NGOs), Patrick de Bucquois, (Vice President CEDAG) who each offered his perspective. Ray Fletcher, President of ENSPER, moderated the debate. The overriding messages conveyed by the panellists were that the Service Directive was here to stay but that civil society has an important role to play in ensuring that service provision is above all human rights driven and not profit driven. The panellists also stressed the necessity to implement quality standards in all areas of service provision.

Seminar on Funding Opportunities

On 23 February 2006 EPR, in conjunction with Workability Europe, organised a successful Seminar entitled ***A new cycle of EC Funding Opportunities for the disability sector (2007-2013)*** which took place in Brussels. The European Commission is currently preparing a new generation of funding opportunities that will cover the period between 2007-2013. They will replace the 2000-2006 cycle of funding programmes, and will offer to the disability sector another wide range of opportunities to finance training, development and dissemination activities at both national and European level. In this respect, the Seminar was a timely occasion to acquire an insight into the new streams of funding that will soon be available for the disability sector, and to understand how an organisation might benefit from them.

The Seminar was very well attended attracting 32 persons from 14 European countries. Participants came from the EPR network and from member organisations of Workability Europe. The programme started in the premises of the European Commission with a general presentation on the role and functioning of the EU institutions. This was followed by presentations given by officials from DG Employment Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities on the PROGRESS Programme, ESF and other interesting upcoming funding opportunities for the disability sector.

The afternoon session familiarised participants to become familiar with the objectives and scope of the main upcoming funding opportunities including the specific actions and activities they can fund; the application procedures for each funding programme as well as the framework for implementation and reporting; evaluating budgets and financial reports; strategies to transform a project idea into the a decision to submit a project proposal, and tools for proposal writing; best practice in partner search and partnership-building. A detailed Training Pack, Certificates of Attendance and follow-up information were distributed to all participants.

Seminar on “Involvement of employees with disabilities in planning and management in their workplace”

A very interesting Seminar on *Involvement of employees with disabilities in planning and management in their workplace* was organised on 30-31 March in Asker, Norway by Pillar IV together with the Norwegian WE member ASVL and the company Asker Produkt. About 15 participants took part in the Seminar and WE members from Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Sweden and UK as well as the WE secretariat were represented. The Seminar included general information on the Norwegian labour market programmes for people with disabilities and a visit to the company Asker Produkt which is a member of ASVL. Asker Produkt is a successful and well-known company in the field of employment and disability in Norway.

During the visit the Seminar participants participated in meetings on team sessions reviewing the work of the day and future planning with the employees of Asker Produkt. In the Seminar the participants also discussed experiences on value based leadership as presented from Belgium and Finland. A representative from the Norwegian Trade Unions presented some of their training programmes for employees with disabilities and the significant support they provide from these programmes.

The results of the Seminar were presented to the entire membership at the WE Annual Conference in May. Pillar IV will use the experiences from the Asker Seminar to develop the subject on “Involvement of people with disabilities”. The idea is to develop documentation with a number of examples of best practices in how to involve people with disabilities as customers, as employees, in policy-making and in process development etc.

Workability Europe Annual Conference 2006

Workability Europe held a successful Annual Conference between 9 and 11 May 2006 under the banner *Beyond 2006: Building Workability Europe's Future Together*. The event took place in the area of wider Amsterdam, the Netherlands and was co-hosted by WE Dutch members Cedris and Amfors Group. This year's Annual Conference was very well attended, attracting over 60 participants from all over Europe. In fact, every single country from the nearly 20 countries represented in the WE network, participated with at least one delegate. During three busy days delegates discussed and debated the WE future and gave their strong contribution to shaping the next Strategic Plan of the organisation for the period 2007-10.

Over the two main Conference days, insightful presentations were given in plenary by a selection of speakers, invaluable work was done in each of the Breakout Groups and interesting debates unfolded. At the same time, there was plenty of opportunity for social networking.

The Conference evaluation forms collected suggest a good overall level of satisfaction with all aspects of the Conference. Crucially, every single delegate thought that the event ‘rather achieved’ its objectives of laying the foundations of the next WE Strategic Plan.