

Points for discussion on Integrating Persons with Disability in the World of Work

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As we hear repeatedly, Malta is a small economy which is poor in many resources but relatively rich in human capital.

The latter is perhaps the key to the Island's successes in the economic and social sphere.

It will also likely to be the crucial element in Malta's future economic performance, given the competitive pressures of globalization on such a small and open economy and to reap the maximum possible benefits as a member of the EU.

The Malta Council for Economic and Social Development, the tri-partite forum for consultation and discussion between Government, employers and unions, is currently looking into these issues, with a view to improve Malta's competitiveness also within the context of the guidelines set by the EU Lisbon Agenda.

It is recognized that this effectively requires a better use of our human resources. We need to increase our activity rate, improve our educational levels and curb longer term unemployment.

This is within the context of promoting social inclusion which would address especially the more needy strata of our society.

However, social inclusion and other social objectives should not come at the expense of, but rather as a complementary factor to, economic efficiency.

It is within this context that I, as Chairman of the MCESD, welcome the undertaking of this study aimed at promoting the inclusion of persons with disability.

The particularly interesting feature of this study is that it is based on providing the proper incentives for achieving the objectives of employment growth and social inclusion.

It promotes the concept of creating a level playing field for different sectors of the labour market, in this case for persons with disability in particular, and for eliminating the distortions created by the so-called benefit trap, whereby people are encouraged to lead a life of dependence rather than on self-help.

It is also important that the study takes an economic cost-benefit approach in its implementation aspects, which emphasizes the efficiency in the allocation of resources, and particularly public funds.

This is indeed a model which can and should be applied to a number of other sectors in the labour market, and which would be conducive to increase the country's competitiveness with concomitant benefits in the social sphere.