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Agreement reached on employment of disabled in private sector

Video: Steve Zammit Lupi

Companies will be able to outsource work to the disabled should they be unable to physically employ people with disability, according to a memorandum of understanding signed today.

The memorandum was signed between the Malta Employers Association, the Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry and the Employment and Training Corporation.

It will be implementing a 1969 law which made it compulsory for employers to have at least two per cent of the workforce from among people with disability.

The memorandum has resolved the difficulties employers had been facing to implement the law. In July last year, the law was amended to state that failure to attain the two per cent quota would trigger an automatic "contribution" to the ETC varying between €2,400 and €10,000.

Another issue tackled in the memorandum is that, in the case of a group of companies, the different companies within the group would be able to share - not necessarily equally - the number of disabled people who had to be employed according to law.

The memo also enabled the ETC to inform employers if one of their employees was disabled should the person concerned give consent.

Prime Minister Joseph Muscat said the memorandum was finally implementing a law that has been on hold for 50 years.

"This should be a lesson for legislators..." Paper work, he said, should be followed by enforcement. "We are sending an unequivocal message that social justice is the other side of the coin of economic development... The best way of ensuring independence and equality is to ensure financial independence.... Inclusion cannot stop at school, it has to continue at the workplace," he said.

Employment Minister Evarist Bartolo said the country was moving from a culture of charity to a culture of rights. In spite of a rise in awareness, he said, the culture of dependency remained and not enough emphasis was placed on the importance of developing independence skills.

It was positive that disabled people, who had previously been "buried at home" without the hope of ever getting a job, were now feeling the need to register for employment.

ETC chairman Clyde Caruana said 500 disabled people were employed in the past year. He said 36 per cent of disabled people in employment had started working in the past three years.

He described the memo as "a fair deal for all sides".

Chamber president Anton Borg said the fact that the law had not been applied over the past years reflected the challenges faced by both employers and the disabled.

MEA president Arthur Muscat said disabled people would contribute if they were given the opportunity. "It took us two years to reach this agreement which was only reached with dialogue," he said