

Meeting of the EU Ombudspersons for Persons with Disabilities

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FINAL DECLARATION BY

THE AUSTRIAN DISABILITY OMBUDSMAN

In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on policy for persons with disabilities, both at European Union level and in its Member States. In this context, EU directives – such as Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation – have made a decisive contribution. An important role was also played by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which has likewise contributed significantly to a paradigm shift. The emphasis is now being placed on the rights of persons with disabilities, which are reflected in such keywords as participation, self-determination, accessibility and inclusion.

A most essential aspect of leading a self-determined life is full participation in working life. Employment in the general labour market is not only the basis for earning one's own living, but in our European societies also contributes decisively to a person's self-esteem. In this respect, it must thus be ensured that persons with disabilities do not face any type of discrimination and have opportunities to participate in the same way as persons without disabilities.

In reality, however, the opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate fully in working life are severely limited and this is even more the case for persons with disabilities who also form part of other vulnerable groups and face multiple discrimination. On average, persons with disabilities are affected earlier, more often and for longer periods than persons without disabilities by the phenomenon of unemployment. This is often particularly true for young persons with disabilities, or women and ethnic minority persons with disabilities. In many cases, persons with high support needs will right from the outset find it impossible to access the general labour market and find themselves restricted to special segregating forms of employment in the absence of adequate reasonable accommodation.

An important prerequisite for successful participation in working life is the best possible education, starting with kindergarten. This applies indeed to all persons, but since persons with disabilities are already severely disadvantaged, education and training is even more important for this group. Therefore, inclusive education is a basic prerequisite for an inclusive labour market.

The transition from school to working life marks a turning point in everyone's life and is often a real challenge. In this phase of their life, young persons with disabilities often need considerable support to ensure that a potential interface does not turn into a cut-off point.

The Vienna Conference of EU Ombudspersons for Persons with Disabilities placed a particular focus on practical examples of support for young persons with disabilities facilitating their sustainable and successful entry into working life. Many Member States of the European Union have developed and implemented outstanding projects, approaches and structures designed to make it easier for persons with disabilities to gain a foothold in the general labour market. The projects presented are ideally suited for sharing with, adaptation and customisation by other EU Member States, regions or municipalities.

The Conference of EU Ombudspersons for Persons with Disabilities calls on the Member States of the European Union to ensure equal treatment of persons with disabilities in the labour market, equal access to counselling and support services, and the same education and training opportunities as for persons without disabilities.

In addition, Member States are called upon to pay particular attention to the transition from school to work, especially with respect to young persons with disabilities. It is not only a human rights obligation, but also an economic imperative to facilitate full and unrestricted participation in working life for persons with disabilities.

Finally, Member States are called upon to extend the mandate of their equality bodies and ombudspersons for persons with disabilities to cover equal treatment based on disability in all fields of life and to ensure the independence and effectiveness of these structures in line with the European Commission's Recommendation on standards for equality bodies (C(2018)3850 final).