People with disabilities: equal opportunities, European action plan DAP

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The long-term EU strategy for those with a disability is to offer them equal opportunities in life with the key objective being to offer disabled people the chance to live independently and to participate fully in society. The EU strategy is built on three pillars. The first relates to EU anti-discrimination legislation, which provide access to individual rights, the second seeks to eliminate environmental barriers preventing disabled people from exercising their abilities and the third is to mainstream disability issues in the broad range of Community policies in order to include, rather than exclude, those with a disability. In addition, the EU has established a “Disability Action Plan” (DAP) in a bid to ensure a coherent policy follow-up to the European Year of the Disabled in an enlarged Europe.

The Communication identifies priority actions for the second phase of DAP, which is set to last from 2006-2007 with an emphasis on the active inclusion of people with disabilities. At the same time, the Commission calls on the Member States to encourage the inclusion of disabled people in the forthcoming Reform Programmes for growth and jobs. This Communication acts as the first EU report on the overall situation of disabled people. It is to act as a tool for those formulating disability policies across Europe.

In its conclusion, the Commission notes that there is a broad consensus in the EU on the need to tackle disability issues. Emphasis must be placed on extending dignity to the disabled, guaranteeing their fundamental rights, offering them protection against discrimination and guaranteeing their social inclusion. The Commission recognises that issues relating to the disabled are chiefly the responsibility of the Member States and that any initiative can be most effectively handled at a national level. One area in which the EU can and does offer support is through the EU Action Plan, with operational help from the European Social Fund. The Report suggest that mainstreaming is key to advancing disability issues and takes note of the fact that the revised Lisbon strategy gives a greater emphasis on the mainstreaming of disability issues at a Member State level.

The new actions being proposed in line with the second phase of the DAP seek to encourage activity as well as promoting access to social services, while fostering accessible goods and services. Moreover, reliable and comparable statistical data on disability and information on multiple discrimination will be gathered by the Commission. Lastly, the Commission will monitor implementation of the proposed actions through a continuous dialogue with all interested parties. A mid-term evaluation of the Action Plan will take place in 2008 as planned.