

For Equal Employment Opportunities

National Strategy for Labour Market Integration
and Maintenance of Handicapped Persons

Consultation workbook

Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale

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Minister's Message

Dear Madam or Sir,

Under the Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration, the government made a commitment to developing and implementing a national strategy for labour market integration and maintenance of handicapped persons. I was entrusted with the responsibility for this work, and was honoured to accept it.

Labour market integration and maintenance of handicapped persons requires the commitment of all labour market players. Employers, unions, workers, service providers, community organizations and associations all have a role to play in developing a more inclusive labour market. I would hope that this strategy leads all of these interests to mobilize in favour of handicapped persons and that it aptly reflects the openness of Québec society.

This is why we are asking you to participate in consultations held in Mauricie, Bas-Saint-Laurent, Saguenay? Lac-Saint-Jean, Outaouais, Québec City and Montréal. I have mandated my parliamentary assistant, the MNA for Maskinongé, Francine Gaudet, to head these consultations. She will be seconded by Pierre Marsan, MNA for Robert-Baldwin, and assisted by the MNAs of the regions involved in the consultation tour.

The employer, union and association interests invited to these meetings are encouraged to share their views on the themes discussed in the consultation workbook, to suggest better action measures and to indicate how they can contribute in their respective sectors to increasing handicapped persons' labour market participation.

The opinions and comments gathered in the consultation process will be forwarded to me for use in the work to be done with the government departments and agencies concerned. Paralleling this initiative, an on-line consultation will be organized on the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale website to allow as many individuals and organizations as possible to participate. The results will lead to the preparation of the strategy per se, whose completion is scheduled for spring 2007.

I heartily encourage you to respond to this invitation. Your participation in these consultations is important. It is essential that we offer a social environment allowing handicapped persons to develop their full potential and enjoy sustainable labour market integration.

Sincerely,

Michelle Courchesne
Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	8
Draft Strategy	10
1. Ensure equal opportunity	13
2. Define objectives	18
3. Recognize the potential of handicapped persons and support its development	22
4. Override obstacles to labour market integration	24
5. Promote longer active lives and career mobility of handicapped persons	28
6. Make the public and labour market players aware of the realities experienced by handicapped persons	31
Conclusion	35

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to end discrimination against handicapped persons and facilitate their full integration into society, in 1978, the Québec government adopted an initial piece of legislation designed to ensure that their rights would be respected. This statute constituted an important step in recognizing the difficulties these citizens experience. It also marked the beginning of a series of government measures that significantly enhanced their participation in Québec society.

Despite the considerable headway made in terms of the many programs, measures and services offered by the government¹ and community organizations, it is an unfortunate fact that handicapped persons continue to face major obstacles, especially where labour market participation is concerned—they represent one of the most disadvantaged worker groups in terms of training and employment. Consequently, they are among those most affected by poverty and the risk of social exclusion.

¹ A short presentation of the government's job offers for handicapped persons can be consulted on the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale website: www.mess.gouv.qc.ca.

Corrective action is required. In December 2004, the government updated the Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration to give new impetus to its measures designed to integrate handicapped persons into Québec society. New provisions were introduced to increase their employment levels. One of these provisions makes the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity responsible for developing and implementing a strategy for labour market

integration and maintenance for handicapped people. This strategy must contain specific goals defined in conjunction with employer and union groups.

This consultation will help fuel efforts to develop this strategy. The government's objectives for this exercise are the following:

- begin mobilizing all concerned: legislators, program managers, public and parapublic service managers, associations for handicapped persons, employers and unions;
- reach a consensus on guidelines for proposed action;
- get opinions on the best means for increasing labour market integration and maintenance of handicapped persons;
- agree on the main parameters guiding the selection of target objectives.

Meetings with those concerned will be held throughout November and December in various regions. The individuals and organizations convened will be invited to share their positions on the various questions raised in the document, give their views on the target objectives and indicate the contribution they can make.

Paralleling this initiative, any other individual or organization interested in taking a stand on the issues raised in this workbook may do so on the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale website (www.mess.gouv.qc.ca).

DRAFT STRATEGY

The national strategy for labour market integration and maintenance of handicapped persons is designed for people with a deficiency causing a significant and persistent disability, who are liable to encounter barriers in performing everyday activities, in keeping with section 1g of the Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration. It could also benefit people who do not correspond exactly to this definition but who experience functional limitations in performing their job duties.

The latest statistics on disabled, or handicapped, people and the labour market confirm that there continues to be a significant discrepancy between their situation and that of the non-disabled population. They are under-represented in the active population and working population and have less schooling. Regardless of the data source, indicators are always less favourable for disabled people: their activity and employment rates are significantly lower than those of non-disabled people and their unemployment rate is consistently higher.

The Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale has produced a statistical portrait comparing the labour market situations of disabled and non-disabled people using Statistics Canada's 2003 Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID). This portrait clearly shows that handicapped persons are at a disadvantage compared to the rest of the population and points out differences between men and women and the various age groups.² The Institut de la statistique du Québec formulates the same findings in its latest study based on data from the 2001 *Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS)*.³

²The document entitled *Disabled people and the labour market* can be consulted on the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale website: www.mess.gouv.qc.ca.

³INSTITUT DE LA STATISTIQUE DU QUÉBEC (2006), *L'incapacité et les limitations d'activités au Québec. Un portrait statistique à partir des données de l'Enquête sur la participation et les limitations d'activités 2001 (EPLA)*, Québec, L'Institut, 156 pages. This document can be consulted at www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/publications/santé/limitations2001_pdf.htm.

Québec needs all of its citizens to ensure its future prosperity. Handicapped persons' labour market contribution is as important as that of other groups. However, current labour market requirements, characterized by increased demand for qualified, flexible workers with an ability to adapt, reduce the employment prospects of people who are doubly disadvantaged due to a disability and limited training and skills. It is, therefore, urgent to guarantee them equal opportunities to become financially self-sufficient and contribute to the future of Québec society. We need to offer a social environment allowing them to develop their full potential, enter the labour market and remain there. To meet this challenge, the labour market integration of handicapped persons must become an interest that all members of society share.

To achieve this goal, there appear to be six priorities:

- 1) Ensure equal opportunity;
- 2) Define objectives;
- 3) Recognize the potential of handicapped persons and support its development;
- 4) Override obstacles to labour market integration;
- 5) Promote longer active lives and career mobility of handicapped persons;
- 6) Make the public and labour market players aware of the realities experienced by handicapped persons.

Measures to be taken in this regard require contributions by many individuals and groups, including employers, unions, community organizations and associations for handicapped persons. The texts and questions that follow are designed to guide deliberations.

1. ENSURE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The right to equality is one of the fundamental values of Québec society. It is written into the Charter of human rights and freedoms, which forbids discrimination for any reason whatsoever, including a handicap. Section 10 of the Charter states that discrimination exists when distinction, exclusion or preference based on one of the reasons proscribed in this article, including a handicap or the use of any means to palliate a handicap, nullifies or impairs the right to full and equal recognition and exercise of a person's human rights and freedoms.

The Charter indicates that in terms of employment, the right to equality applies to a person's hiring, apprenticeship, duration of the probationary period, vocational training, promotion, transfer, displacement, laying-off, suspension, dismissal or conditions of employment. It also provides for the right to equality in an association of employers or employees, in the reception, classification or processing of a job application by a job placement office, and for granting equal salary or wages for equivalent work. Further, Québec legislation provides for minimal standards to ensure fair working conditions. The Act respecting labour standards stipulates that employers may not subject their employees to working conditions that are less advantageous than those provided for in the Act and its regulations.

Obligations related to non-discrimination apply to both private-and public-sector employers. However, in neither case is there currently an obligation to hire or comply with a specific quota regarding representation of handicapped persons on staff.

Recently, Québec legislation evolved in favour of handicapped persons. The Act respecting equal access to employment in public bodies⁴ now considers handicapped persons as a group that is victim to discrimination in employment along with women, aboriginal peoples, and persons who are members of visible or ethnic minorities. This statute requires the employers contemplated to hire persons in the target groups. The affirmative action or equal opportunity programs that employers must develop are based on analyzing staffing requirements and setting remedial objectives by job category. They make it possible to govern hiring, career mobility, reclassification or career change and job maintenance. They also reduce the effects of double discrimination affecting handicapped women, handicapped aboriginal people and handicapped members of visible or ethnic minorities.

- ⁴. This refers to the following approximately 600 bodies with 100 or more employees: municipalities, education and health and social service network organizations. Government corporations and Sûreté du Québec.

In Québec's public service, measures stipulate that 25% of people hired must be aboriginal, English-speaking or members of a cultural community. Since April 2005, handicapped persons also belong to the groups included in these staffing quotas.

The right to equality means that employers must offer a handicapped person reasonable accommodation measures, i.e. measures which, in the context of exercising his or her job duties, take a handicapped employee's special needs into account. Such accommodation is reasonable if it does not constitute an excessive constraint for the employer (determined on a case-by-case basis). Excessive constraints include the cost of the accommodation measure and real threat to the rights of other employees.

What is being done elsewhere

In Canada, two statutes govern companies whose manpower falls under federal government jurisdiction. The Canadian Human Rights Act stipulates that designated employers must implement measures to accommodate persons unless these measures constitute an excessive constraint. The Employment Equity Act requires employers under federal jurisdiction, including private-sector employers subject to federal legislation, to develop and implement employment equity programs to increase the representation of various groups, including handicapped persons, on staff. The Act also requires employers to detect and eliminate barriers to employment of members of designated groups and present an annual statistical report and status report. Finally, unlike the situation in Québec, employers under contract with the federal government are subject to the same contractual obligations concerning handicapped persons as the other designated groups.

Like Québec, most other Canadian provinces have legal provisions proscribing discrimination in hiring and in the workplace (Alberta, Ontario, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, etc.). These provisions ensure workplace accessibility and adaptation, promote action in favour of the designated groups or impose specific conditions for labour market integration of people receiving benefits under financial assistance programs. Several provinces also have legislative provisions governing employment of handicapped persons, targeting the services and programs offered to develop their employability, job integration and workplace adaptation.

Internationally speaking, there seem to be several legislative approaches. Many countries have adopted anti-discrimination legislation (United States, Australia, Norway, United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, Switzerland). Some have chosen general labour legislation to govern employer obligations vis-à-vis handicapped persons (Sweden, Netherlands, Belgium), and others have adopted specific statutes, such as Germany's Act respecting severely handicapped persons, which defines various employment aspects (obligation to give this group priority for on-the-job training activities, obligation to provide additional training to broaden their career prospects, granting five additional vacation days per year, incentive measures, specific firing rules).

Many countries have also chosen to set hiring quotas, which vary with business size and nature (public or private). For instance in Germany, the hiring quota is 5% for any company with at least sixteen employees, whereas Spain has determined, for companies with over fifty employees, 2% hiring quotas for the private sector and 3% for the public sector. In the Netherlands, the law authorizes imposing hiring quotas as a last resort when all other measures prove insufficient. In cases of violation, certain countries levy fines. In France, fines seem to have little effect. The substantial amounts collected lead one to believe that employers would rather pay the sanction than hire handicapped persons.

The compulsory quota is generally considered an important measure and is respected in 50-70% of cases, depending on the country. However, there is no consensus on its effectiveness. Some feel it generates jobs, offers specific data and creates opportunities for enhancing awareness in businesses and society as a whole. Others consider it to be contrary to the principle of non-discrimination, ineffective in terms of job creation, requiring considerable administrative monitoring, not guaranteeing harmonious integration and not very compatible with a market economy.

Questions submitted

What needs to be done for the right to equality guaranteed handicapped persons under Québec legislation to be concretely translated into real equality?

What contribution should employers, workplaces, unions and the State make in this respect?

How can the voluntary implementation of employment equity access programs be promoted in organizations that are not subject to the Employment Equity Act in public bodies?

Do you have any other comments or suggestions on this topic?

2. DEFINE OBJECTIVES

The Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity has been mandated to coordinate the development and monitoring of a strategy for labour market integration and maintenance of handicapped persons and to define its objectives in conjunction with employer and union groups. The government feels that a consensus-based approach would promote mobilization centred on concrete, realistic objectives. After the consultation, we must possess all of the elements required to determine one or more target objectives endorsed by all labour market players.

Ideally, activity, employment and unemployment rates for handicapped and non-handicapped persons should be equivalent. Since some severely handicapped persons cannot hold jobs or do not wish to, it seems more realistic to try to diminish this discrepancy. For example, according to the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, the employment rate for disabled people aged 15 to 64 was 34.8% in 2001 compared to 70.2% for non-disabled people. Reducing this difference by half would represent 17.7 percentage points.

The relative share of handicapped persons in the working population could also be used as an indicator. Based on the 2003 Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, disabled people represent 20.3% of the population. In comparison, the 552 500 workers aged 16 to 64 who reported having a disability represented only 15.5% of the entire working population. Reaching the same comparative share would mean closing the gap by 4.8 points, or 171 000 disabled

people. Reducing this discrepancy by half would bring this objective to an additional 85 500 people working.

Handicapped persons do not constitute a uniform group. In terms of labour market participation, there are differences between men and women, and depending on the severity of the functional limitations. It would be possible to define specific goals using these two variables. The Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics allows us to measure the employment rate of handicapped persons according to the severity of their limitations. In 2001, 52.1% of people with a slight disability were working. This rate was 40.2% for people with a moderate disability and only 20.8% for people with a severe or very severe disability.

The legislation governing the strategy's development sets no specific deadline for attaining the objectives. It essentially suggests reporting on the strategy's evolution in the National Assembly five years after the Act has been passed. Considering the nature of the measures to implement, it seems reasonable to set a ten-year term to measure the effects. However, it should be possible to monitor progress annually.

This was the time frame set for the national strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion. It is also the deadline that the community movement is proposing to the New Brunswick government, which has undertaken an approach comparable to Québec's with regard to handicapped persons.

What is being done elsewhere

All Canadian provinces have a range of measures designed to develop the employability and labour market integration of handicapped persons. British Columbia and New Brunswick have developed strategies specific to this group without setting hiring objectives or defining specific target goals.

It seems that the hiring objectives imposed by law in many countries are the only specific objectives used.

Questions submitted

What are the best indicators for monitoring the change in handicapped persons' labour market participation:

- Their comparative share in the working population?
- Activity, employment and unemployment rates?
- Absolute numbers?
- Others?

Should we target an improvement in these indicators for the handicapped population or reduce discrepancies between handicapped persons and the rest of the population?

Is reducing the differences noted in the situation of handicapped persons and the non-handicapped population by 50%, a realistic objective? Is it too ambitious? Not ambitious enough?

Should we monitor the progress of handicapped persons on the labour market distinguishing between men and women? According to the severity of the disability (slight, moderate, severe or very severe)? Should other variables be used to monitor changes in the situation (age, ethnic origin)?

Would one or more national target objectives cause groups to mobilize sufficiently? Why? Should regional objectives be defined?

Is a ten-year deadline for achieving objectives realistic? Too long? Too short?

Do you have other comments or suggestions on this topic?

3. RECOGNIZE THE POTENTIAL OF HANDICAPPED PERSONS AND SUPPORT ITS DEVELOPMENT

In Québec, as in most developed societies, training has become the key to labour market entry and playing one's role of citizen to the fullest. Sufficient mastery of basic skills is essential for holding a job, enjoying an upwardly mobile career and continuing with lifelong learning. According to the career prospects assessed by Emploi-Québec, occupations requiring a certain level of vocational or technical skills offer the best job opportunities in the coming years.

Handicapped persons definitely have less schooling than non-handicapped persons—proportionately fewer of them have completed a basic education. The disparity between younger and older handicapped persons is significant, and disabled women are at a greater disadvantage than disabled men and non-disabled women.

Considering that a low skills level considerably curbs social integration and labour market participation and tends to accentuate inequalities, Québec must recognize the potential of handicapped persons and support its development. To do so, it must offer handicapped men and women the necessary means for improving their qualifications and skills.

School is the main venue for knowledge acquisition. Although it is easier for young handicapped persons to access schools than it was for their older counterparts, due to the severity and nature of their functional limitations, some of them are unable to obtain a diploma leading to a job. The effort Québec society must make to increase handicapped persons' level of qualification and skills must take the needs of young handicapped persons into account—needs that differ according to the nature of the functional limitation—as

well as the different needs of handicapped adults, who have not had access to a basic education.

School is not the only place where handicapped persons can develop their potential. The family, community and workplace are all environments offering opportunities to do so.

To recognize and support the potential of handicapped persons, we must:

- increase the skills levels of handicapped adults, working or looking for a job, who do not have sufficient schooling;
- broaden handicapped persons' training prospects by diversifying training methods and venues (e.g. by creating paid practical sessions leading to qualifications for those who cannot benefit from traditional training measures);
- facilitate the transition between school and work for young handicapped persons, including those who cannot obtain a diploma of studies.

Questions submitted

Do you agree with the action guidelines and avenues for action proposed?

What measures should be implemented in regard to the avenues for action proposed?

What can be done to support development of handicapped persons' potential?

Do you have other comments or suggestions on this topic?

4. OVERRIDE OBSTACLES TO LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION

People are generally hired for their skills and qualifications. While this also applies to handicapped persons, their failure to get a job is often due to other factors. Discrimination, ongoing prejudice regarding their potential, environmental factors (inaccessible workplaces and work stations, lack of adapted transportation) and organizational factors (hiring and staff selection practices, compatibility between employer requirements and job duties, work organization and adaptation of duties, etc.) are all conditions creating obstacles for them. These barriers discourage many handicapped persons from trying to get a job.

For handicapped women and handicapped aboriginal peoples and members of visible or ethnic minorities, these difficulties are often exacerbated tenfold by the discrimination and obstacles they experience. More than simply an added disadvantage, their functional limitations significantly increase the problems these people already experience and constitute reasons for continuing to discriminate against them.

Whether they are physical, organizational or social, these obstacles are not insurmountable. The attitude and contribution of all labour market players can override them. The constantly growing employment rate of handicapped persons reflects, among other things, employers' greater openness to hiring them. However, many employers and workplaces still have the impression that adapting the work environment and organization to the capacities and needs of handicapped workers requires investments that are costly in terms of management, human resources and money.

Under the Charter of human rights and freedoms, employers are obliged to offer measures to accommodate handicapped persons on staff. Noting that this obligation adversely affected unemployed handicapped persons, the government decided to reimburse employers for the cost of the accommodation measures required under the Contrat d'intégration au travail (work integration contract) program. In addition to adapting workplaces, this program offers wage compensation to offset the lower productivity of certain persons. However, given the fact that the program's budget is limited, it cannot meet all of the needs expressed. It might, therefore, be appropriate to increasingly specify responsibility-sharing between the State and employers regarding the cost of the accommodating handicapped persons seeking employment.

While necessary, awareness alone is not sufficient. Businesses must review their management practices and workplace organization in order to pinpoint and modify those that continue to constitute obstacles or generate discrimination. The resulting structural changes will favour the integration of handicapped persons while enabling businesses to better face the evolving needs of an aging work force likely to suffer health problems or develop functional limitations while on the payroll.

We have also noted that for a handicapped person to create his or her own company is a very ambitious operation and that the support offered for this type of initiative does not take the person's functional limitations sufficiently into account.

Finally, we must not neglect the fact that the labour market cannot receive all persons with significant functional limitations. For some, jobs in adapted workplaces may be the best means to work and earn wages. These jobs are deemed essential by most Western countries. However, efforts must be made to promote the career mobility of the people holding them if their skills and capability increase with experience.

For handicapped persons to hold their fair share of jobs, employers, unions, community organizations, workers and governments have a role to play. We propose the following avenues of action to achieve this goal:

- encourage more employers to hire handicapped persons through fiscal measures, by funding accommodation measures, etc.;
- work to eliminate the effects of double discrimination;
- encourage businesses to review and adapt their staffing and selection processes and hiring requirements;
- facilitate job hunting and labour market integration through sponsoring and coaching, for example;
- offer fair support for handicapped entrepreneurs;
- support the creation of adapted jobs for severely handicapped persons, creating links between this market and employment in the regular market;
- increase accessibility of regular mass transit services;
- ensure a supply of adapted transport services.

Questions submitted

Do you agree with the action guidelines and avenues for action proposed?

What measures should be implemented in regard to the avenues for action proposed?

What means are available to you and what actions could you take in your activity sector to override obstacles to the labour market integration of handicapped persons?

Should accommodation measures be funded by businesses, the State or both? Under what terms and conditions?

Do you have other comments or suggestions on this topic?

5. PROMOTE LONGER ACTIVE LIVES AND CAREER MOBILITY OF HANDICAPPED PERSONS

Once the obstacles to employment have been eliminated, it might seem that the situation of handicapped persons would be comparable to that of the rest of the population. The data from various surveys shows that although the employment rate for 16 to 34 year olds is similar for both groups, it drops drastically after age 35 for handicapped persons, while rising for non-handicapped persons. The employment rate for handicapped persons aged 55 to 64 is barely half that of the non-handicapped population.

More indepth studies would allow us to better understand the causes for the downturn observed as of age 35. Currently, data nevertheless suggests that level of schooling and onset/aggravation of the disability with age affect withdrawals from the labour market. The rate of severe or very severe disability for people aged 55 to 64 is six times higher than for 15 to 34 year olds. The rate of slight disability is three and a half times higher.

It also appears that persons with functional limitations benefit less often from job-related training activities—less than two-thirds of the formal job training of non-disabled people and less than half of the employer-sponsored training. Yet, on-the-job training is often essential for moving ahead or simply adapting to the company's technological or organizational changes.

For handicapped persons to be able to maintain their jobs and enjoy career mobility, special conditions must be implemented. Where on-the-job training is concerned, they must benefit from at least the same opportunities as other workers. As in other countries (Germany, Ireland, Portugal, United Kingdom), the State or employers could ensure that

they have preferential access to ongoing training. The onset or aggravation of functional limitations and the introduction of changes, both technological and other, in the way duties are performed requires regular adaptation of workplace organization, work stations and employer expectations. Neglecting these aspects can only have negative effects on handicapped persons' job maintenance. Further, any action to promote longer active lives for them would also benefit other workers who, with age, will likely also experience limitations in their activities.

Consequently, workers with functional limitations need more support. The following avenues for action are envisaged to achieve this goal:

- make workplaces aware of their responsibilities in maintaining handicapped persons in their jobs along with people who develop disabilities while working;
- adjust work stations and conditions linked to job performance based on changes in workers' functional limitations;
- ensure that handicapped persons can maintain their skills while working and develop them so that they can continue to evolve on the job in a context of frequent technological and organizational change;
- ensure access to psychosocial and rehabilitation services in order to support handicapped persons who are working;
- adopt an inclusive approach taking the realities of handicapped persons into account in defining and applying career mobility conditions, notably through collective agreements.

Questions submitted

Do you agree with the action guidelines and avenues for action proposed?

What measures should be implemented in regard to the avenues for action proposed?

What actions could you take to contribute to maintaining handicapped persons in their jobs and support their career mobility?

Should incentives be implemented for employers and the State to make sure that ongoing training for handicapped persons is a priority? If so, how?

Do you have other comments or suggestions on this topic?

6. MAKE THE PUBLIC AND LABOUR MARKET PLAYERS AWARE OF THE REALITIES EXPERIENCED BY HANDICAPPED PERSONS

This consultation is also an exercise in enhancing awareness with regard to handicapped persons and a first step towards mobilizing employer and union groups. However, it needs to go further. We must stress awareness and information to change attitudes and fight prejudices and misconceptions about the realities of handicapped persons, which are often the source of their labour market integration problems.

To get employers and workplaces to act on the obstacles handicapped persons encounter in accessing a job and performing the related job duties, they must be made more aware of the advantages of hiring these people and the loss of expertise their early withdrawal from the labour market entails. Yet, awareness-enhancing activities targeting labour market players are relatively rare. Each year, the government holds Québec's handicapped persons' week, which is not particularly directed at labour market players although it could constitute a very interesting awareness-enhancing vehicle for employers and their staff.

The Comité d'adaptation de la main-d'œuvre (manpower adaptation committee - CAMO) for handicapped persons is currently preparing a promotional campaign targeting employers across Québec. In some regions, promotional activities have already been carried out, including an advertising campaign targeting employers and funded sectorial partners (Abitibi) and a tribute to exemplary businesses (Beauce).

Publicizing exemplary behaviour can be an effective tool for enhancing peer awareness. Companies that have adopted management practices favouring handicapped persons could, on their own initiative, become promotional agents for inclusion. They are best placed to share their experience and the advantages they derive.

Similarly, through their extensive knowledge of working conditions and labour requirements in their respective sectors, sectorial committees could play a significant role in business awareness and mobilization.

Finally, employer and union awareness and mobilization are essential but we must not neglect measures involving staffing officers and human resources managers, who directly influence employers and workplaces. For example, human resources management training programs should include matters related to handicapped persons.

What is being done elsewhere

Campaigns designed to enhance employer awareness of handicapped persons' situation have been carried out in many countries. Most often spearheaded by government, they are sometimes the result of joint efforts between the State, employers and unions. For instance, in order to encourage the adoption of practices based on equal opportunity in businesses, the National Rehabilitation Board of Ireland, together with union and employer organizations, launched the measure Positive to Disability. Employers endorsing positive practices vis-à-vis handicapped persons are authorized to use a logo with the campaign's colours for promotional purposes. Elsewhere, unions have chosen to inform and sensitize their representatives and members (France), published a charter of handicapped persons' rights

(Ireland) or set up committees for handicapped members and appointed people to be responsible for supporting negotiations and consultations on the local level (United Kingdom).

In 1998, the European Union's social partners adopted the Joint Declaration on the Employment of People with Disabilities, which highlights their commitment to contributing to promoting the labour market integration of handicapped persons in Europe. A study conducted by the European Industrial Relations Observatory points out that many countries have used this declaration as a framework for their actions and that others, without explicitly invoking it, have acted in accordance with its principles. Finally, other States have adopted no specific measures with regard to handicapped persons.

The charter of commitment is another example of mobilizing efforts in favour of handicapped persons. In the employment sector, the charter embodies the commitment of a single business and its subsidiaries, a given area's employers or various interested partners. The charters consulted often contain three main thrusts: awareness, information and mobilization; hiring and job integration of handicapped persons; and job maintenance and career mobility.

Questions submitted

Do you agree with the action guidelines and avenues for action proposed?

Can employer associations and sectorial manpower committees play a leadership role in promoting hiring of handicapped persons? If so, how?

What are the best means for encouraging employers, unions and associations to work together to increase the labour market participation of handicapped persons?

Would you be prepared to sign a commitment in favour of handicapped persons?

Do you have other comments or suggestions on this topic?

CONCLUSION

Labour market integration and maintenance of handicapped persons require commitment on the part of all labour market players. This is why the government is seeking your contribution to achieve the objectives of the strategy being developed.

The results of this consultation will support the work of the government departments and agencies concerned and help them determine sectorial and joint measures to favour. At this stage, the government will also be concerned as an employer.

The strategy will be implemented as of fall 2007. The Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity will table an initial report on its implementation in the National Assembly in December 2007. In December 2009, a second report will discuss progress made and, if necessary, propose adjustments.

Your participation in this consultation is one more step towards a more inclusive labour market and your commitment towards handicapped persons will help fully achieve the target objective. Thank-you for your cooperation.