ILO Code Seeks to Improve Job Prospects of Persons with Disabilities

(GENEVA) - On the International Day of Disabled Persons, the International Labour Organization announces the launch of its Code of Practice on Managing Disability in the Workplace, adopted by the ILO Governing Body at its recent meeting (Nov 1-16) in Geneva.

The Code, providing guidance to enterprises on how to recruit people with disabilities and maintain employment for workers who become disabled, is the first of its kind and can be applied by all employers, in both industrialized and developing countries.

Many of the obstacles which people face in the search for jobs and at work arise as much, if not more, from social barriers, than from a genuine inability to perform work.

There are approximately 610 million persons with disabilities in the world today, of whom 386 million are of working age, and 80 per cent live in developing countries, predominantly in rural areas.

Unemployment among disabled persons is significantly higher than in the workforce as a whole - at least double this rate, but often higher, with some countries reporting a rate as high as 80% of the labour force of disabled persons.

The overall result is that many disabled persons live in poverty and social exclusion. Their potential contribution is lost - to their own livelihood, to their families, to employers and to society as a whole.

The Code is part of an increasing recognition that disabled people have a valuable contribution to make to the performance of their employers’ enterprises and to the national economy. The support of employers is central in making this possible and a positive strategy on managing disability in the workplace enables employers to benefit from the potential of disabled workers in a variety of ways.

The following are the main points underlying the code:

- Women and men with disabilities with the right skills, in the right job - with support if required - are capable and reliable employees, an asset in the workplace.
- Managing disability issues in the workplace is in the business interest of employers. It can lead to considerable savings in terms of time lost, insurance and health care payments, and the cost of recruiting and retraining replacement staff.
- A comprehensive disability management strategy should includes provision for recruitment, promotion and retention, as well as adjustments and accommodations where these are required.
- The management of disability issues is part of good human resource development practice.
- Existing human resource practices, representational committees and other structures can be used to implement the disability management strategy, with adaptations, as required, to suit disabled workers/employees.
- Employers, with the support of employers’ organizations, can benefit from recruiting people with disabilities directly, or after a period of on-the-job training, or a work trial.
• Retaining people who acquire a disability while in employment means that the employer retains experienced workers, with valued expertise, in whom considerable investments have been made.

• Adjustments to the workplace or the working arrangements are necessary in some cases and often cost relatively little.

• Competent authorities have a central role to play, in setting the legal and policy framework, in ensuring that quality services (including placement, vocational rehabilitation, skills training and technical support services) are available to employers as required and that these services are coordinated.

• Competent authorities also have an important role to play in ensuring that all relevant ministries - including ministries for health, education, public transport, the built environment - take account of the needs of people with disabilities so as to make their integration into employment possible.

• Employers’ organizations can play an important promotional, advisory and support role.

• Workers’ representatives can play an important role in representing the interests of disabled workers and in advocating employment and job retention opportunities for people with disabilities, in negotiations and consultations in the workplace and at regional and national levels.

• Organizations of people with disabilities can play an invaluable advisory role in developing disability management strategies.

The Code is available on the ILO website:

www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/skills/disability
www.ilo.org/public/french/employment/skills/disability
www.ilo.org/public/spanish/employment/skills/disability