HOW TO COOPERATE WITH EMPLOYERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS IN IMPLEMENTATION OF EMPLOYMENT POLICY FOR OLDER WORKERS AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES?

BULGARIAN CASE

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The main approaches in the policy of employing persons with disabilities and elderly people involve **partnership, cooperation and active inclusion** of all participants in the process of problem identification, design of policies, strategies, plans and other strategic and operative documents, as well as in the policy implementation process and monitoring.
Policy principles regarding persons with disabilities:

**Recognition** – the policy is based on the understanding that elderly people and persons with disabilities are part of society and provide a valuable input to labour force. Therefore, decent opportunities for their participation in the labour market and in society should be provided.

**Participation** – the implementation of this principle entails identification of all partners such as the government, municipalities, employers, trade unions and NGOs and their inclusion at all levels in decision-making and monitoring.

**Active inclusion** – inclusion of all partners at all levels in the policy implementation and execution of specific national, regional and local programmes and measures.
At national level:

- National Council for Promotion of Employment

- **Composition** – government, social partners – trade unions and employer organizations

- **Activity** – discusses and gives opinions on design and implementation of the employment policy, adopts the National Employment Action Plan for the respective year
National Council for Integration of Persons with Disabilities

- **Composition** – government, trade unions and employer organizations, organizations of and for persons with disabilities, the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria

- **Activity** – discusses and gives opinions on all legal acts, strategic and operative documents regarding the rights of persons with disabilities and their integration. It has designed and adopted the National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2016 – 2020.
National Council on Social Inclusion

- **Composition** – government, trade unions and employer organizations, civil society organizations in various sectors, organizations that are members of European networks and deal with social inclusion issues, the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria

- **Activity** – discusses and gives opinions on all legal acts, strategic and operative documents on social inclusion, strategic priorities in the area of social inclusion, facilitates dialogue and coordination with all stakeholders, aimed at reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion. It has designed and adopted the National Strategy for Reducing Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion until 2020, the National Strategy for Long-term Care and National Social Reports for the respective years.
At regional level:

- **Regional councils** for regional cooperation – regional strategies for development, regional strategies for employment and development of social services
- **Employment committees** – regional employment and training programmes
At local level:

- **Councils** for Cooperation by Employment Offices

- **Consultative committees** by Social services for considering options for integration of persons with disabilities
Active participation in policy implementation (1):

Attracting employers as an important partner:

- Legal stipulation of quotas for employing persons with disabilities;
- Preferences in the public procurement process for specialized enterprises of persons with disabilities and for social enterprises;
- Tax reliefs for employers hiring persons with disabilities;
Financial incentives for hiring persons with disabilities and elderly workers – salaries, social security contributions and other measures under the National Employment Action Plans, including supported employment;

Adapting workplaces in ordinary and protected environment;

Qualification for persons with disabilities and elderly people;

Specialized cooperatives of and for persons with disabilities;

Collective agreements – a tool with potential for development;

Support from the European Social Fund with a focus on employing persons with disabilities, elderly workers and improving labour conditions.
Active participation in policy implementation (2):

- Involving regions and municipalities:
  - Regional employment programmes;
  - Social services in the community;
  - Social enterprises.
Active participation in policy implementation (3):

- Attracting persons with disabilities:
  - Tax reliefs for own business development;
  - Support for own business start-up;
  - Employment services;
  - Support from the European Social Fund with a focus on employing persons with disabilities and elderly workers.
A good example:

Cooperative and competitive
July 2013

Bulgarian cooperative Chernomorka, based in the city of Burgas, provides disabled people with job opportunities, producing clothes for babies and children.

Founded in 1950 by war invalids, Chernomorka - its name literally means 'the woman from the Black Sea' - employs just over 100 people, of which 80% are women and 57% have disabilities. The work assists the social integration of disabled people, reduces dependence on state handouts, improves their employability and therefore status within their communities as well as their self-esteem.

The cooperative has received around €190 000 of EU support over five years through European Structural Funds to train workers and adapt its working environment to the special needs of people with disabilities. As Maya Marinova, the President of Chernomorka, explained, "Of course, that has had an impact on the financial situation of the cooperative. Turnover has increased by 5-10% a year, and we've taken on lots of people, including disabled workers. Before, we had 5-10 employees on this line but now seven years later we have 30."

"Our aim is to improve the quality of our production" continued Maya Marinova, "and at the same time make working conditions better for disabled workers. And of course to improve productivity, that's the most important thing." But the socially responsible aim of providing therapy through work for disabled people has remained the same.

- Cooperative and competitive - watch the video
- Chernomorka Cooperative
- Supporting SME Policy Initiatives from Structural Funds
Thank you for your attention!

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