

## 2001 INTERNATIONAL EMPLOYMENT POLICY THINK TANK

Houston, Texas, July 2001

### CONFERENCE REPORT

*An ILRU project sponsored by IDEAS-New Millennium, a collaborative project of the World Institute on Disability with funding provided by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education), with additional sponsorship provided by the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities (U.S. Department of Labor); and by the Rehabilitation International Commission on Work and Employment.*

#### Conference Premises

It has been observed that much of the rationale which is used by policy makers and public officials to explain the high rates of unemployment among people with disabilities can be nullified through observation of high rates of unemployment in countries where the dynamic variables used as justification for these rates are moot or non-existent. For example, in the U.S., policy observers have concluded that high unemployment among people with disabilities is partly a function of disincentives to employment, including the risk of losing health insurance. However, data indicate that even in countries where there is universal health care and where people should have no risks of losing such benefits, rates of unemployment of people with disabilities are about the same as that population in the U.S.

Another often made excuse to explain high rates of unemployment among people with disabilities is that of general unemployment in the economy. It is said that people with disabilities will generally be the last to be employed in an economy, and even with low unemployment rates in the general population, there will be high unemployment rates among people with disabilities. This theory seems to be controverted by the fact that in many developed countries in the world today, including areas within the U.S., unemployment rates in the general population are at their lowest in decades or nil, and still, people with disabilities face high rates of unemployment.

A third often used explanation, especially in the richer and more industrialized countries, is that employment of people with disabilities cannot be viewed in isolation but must be viewed as linked to lacks of accessible transportation systems and low levels of education of prospective workers with disabilities. However, after three decades of improvement in several countries of transport systems and a marked increase in college and other higher education degrees earned by disabled individuals, there seems to be no corresponding rise in employment of people with disabilities in any of these countries.

## Conference Purposes

The purposes of the INTERNATIONAL EMPLOYMENT POLICY THINK TANK were to:

- 1) review extant studies on various factors and policies affecting the rates of employment of people with disabilities around the world;
- 2) utilize the presence of research and employment specialists from Europe, North America, Asia and Africa to take inventory of or evaluate our current knowledge base about trends and new approaches towards employment of disabled people;
- 3) and to begin the process of developing a complex research model which may account for the myriad of variables that discourage or prevent employment of people with disabilities following an extended period of not working.

## Conference Organizational Framework

The conference was organized around five subject areas, all of which were determined from the research of conference organizers to be fundamental issues. These subject areas include:

- *Past and Current International Research Efforts*: examination of factors that foster or discourage employment by people with disabilities, determining the employment rate of people with disabilities, and assessing methods by which such rate is measured.
- *Identifying and Comparing New Approaches to Employment*: discussion of what practitioners know from day-to-day experiences that researchers don't seem to know, considering how researchers can generate more meaningful hypotheses, and assessing the extent to which issues related to regional differences as well as issues related to developing countries are appropriately recognized.
- *Gathering and Disseminating Knowledge*: consideration of how researchers can do a better job of accumulating, sharing, comparing, and using knowledge; identifying ways in which practitioners and policy makers can make best use of research-generated information.
- *Affecting Employment Policy on National and International Levels*: identification of approaches researchers and practitioners can take to affect policy proactively, discussing the notion that the realms of national and international policy are subject only to advice of well-organized, vested-interest groups.
- *Measuring the Impact of Policy Change and Paradigm Shift*: examination of whether or not it is possible to obtain accurate measures of social change within a complex environment, assessing whether or not current definitions of disability adequately support rehabilitation research and practice.

## Conference Process

The conference agenda was designed to prompt discussion by participants around 12 broad topics related to employment framed within the five subject areas noted above. Again, research completed prior to the conference by the conference organizers was used to inform the choice of topics. The topics used were:

For the subject area of past and current **international research** efforts:

- 1) What are the dynamic factors that foster or discourage employment by people with disabilities?
- 2) What is the employment rate of people with disabilities and how do we measure it?

For the subject area of identifying and comparing **new approaches to employment**:

- 3) Do practitioners know something that researchers don't?
- 4) How can researchers generate more meaningful hypotheses?
- 5) Are regional differences and issues pertinent to developing countries recognized appropriately?

For the subject area of gathering and **disseminating knowledge**:

- 6) How can researchers do a better job of accumulating, sharing, comparing and using knowledge?
- 7) In what ways might practitioners and policy makers better use research information?

For the subject area of **affecting employment policy** on national and international levels:

- 8) Can researchers and practitioners affect policy proactively?
- 9) Are the realms of national and international policy subject only to advice of well-organized, vested-interest groups?

For the subject area of **measuring the impact** of policy change and paradigm shift:

- 10) Is measurement of social change in a complex environment pure fantasy?
- 11) Do current definitions of disability adequately support rehabilitation research and practice?
- 12) Can improved international cooperation help to affect and measure improvements in employment rates of people with disabilities?

In order to ensure that the conference purposes could be achieved and to assure that the products of the conference would be useful, accurate, and up to date, conference organizers sought and secured the participation of 22 of the world's leading policy experts and commentators working in the field of employment by people with disabilities. The experts who participated are listed at the end of this overview, but essentially, they were a mix of researchers, employment policy analysts, professors, higher level government staff, disability management specialists, and representatives of non-governmental and international organizations involved in employment initiatives for people with disabilities. They represented groups working in North American, Europe, Africa, Asia and internationally.

## Dynamic Process

The conference organizers structured the intensive two-day exchange so that Think Tank participants first identified and discussed the dynamic variables that had been studied to date, theorizing about those variables which have yet to be studied, and commenting on the results of past research. With this platform established, participating researchers were then given an opportunity to reflect on their earlier work and to engage in the collaborative process of developing an international, multi-cultural research methodology designed to systematically determine the dynamic variables which may actually prevent people with disabilities who want to work from doing so.

To maximize the effectiveness of the conference, the organizers selected discussion leaders from the pool of participants in order to draw directly on their distinct experiences and expertise in a particular subject, geographic domain or approach to research or dissemination. Certain participants were identified to serve as group leaders, while others rotated as prompters, fueling discussions with pertinent observations and provocative questions. Other participants served as moderators or topical discussion leaders, and still others were facilitators, managing group process. Finally, some participants functioned as commentators, sharing opinions and perspectives.

The Think Tank organizers employed recorders who recorded key findings and seminal points made in each session of the meeting. This material and audio-taped recordings of the proceedings have been used to generate this conference report.

## Review of Contemporary Knowledge Base

Led by the Conference Co-Chairs, Lex Frieden, Executive Director of ILRU and Fred McFarlane, Chairman of the Rehabilitation International Commission on Employment and Work, participants identified their beliefs and knowledge about enduring and emerging trends concerning work and the employment of people with disabilities. Highlights follow of this stimulating discussion of the participants' contemporary knowledge base, which served to set the stage and "raise the bar" for the remainder of the conference.

□ Globally, there are varying and changing cultural contexts of **work** and its consequent value assigned by a society and the individual. As examples: in some countries obtaining work means food and survival while in others, working is unrelated to survival as safety nets, however holey or patch-worked, are in place; in some countries with high income, work by citizens has not been required as numerous jobs are contracted to imported laborers; in other countries work is the primary means of an individual's self-identity and status within society; while in yet other countries, the responsibility for work might be assumed by a family, with the tasks rotated among family members, thereby reducing the individual identity with a particular job. In this last instance, the disabled family members may take part in the rotation or may take added responsibility in the home to free other members for paid labor -- in either case, they would probably not be counted as employed by any current labor market measurement tool. In some countries with long-established safety-nets, work by disabled persons may be unpaid (and therefore uncounted) but valued in relation to the contribution being made to the family, peer

group or culture.

These and other examples led the group to suggest that the **definition of work** and its cultural and economic implications could benefit from a more in-depth international examination of realities around the globe.

□ The concept of “**the right to work**” is now regularly introduced into policy-based discussions around the world about employment, unemployment and underemployment of various sectors of the population. Some of this is based on cost-benefit considerations, such as the clear boost to a national economy gained from facilitating the education, training and paid labor of women.

National policy discussion of employment of disabled persons is more often introduced, however, as an “affirmative action” intervention to reduce isolation and marginalization by inclusion in the social and economic mainstream of society. That said, in a few countries where the labor market is quite tight, governments are now revising policies, seeking to facilitate inclusion of all those who want to work and proactively supporting training and apprenticeships of people with disabilities. Several countries have now introduced the right to work in their legislation concerning disabled people or, at least, the right not to be discriminated against by the world of work.

The group agreed that in light of the proposed **UN Convention on the rights of people with disabilities**, international discussions about the right to work will intensify and should be enriched by further articulation of both the social and economic benefits to be gained.

□ Discussing **international standards**, the group recognized that more than 60 countries had adopted the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Convention #159 on employment of disabled persons, comprising about one third of the United Nations member nations. The 1982 Convention was accepted by the ILO governing body due partly to the effective lobbying and other assistance of international disability organizations and is widely considered as one of the more enduring results of the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP). As the Convention was developed within the IYDP milieu, it reflects the current international values of “full participation and equality,” and has not been superseded by other international codes. In fact, new disability legislation particularly in developing or poor countries often references Convention #159.

Group members commented that there seemed to be little known research about the effect of adopting the Convention on the rate of employment or other changes benefiting disabled people in those countries. Other members noted that the UN Standard Rules for Equalization of Opportunities were also beginning to be referenced in national policies and legislation and more information was needed about the impact of these tools.

□ Participants particularly familiar with international studies and research noted that an enduring feature in the employment field was to review periodically the effect and characteristics of **quota systems**. The basic assumption of a quota system is that a certain percentage of jobs available in a particular workforce, governmental or private, will be reserved for workers

identified as disabled. Most but not all quota systems have built in levies or penalties for not meeting the agreed percentage and the resulting funds can be substantial. Quota systems are central to the vocational rehabilitation, training and placement efforts of disabled people in a number of large European and Asian countries, and are being adopted to a lesser level --usually applying only to the public sector—in some African countries. With the exception of England, it seems very few countries have abandoned the quota system once it is in place. Instead, in recent years, studies show, these systems have been responsive to policy changes of several types: enlarging the pool of companies covered, expanding the definition of types of disabilities covered, expanding the types of services subsidized by quota funds to encompass for example, workplace adaptation and transportation, and the establishment of new quota fund management structures to include participation of disabled people's organizations.

Again, the effect of quota systems on increasing the rate of employment of disabled persons is not as clear as is the fact that the resulting penalty fund has become a main source of subsidizing employment and training initiatives. It was also brought forward that in some poor countries, there was no effective monitoring or penalty system and that, in essence, the 1-3% quota system was little more than a political proclamation of intent.

The group noted that **rights based legislation and policies** are under consideration in some of the same countries where these systems are most entrenched, providing interesting opportunities for research down the road to compare: countries with rights based legislation, those with quota systems and those with a mixture.

□ The growing phenomenon of **self-employment and small business development** was recognized as increasingly evident in both the rich and poor countries, although seemingly in response to differing variables. In the wealthy countries, apparent factors are the lower prices of computers and electronics, enabling the growth of home-based ventures with less capital outlay, as well as more firms and agencies becoming amenable to sub-contracting. Additionally, one study showed that in rural areas where disabled people were less likely to have accessible public transport available, they were seeking out and finding government support for small business loans. Some disability rights groups have cautioned about the dangers of a full-scale “return to isolation,” while others are forming associations of disabled entrepreneurs or “netrepreneurs.” This phenomenon was recognized as a rich but as yet largely untapped topic for research.

In developing or resource poor countries, **revolving loan schemes** for small business development have become popular since the success of the famed Grameen project. Most of these schemes have been aimed at poor women who find it difficult to obtain loans or credit, but in recent years disabled people's organizations and disabled individuals in African, Caribbean and Asian countries have petitioned for and become recipients of these loans. The group noted that long-term initiatives such as the African Decade of Disabled Persons and the second Asia Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons could provide useful frameworks within which to research these programs. It was also pointed out that these loans may become a permanent feature in countries which lack an infrastructure for and investment in training and placement efforts.

□ In many of the participants' countries, the effects of **globalization**, forcing a pervasive focus on productivity to the exclusion of other workplace values, were reportedly becoming

more clear. Experts from a few countries stated that employers were much less interested in hiring disabled workers than 10 years ago. A disability management specialist stated that in large companies, it was now common for disability managers to be tasked to determine all reasons for low productivity: unanticipated leave, family sick leave, illness or disability.

One result of the focus on productivity is that disability management efforts are centered largely on **prevention**, and occupied mainly with the effects of back pain, asthma, heart disease, diabetes and mental health problems among their current workforce. This overriding concern appears to mitigate against hiring of additional workers perceived to have conditions that might affect productivity.

For example, a participant cited a recent study of attitudes of human resource personnel in the USA and the United Kingdom that showed a hesitation to hire workers “with problems” that the staff might not know how to accommodate.

□ At the same time, it was noted that the rising **costs of rehabilitation** are endangering or weakening the commitment of some countries to investment in **return to work** programs for employees who are injured or develop disabilities while already employed. Several participants stated that research showed that workers who became disabled were most likely to return to work if enabled to do so by the companies they were originally employed by and that it was most important to maintain this connection.

□ In this regard, researchers reiterated that both domestic and multi-national studies showed that the earlier an **early intervention** by the employer or responsible rehabilitation agency took place, the more likely the return to work of an injured or disabled employee. The trend toward cost containment strategies places a larger onus on disability and rehabilitation researchers to make their case for the value of investment in rehabilitation and return to work services.

□ At this point in the discussion, participants agreed that all of the discussions about employment would benefit from an elaboration of who comprised the **market population** under discussion, in other words, who are we talking about when discussing employment of disabled persons? The employment specialists among the group agreed that most countries and systems track the population in search of work between the ages of 16 and 64 and within this universe identify the following groups:

- 1) those born with a disability or disabled at an early age and who have never worked; and
- 2) those who have a work history before becoming disabled.

There are other possible subdivisions within each of these groups, and many countries have completely separate response systems depending on the origin of injury (e.g., military, on-the-job, etc.), but for the sake of discussion of the type of intervention required, these two populations were acknowledged to require differing interventions and outreach. As one participant put it, the strategies to assist a young person with mental disabilities to prepare and train for the world of work were vastly different from providing incentives to a seasoned worker with back pain to explore possibilities for job retention.

- Adding to this discussion, another participant pointed out that the tensions inherent in many national systems aimed at supporting employment for disadvantaged sectors were partly due to a visible, or sometimes invisible “**fork in the road,**” **with one path leading to benefits and the other to employment.** Historically, this may be due to conflicting policies that have grown up over time –such as winking at the rules in times of high unemployment –or unspoken policies that have encouraged disability pensions as a door to early retirement. Others noted that policies may have developed in the absence of a clear national definition of who is expected to work and who, due to low expectations, are expected to live out their lives on benefits or “sheltered work.” All agreed that comparative research on employment outcomes was greatly hampered by the lack of clear definitions, and that the binary either/or approach –work or benefit – is not sophisticated or flexible enough to respond to most real world situations. It was recognized that there are serious efforts being introduced in several countries to reduce the either/or approach and that researchers should prepare to capture these changes as they take effect.
- Similarly, representatives of **sheltered and supported work** initiatives in Europe reported that they too were under great pressure to redefine objectives in line with emerging national policies. One participant stated that a European group had recently clarified its mission as offering training and support to disabled persons to enter the mainstream employment market and to work with employers towards this end.
- At this juncture, one international employment researcher reminded the group that most studies revealed a **mismatch** between the needed labor market skills and the training and skills of the prospective worker with a disability. Hundreds of surveyed employers were quick to identify this as a leading reason why they were hesitant to hire disabled employees: not only were the requisite job skills often missing, but so was a work history illustrating the aptitude or capacity to acquire such skills. This was clearly not a marketing problem, but a lag or lapse between the training/placement industry and labor market needs.
- Finally, the observation was made that, for perhaps the first time in history, the employment challenges and training or retraining needs of the overall labor force were similar to the needs of disabled people wanting to work. Some participants could envision when **the term “disabled” would become superfluous with regard to employment.** In effect, in this global economy, with radical shifts of supply, demand and expanding and contracting labor pools, the majority of workers may have the same needs for training, retraining and redeployment, and undergo the same specter of moving from a variety of jobs within a large company to a small company to self-employment. Even in countries where worker loyalty and lifetime employment at one company were proffered as basic values, radical changes are on the horizon.

### Conference Findings & Recommendations

During the course of the two-day meeting, conference participants discussed and deliberated about a wide array of employment-related topics as dictated by the conference themes noted above and in the attached conference agenda. These discussions produced important observations and findings which are detailed below in sections entitled “Findings” and “Possible Future Actions.” Additionally, the participants generated and began development of several important

policy recommendations, research hypotheses and future research objectives. These recommendations are listed below in the section entitled "Specific Recommendations".

### *Findings*

The following are notes reminding all participants what was agreed and are retained in that format:

- Need to insure that the actions are not just directed to developed countries and minimize the needs of developing and emerging countries
- Terms (disability, employment, unemployment, benefits, work and outcomes) are neither well defined nor agreed to from program to program and/or country to country
- Must insure that we have evidence and data to support our content that work and employment are viable options for all persons, especially since local lore seems to suggest the opposite
- Terms such as “disability, work and employment “are heterogeneous - there is not one universal term that fits all—not only is each term culture-bound, but each concept needs testing against 30 year, 20 year and 10 year updates
- Reflect on changes in the past and complete and objective assessment of change and progress - be honest with the assessment: in other words, until we clearly state the problems, the strategies and the possible solutions in honest, neutral terms, we have not explored the research possibilities.
- Employment policy must address all aspects of the labor market - not just disability issues - so our target is integral to work and employment. In other words, as each culture and country explores ways to involve its entire adult population in labor for economic, social and cultural ends, the particular needs and demands of the disabled population will become analogous to that of the entire population engaged in employment and career search.
- Countries today are divided between those defined by "quota systems" and "equity/free-market systems" and changes of these variances are long-term and complex. Yet, we recognize that in the future some countries will feature a mix of these fixed demand systems (quota) and more elastic demand systems (equity based) and we must, as researchers, prepare to evaluate all of the possible combinations.
- Insure we do not use "one country or one model to fit all" (such as the US or selected European countries). Basically, to ensure a balance of international research projects, the so-called “point of view” of equity in systems should emanate from different value systems. By this we mean, research projects should be designed from varying centers of expertise and experience: those centered on countries where the safety net remains in place regardless of policy change; those centered on countries where survival depends upon employment; and countries where a mixture of realities are present.

- There are unintended consequences of many interventions and initiatives, but, seemingly, especially of those benefits and paid supports for individuals that appear to be positive initially, but subsequently may create disincentives.
- Benefits often were not designed to enable a person to enter work or return to work but to create a sense of comfort and security. This reality reminds us that in previous eras particular benefits were established in response to an identified need, extreme situation or emergency, but today, may eventually serve as an obstacle to self-sufficiency, independent living or employment income.
- Must consider the distinction between “no work experience” and “extensive work experience” because the needs and strategies are unique and more specific. We must therefore, identify more ways disabled students and young people can obtain work experience that is respected in the employment sector, because right now they are not doing so.
- Accept the fact that work (as we view it) is not satisfying or rewarding for everyone. In other words, some jobs will be desired by no one and tolerated only as long as necessary whether held by disabled or non-disabled folks. These jobs should be viewed as transitional by all. On the other hand, some jobs that the majority would consider desirable, e.g., an elected paid representative of a party or special interest group, may also be considered not worth the considerable dedication of time by others. The point is not what job is worthwhile but that very few public discussions of value placed on various jobs takes place, and therefore everyone’s perception on this topic is an individual one.
- Employers are most interested in productivity factors and prevention of disability among their workforce- their agenda is the profitability of the company and its responsiveness to its market place, especially as employers become global in their markets. This statement may seem obvious in 2002, but in reality little research has been done about the productivity of disabled workers, and we know very little regarding their productivity compared to non-disabled workers.

### *Additional Findings*

Persons with disabilities must have the requisite skills, abilities and attitudes to be successful in the work environment - the emphasis needs to be on value to the work and employment environment.

Research needs to be practical and useable - it needs to focus on a targeted outcome and integrated approaches with an evaluation of positive skills and abilities (not limitations).

Research needs to assess and disseminate effective practices, which is especially true for developing countries where there is limited documentation and communication.

There are no quick fixes - the changes must be viewed on a long-term view (and we need to assess our progress in the past to the present - say in the past 30 years).

Most innovations emerge from practitioners - not researchers - therefore, we need to determine mechanisms to gather and communicate these innovations.

There needs to be a focus on power and influence to insure that we convert knowledge into power at the individual and organizational levels

We are at a point where change cannot be solely in small steps but must consider the "principle of leap-frogging" to make substantive changes

Learning and change needs to draw from the literature in adult learning - what will make a difference for each of us and how do we best learn

Volunteer organizations have energy and enthusiasm but need to focus on topics and initiatives

Long term financial support is essential to insure change and sustained work

When examining approaches to make a difference, address actions and changes, which segment the issues and the solutions. One size does not fit all. This can be defined through an articulation of the target audiences as follows:

#### Employers

- Multi-national
- Large national
- Medium national
- Small national
- Self-employment/"mom and pop" businesses
- Informal employment
- Community/family work and productivity

#### Consumers with

- Disabilities and no work experience
- Disabilities and limited work experience
- Disabilities and extensive work experience

#### Policy makers government employees in

- Developing/emerging countries
- Developed countries
- International bodies (i.e., the UN and the ILO)

#### Service providers in

- Government
- Non-government

#### Educators

- Traditional in universities
- Corporate and human resource professionals

Researchers

Human services

Business

Product and service marketing research

*Possible Future Actions*

Insure that all members of the conference are included in the distribution of Disability World.

Solicit work and employment information from all participants to be included in Disability World publications.

Create a common lexicon of terms that can apply to various programs and countries.

Delete terms and principles that seem to segregate individuals and programs.

Learn from employers and not make the sole focus our education of employers - shift our focus from advocate to learner

Use research approaches and strategies from "successful" fields such as products and services to address the positive impacts of work and employment for all individuals

Modify our focus and break the tradition and stereotypes such as "it is good business to hire the disabled," and "disabled people make good employees."

Research must address individuals with learning disabilities and non-visible disabilities - these are increasing in numbers, are often neglected and/or misunderstood, and cause the most problems with attitudes and perceptions with our communities

Create an employment rate for persons with disabilities that can be used across and within countries (similar to the employment rates for the general population); this needs to be considered on a longitudinal basis so we can assess change (note: other groups such as women and various cultural groups have a long history of this practice)

Consider collecting data on cross-national research and "mine data" from different resources and disciplines

Influence student research (both in business and social sciences) in our various universities to address specific topics of international interest - this provides an opportunity for stimulating future professionals and provides an economical approach to getting quality research

Strengthen our networks of communication - not just our agreements to communicate  
Substantiate that accommodations work within employment settings

Consider getting questions on census forms related to disability and try to influence numerous countries to use common questions to gather common data sets.

Ensure that people with disabilities are integrated in international conventions and ethical standards that directly or indirectly concern employment.

Consider the role of the Third Sector in employment generation

What are factors which promote successful self employment endeavors by people with disabilities?

### *Specific Recommendations*

1 -- Increase communication, networking and shared exchanges among selected groups with common expectations related to work and employment.

Description: There is always the "talk" of communicating, sharing of information and working for common goals. However, the operational aspects of these discussions are seldom realized. Therefore, it is proposed to target four or five Groups such as the European Commission, GLADNET, IPWH, Rehabilitation International's Commission on Work and Employment, and the European Platform of Vocational Rehabilitation to work together on increasing employment for persons with disabilities. There is also the necessity to work with other conferences, on a national and international arena, and insure work and employment are considered integral components in the preparation, presentation and outcomes.

2 -- Media: Highlight work and employment successes of people with disabilities -- tap into marketing expertise.

Description: There is limited mainstream information that addresses work and employment successes of persons with disabilities. In fact, the marketing of work and employment successes and benefits is virtually non-existent. There is a need to strengthen the focus and targeted media impact on the positives, benefits, and "untapped" employee resources.

3 -- Document and disseminate unemployment rates of persons with disabilities in selected countries

Description: There is no comparable data on unemployment among persons with disabilities from country to country, similar to general employment/unemployment rates which are used by many countries. If there were an index that could be used across countries, the information would raise the community awareness.

4 -- Insure work and employment are integral elements in the proposed UN Convention on Disability

Description: There is the development of the proposed UN Convention. In all aspects of the Convention's development and implementation, there must be the inclusion of work and employment. This must include work as a basic individual right and serve as an opportunity to secure policy support and long-term funding support to increase access and accommodations.

## 5 -- Study the effects of benefits systems and the return to work initiatives

Description: There are numerous benefit systems within countries and across countries. These complicate the resources for individuals, confuse the public and result in both duplications and gaps in benefit systems. Understanding the various benefit systems is a first step in streamlining the systems for employers and persons with disabilities.

## 6 -- Secure funding for country, cross-country and longitudinal studies in work and employment.

Description: Many efforts are undertaken by professional and consumer voluntary organizations. Where there is extensive expertise, there are limited dedicated personnel to initiate and sustain research and implementation studies. This is further complicated in countries with limited resources where there are many priorities, needs, and very limited dollars. There needs to be a concentrated focus on selected topics which are fully supported, have an extended period of work, and cross both developed and emerging countries. Involve the UN and its branches. Mobilize organizations such as the International Labour Organization, The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, US Aid for International Development and the Inter-American Bank.

## 7 -- Determine the needs of persons with disabilities, as they perceive the barriers and necessary strategies for employment.

Description: There is a need to solicit comments from persons with disabilities in the countries represented in Rehabilitation International. This conference primarily solicited comments from professionals and leaders. There is a need to gather information from persons with disabilities in the various regions of the world and use this information to drive the immediate and long-term strategies for employment. Proposed Processes may include conducting a survey of persons with disabilities in each country represented by Rehabilitation International through the national secretaries. An existing survey instrument could be modified so there would be some benchmarked data. It is essential that it is nationally and culturally sensitive.

## 8 -- Prepare personnel to work in one-stop centers and comprehensive work and employment programs, which serve diverse persons.

Description: There are changes in service providers and delivery systems, which are changing the expectations and responsibilities of personnel. There needs to be a systematic approach to assess these generic knowledge and skills. From this assessment, we should develop a consortium of universities and training providers to train new personnel entering the profession and retrain existing personnel who are currently employed as administrators and service providers.

## 9 -- Develop leadership skills for advocates and persons with disabilities within countries.

Description: There is a need to insure that the next generation of leaders within the consumer movement is prepared and able to advance the work and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Selected education efforts exist but virtually none transcend national boundaries. The development of cross-national approaches to identification, education and

training is essential to sustain and advance opportunities.

### Conclusion

The 2001 INTERNATIONAL EMPLOYMENT POLICY THINK TANK brought together many of the leading experts in the world to discuss a wide array of topics related to the goal of better understanding and eventually manipulating the multitude of dynamics which effect employment of people with disabilities. In the course of preparing for the conference, participants reviewed extant studies on employment policies affecting the rates of employment of people with disabilities around the world. As a result of this preparation, and because of the expertise of the participants, the quality of dialog at the conference was exceptional, and the resulting findings and recommendations are timely, pertinent, and highly useful. Perhaps most importantly, the conference served as a vehicle to begin the challenging process of developing a practical research model which can be used effectively to focus future policy solutions on practical, attainable outcomes.

Detailed transcripts of discussions by conferees are available for reference. Conference organizers and participants are reviewing and further editing them for inclusion in future reports. Additional findings may also be reported as they are distilled from the extended conference notes and transcripts.

(Note: This report was revised January and June 2002, following review by all conference participants. The opinions expressed herein are those of the editors and conference participants; no endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education or the National Institute for Rehabilitation and Research should be inferred.)

2001 International Employment Policy Think Tank  
Final Report

Summary of Discussions of Effective Practices and Recommended Resources

*During the two-day meeting that ranged over numerous discrete topics of concern, many of the international participants cited and recommended resources that are disseminating effective practices concerning employment of people with disabilities. After the meeting, participants were requested to contribute additional recommendations. Following is an annotated listing of all internationally recommended resources for further research and information.*

Web Sites

In no particular order, following are the most frequently mentioned web sites that feature best or effective practices and regularly updated information on disability and employment research, trends and information. They were all checked for content and currency in June 2002, and all can be found using the “www.” address prefix unless otherwise noted.

**Workability-international.org**

Formerly called IPWH, this is an international umbrella group of associations working towards “paid employment for the 500,000,000 disabled people all over the world.” Its members mostly represent people in supported work. Workability International holds conferences, publishes newsletters and papers and statements of its members.

The website has a complete listing of the officers, members and online versions of several past issues of the newsletter. Articles frequently describe effective practices and policies.

**Employers-forum.co.uk**

The Employers’ Forum on Disability is an organization, funded and managed by employers, with major focus on disability in the workplace. With over 370 members, it represents organizations employing around 22% of the UK workforce. Works closely with government and other stakeholders, disseminating best practices “to make it easier to employ disabled people and serve disabled customers.”

Offers publications and videos that can be ordered from the web, including Recruitment that Works, Welcoming Disabled Customers, Disability Communication Guide (preferred modes of assistance), Unlocking the Evidence – the new disability business case, Accessible Website Design and Open for Business, highlighting how sensible management decisions can make a difference to Britain’s 8.7 million disabled people.

**Disabilityworld.org**

International electronic magazine of news and views covering disability employment policies and practices around the world as one of its main focuses. Published as a collaboration of four U.S. based organizations: World Institute on Disability, Rehabilitation International, the Independent Living Research Utilization branch of The Institute for Rehabilitation Research and the InterAmerican Institute on Disability, with the assistance of a five year grant from the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research.

Since its inception in March 2000, has published 13 issues in English and Spanish, with in-depth coverage of employment policies, studies and programs in the UK, South Africa, Russia, Norway, Mozambique, Japan, Brazil, and the USA.

**Gladnet.org**

International network of research centers, organizations, enterprises and universities with “the common goal of advancing competitive employment and training opportunities for people with disabilities.” Founded in 1994 with the assistance of the International Labor Organization. Headquartered in Canada, the network holds meetings and seminars around the world, at least annually, to give its members the opportunity to report on new research and projects in the employment arena.

An active listserv announces news, conferences, projects and resources in either English or French. The website has an inventory of employment related research and projects of its members. (GLADNET stands for Global Applied Disability Research and Information Network on Employment and Training)

**Epvr.org**

The European Platform for Vocational Rehabilitation is a member organization of the European Disability Forum, an organ of the European Union. The EPVR is focused on “influencing policy development and providing information and assistance to service providers on European and international affairs.”

The website offers channels on research and development, on lobbying and on the European Rehabilitation Academy.

**ILO.org/public/English/employment/skills/disability**

The International Labor Office, based in Geneva, has a disability focus within its Targeted Groups Unit. The ILO “advocates for training and employment of people with disabilities through awareness-raising, information-dissemination and dialogue with governments, employers, workers’ organizations, and organizations of/for people with disabilities.” Materials published are available in English, French and Spanish.

Its most recent project is the newly adopted Code of Practice on Managing Disability in the Workplace. Other current research and practice projects include Job Retention and Return to Work, Mental Health in the Workplace, and Documenting the Impact of New Technology on Employment of People with Disabilities.

The website lists (and offers full texts of some) recent publications, such as 1998 national study reports on job retention and return to work strategies in Sweden, USA, UK, France, Germany, Canada, the Netherlands and New Zealand; Developing an Effective Placement Service for People with Disabilities, and Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment – reports from a 1998 ILO study of implementation of its Convention #159; and an international study and conference on Employment Quota Levies & National Rehabilitation Funds for People with Disabilities: Pointers for Policy and Practice.

### **Nidmar.ca**

The National Training and Research Institute to assist Canadian workplaces in implementing disability management programs and utilizing education, training, research and policy development. NIDMAR sponsors symposia, most recently the International Forum on Disability Management, which brought 400 participants from 12 countries to Vancouver in May 2002. Other regular activities are an annual Awards of Excellence for disability management, a certificate program in disability management and a quarterly newsletter. NIDMAR has both a national board and an international council and is active in international research and information exchange.

The website offers its newsletter in Adobe Acrobat format and online ordering of publications. Recent reports include Proceedings of the last few symposia, Profiles 2000 of excellence in disability management, Best Practices Case Study of implementing disability management in industry, and Strategies for Success, a compilation of Canadian and international perspectives on disability management, detailing successful programs.

Nidmar is also the authorized Canadian development agency of REHADAT, a German developed database system to enable sharing between countries of information and research related to successful vocational rehabilitation and disability management programs. Rehadat-Canada consists of six public access databases, comprising approximately 9000 reports on: 1) disability management practices, 2) policies and language, 3) case studies, 4) research, 5) assistive devices and 6) literature. Two additional databases by subscription are planned on legislation and industry profiles.

### **Als.uiuc.edu/dri**

The Disability Research Institute of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This Institute is “researching the effect of rehabilitation and other support services on the proportion of people with disabilities on SSI or SSDI who continue working or re-enter the workforce.” The website offers a complete description of the numerous research projects in progress, as well as highlights of its June 2002 symposium on disability benefits and return to work. The Institute’s newsletter can also be read online.

### **Ilr.cornell.edu/ped/dep/rrtc.html**

The Disability Employment Policy Rehabilitation Research and Training Center based at Cornell University, New York. The Center is focused on “research, training and dissemination about how the economy, public policies and other socio-political factors affect the employment and economic self-sufficiency of people with disabilities.”

The Center sponsors institutes, most recently the 2001 Institute on “Persistence of Low Employment Rates for People with Disabilities: Causes and Policy Implications.” Research in progress includes a longitudinal analysis of the effects of labor market change on the employment and earnings of disabled persons; longitudinal analysis of return-to-work after onset of disability; longitudinal analysis of the impact of civil rights protections on the employment and earnings of disabled persons; and identification and analysis of policies that foster or impede the participation of transitioning students in rehabilitation or employment service programs.

The website offers an array of papers (in various formats) emanating from the institutes and related research. There is also an international focus on research conducted in the United Kingdom and Ireland on attitudes of employers towards hiring employees with disabilities.

### **Worksupport.com**

Research-based initiative of the Virginia Commonwealth University, USA, with the purpose of “identifying factors that enhance or inhibit businesses from tapping into the pool of potential employees with disabilities.” Worksupport offers information, resources and research about work and disability issues. This group produces an excellent informative newsletter that often covers international resources.

### **[Eurofound.ie/working/disab\\_cstudies.htm](http://Eurofound.ie/working/disab_cstudies.htm)**

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions has issued six case studies concerning employment of disabled persons, conducted by national research teams. Five of the case studies can be downloaded from the website. Examples are:

- 1) France – the French research team focused on three small enterprises in the Paris Basin area that have tried to integrate disabled employees who, theoretically, had full access to a range of support services;
- 2) Germany – the German case studies are based on interviews with personnel from firms and with experts from welfare and employment offices, as part of an evaluation of a special labor market program in North Rhine-Westphalia. Three case studies are advanced as examples of good practice in integrating workers with various disabilities into different small businesses;
- 3) Spain – study provides a general picture of the social integration and employment of people with disabilities nationally, and additionally, investigates the way in which three disabled people have been integrated into the ordinary labor market.

### **Disabilitystudies.ca**

Website of the Canadian Center for Disability Studies, based at the University of Manitoba at Winnipeg. This center is active internationally and hosted the 2000 annual conference of the U.S.-based Society for Disability Studies.

The website is particularly accessible and offers full text of many publications, including an informative newsletter. Concerning employment, the CCDS published in January 2002 a comprehensive handbook on “Best Practices in the Home-Based Employment of People with Disabilities,” based on a research study conducted in 2000-2001. Research in progress include

“Women with Disabilities Accessing Trade,” and “Post-Secondary Students with Disabilities in Transitions from Education to Work.”

**Disabilitystudies.com/work.htm**

This website is somewhat out of date but offers a wide-ranging annotated international bibliography of disability employment studies and books, compiled in 2000 by Vivien Runnels, M.Sc. in Disability Management in Work and Rehabilitation, University of London.

**Abusiness4you.com**

Website of the newly formed Disabled Netpreneurs of America

**Entrepreneurdisability.org**

Website offering newsletter, links and articles by disabled entrepreneurs

**Handicapincifre.it/e\_index.asp**

Comprehensive website of the Italian National Institute on Statistics (ISTAT), featuring data and articles about disability issues in Italy, including work and employment, social life, transport and educational integration.

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