



*European Communities
Commission
Press Release*

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July 2, 1974

Dr. Hillery's Speech to the 5th International Seminar
in London on 2 July 1974 (for Rehabilitation of the Disabled)

In spite of the various crises that have been troubling the Community in the past few months, Member governments have shown a genuine desire to respect and implement the social action programme. On June 10, the Council took a first set of decisions which pave the way for achieving our objectives.

It is no coincidence that the problems of disabled people figured prominently in these decisions. An initial Community programme designed to improve the chances of handicapped people to take up normal employment was decided upon, as was an extended system of financial assistance for handicapped people from the European Social Fund.

It is important to see Community activity on behalf of the disabled people within the general context of efforts to improve the social well-being of the whole Community population. The Community has reached a stage of economic and social development where it can, and indeed must, afford to question more critically the pattern and costs of economic growth and the distribution of resources. Our society imposes ever higher standards of efficiency in order to keep pace with the intensity of competition.

The lives of disabled people thus become more difficult. These difficulties are compounded in times of economic uncertainty, such as we are now facing, when the more vulnerable categories of the working population together with the non-active population often have to bear the brunt of inflation.

One must also bear in mind that our community is today not only prosperous but also better educated and informed. With this come entirely legitimate demands for a more just society and for policies which can ensure not only the collective well-being but also the selffulfillement of each individual.

The general aim of Community initiatives on behalf of the handicapped population must be to enable these people to lead, as far as possible, a normal independent way of life, fully integrated into society. This general aim applies to all age groups, to all types of disablement and to all rehabilitation measures.

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Some of the specific types of action involved have been carried on for some years.

Since 1957, the ECSC Treaty has enabled us to promote biological research and assist rehabilitation centres, particularly as regards the functional rehabilitation of dramatic injuries and diseases most frequently encountered in the coal and steel industries. Information and study sessions were held on this theme in Luxemburg in 1973. In the years to come, new research work will be developed, particularly that related to the industrial rehabilitation of disabled persons.

Starting with work on amputees and their equipment, we have undertaken the standardisation of prostheses and their prefabricated parts, and hope soon to reach an agreement on artificial limbs.

The Commission also recognises the very great importance of appropriate housing in any general approach to rehabilitation and social reintegration. A working party has been studying the various problems and architectural obstacles involved with a view to establishing minimum standards. More will be said about our activity in this field at a later session at this conference.

The European Social Fund, which is an important community financial instrument designed to promote a better employment policy throughout the Community, has also been used extensively for the occupational rehabilitation of handicapped people. Financial aid from the Community amounting to over 30 million units of account was approved last year for training activities in this field. During 1973, the size and number of applications for financial support of this kind were much greater than expected. This indicated the need for the Community to concentrate its efforts on priority projects aimed at the quantitative and qualitative promotion of efforts being made at national level, on the basis of jointly formulated guidelines. With this in mind, the extension of the Social Fund system of intervention on behalf of the handicapped was included as a priority measure in the Commission's Social Action Programme and as I mentioned earlier, recently adopted by the last Council meeting in June.

Another important step, taken by the Council in June, was the adoption of the first Community programme on occupational rehabilitation specifically concerned with all handicapped persons who have the potential capacity for employment in normal conditions. This initiative comes as a result of much preparatory work, undertaken since 1970, to study how Community action could be developed in this field.

During the last few years, the Commission has encouraged a wide discussion of the problems involved. Preliminary conclusions showed that concerted initiatives at Community level could most usefully be started in the particular field of occupational rehabilitation for normal work. Here it has been shown that there is great scope for improving the framework of co-operation between the relevant authorities to encourage the spread of knowledge about the best training methods and their application, together with their evaluation in a Community perspective.

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The programme in question is designed to enable all the different groups in a community to become aware of their social responsibilities. By promoting a wider development of occupational rehabilitation facilities, it should moreover be possible to ease the burden on the infrastructure of protected workshops.

A second programme is required to guide Community activity into fields which concern the most seriously handicapped people. This should cover the whole diversified process of rehabilitation, from the stage of diagnosis. In this context, we shall try especially to provide a common approach to the problem of sheltered or adapted employment.

Together with these rehabilitation measures, others are proposed for the prevention of accidents and diseases. The Community is thus making a dual approach to these problems. In the coming months, we shall be concerned with drawing these problems and their solutions into a coherent pattern.