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NEW ILO FILM SHOWS THAT EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES MAY BE MORE PRODUCTIVE AND MORE SKILLED IN SOME JOBS THAN NON-DISABLED PEOPLE

DECENT WORK IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE MEANS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES OF ESCAPING POVERTY

WARSAW (ILO News) According to the ILO report published today¹ around 2.38 million people with disabilities are of working age in Poland. This means that one in 10 working age individuals has a certified disability. But while their share of the working age population is 10%, their share in employment is only 3.8%. This reflects, among other factors, their lower educational attainments, which, in turn, result from societal and institutional barriers to equal opportunities. But people with disabilities have the right to equal opportunity and these rights are not dependent on the state of the economy.

According to an ILO expert, Ms. Annie Rice, greater focus should be placed on the inclusion of people with disabilities in mainstream employment. This implies a shift from exclusion, sheltered workshops and quota systems to equality of opportunity and integration, to anti-discrimination legislation and measures. Decent work is the most effective means for people with disabilities of escaping the often vicious circle of marginalisation, poverty and social exclusion.

As the ILO film² shows, not only may people with disabilities be more productive, they may actually be more skilled in some jobs than non-disabled people. As Dr. Adam Czarnecki, CEO of ARC Market and Opinion Research Centre says on the film, "I am very satisfied with the employees with disabilities. It comes from the fact that they know it is hard to find a job with so many reluctant employers, and they do their best to be good employees". Or as Hanna Woźnica, sign language interpreter at Carrefour, says of her impaired hearing group: they "are great. They are people who don't need things repeating twice, they don't make mistakes. Working with them is terrific".

Both the film and an earlier ILO study³ challenge the "cost" argument of hiring people with disabilities. They show that the costs of adapting the workplace are low or even neutral, and that there is a perceptible positive change in attitudes amongst employees who work with disabled colleagues, which has a noticeable effect on productivity.

In addition, the cost of excluding disabled persons from the active labour market is staggering. The costs associated with maintaining workers' compensation systems and disability benefits, workplaces for disabled persons, losses in taxes and other revenues from disabled persons who might otherwise work if opportunities were open to them in Poland

¹Promoting employment of people with disabilities on the open labour market: Policy options for Poland, written for the ILO by Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak and Dorota Poznańska.

²Fully Fit at Work, a film produced for the ILO by the Andrzej Wajda Master School of Film Directing.

³Employer attitudes towards employing people with disabilities, a survey produced for the ILO by Millward Brown SMG/KRC, July 2006.

amount to 8.9 billion USD, or 9.6% of GDP, annually⁴. These economic costs to society are shared by all, including business.

For the protagonists of the film, disability is no longer an issue at work. They are not "disabled" but simply valued, productive members of the companies they work for. And just like any other employee, they benefit from their companies' culture of relying on dependable employees.

⁴ Disability issues, trends and recommendations for the World Bank, by Robert L. Metts. 2000. Figures quoted are low estimates; higher estimates are 12.6 billion USD, representing 13.6% of GDP, based on 1996 data.