People with disabilities: equal opportunities, European action plan DAP

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PURPOSE : to present an Action Plan to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities.
CONTENT : this Communication aims to achieve a sustainable and operational approach to disability issues in the enlarged Europe. It will provide a reference point and framework for reinforcement of the disability dimension in all relevant EU policies, while supporting or stimulating policies at national level. The present Communication accordingly outlines forward-looking EU initiatives aimed at the further inclusion of people with disabilities in an enlarged EU economy and society as a whole. Three operational objectives are central to the proposed approach: achieving full application of the Equal treatment in Employment and Occupation Directive (2000/78/EC), reinforcing mainstreaming of disability issues in relevant Community policies, and improving accessibility for all. In particular, this Communication introduces a rolling multi-annual Action Plan with the time horizon of 2010. The goal of the Action Plan is to mainstream disability issues into relevant Community policies and develop concrete actions in crucial areas to enhance the integration of people with disabilities. As an instrument to support mainstreaming of disability issues in key EU policies, the Commission will publish a biennial report on the overall situation of people with disabilities in the enlarged EU, taking on board new developments in the Member States. At the same time, the Commission proposes to reinforce the involvement of stakeholders and key players in the policy dialogue in order to bring about far reaching and lasting changes within the economy and society as a whole. As employment remains the most critical factor for social inclusion, the first phase of implementation of the EU Disability Action Plan - which is due to be developed in 2004 and 2005 - will focus on creating the conditions necessary to promote the employment of people with disabilities, while making the mainstream labour market more accessible to them across the enlarged Union. Accordingly, the first phase of this Action Plan will concentrate on four concrete employment-related priority actions: - access to, and retention in, employment including the fight against discrimination; - lifelong learning to support and increase employability, adaptability, personal development and active citizenship; - new technologies to empower people with disabilities and therefore facilitate access to employment; - accessibility to the public built environment to improve participation in the work place and integration into the economy and society. The Commission biennial Report on the overall situation of people with disabilities in the enlarged Europe will be used as a basis for identifying new priorities to be addressed in the following phases of the Action Plan in the light of the impact of EU policies on the situation of people with disabilities. The first report is planned for 2005. It will aim to stimulate debate with the Member States and all interested parties, including NGOs representing people with disabilities, on best practice and new priorities for the subsequent phases of the Action Plan.