

**PANEL DISCUSSION ON THE THEME
“PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN TIMES OF ECONOMIC CRISIS”
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STATEMENT BY BERNIE JONES, INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR, SHAW TRUST

Shaw Trust is a UK-based charity that assists people with disabilities move into mainstream employment. Founded 27 years ago, we have helped over 160,000 people with disabilities and disadvantage find a job in the mainstream labour market.

We believe that everyone has the right to work, and that right is as important during tough economic times as it is during boom times. Reducing worklessness is an important tool in any country's journey towards economic recovery. Selectively reducing worklessness is counterproductive, and governments must offer more support to all job seekers during a recession

Our experience is that people with disabilities are amongst the most keen to work. We estimate that at least one third of the nearly 3 million people on disability benefits in the UK are desperate to get back into work.

The economic crisis has had significant effects on labour markets around the world. In the UK, unemployment has risen to around 2.5 million, and job vacancies are down around 30% compared to last year.

Shaw Trust's experience through the economic crisis has been encouraging though. Pressures on our funding and the shrinking job market have affected our finances, but despite this we are helping more people with disabilities than ever to get into

mainstream employment. Of the more than 80,000 people we will work with this year, we are expecting that more than 20,000 will be successful in getting a job.

One reason why we can do this is that we have built very strong relationships with employers over the years. These employers now know from experience that they will get a reliable and dedicated employee, and that both they and the employee can turn to Shaw Trust at any time for help with workplace adaptations, special training or for anything else. One of the employers we work with, MK Dons Football Club, says “We’re delighted with the calibre of the people we’ve taken on. We have a fantastic partnership with Shaw Trust. We save money because we don’t pay recruitment agencies. Importantly, we get people who are hungry to work.”

In addition to these benefits, many employers continue to place a high value on corporate and social responsibility, and on having a diverse labour force, despite the economic downturn. And this is not just true in the UK – we have partnerships around the world where despite the challenges we are able to continue supporting people with disabilities in finding mainstream employment. In Romania, for example, our partner Motivation recently successfully worked with Carrefour supermarkets to place 6 people with disabilities into jobs in their flagship central Bucharest store – an experience which has been so positive that we are hoping to repeat it across the country.

However, we know that some supported employment projects have encountered problems during the economic crisis. We are a part of the Workability network, whose members also include a number of organisations supporting people with

disabilities by direct employment, along the “supported workshop” model. Because of the economic situation, the business model of these organisations has been affected especially on the sales side, and consequently Workability has called for greater support from governments.

That is why we believe that the support and training offered by organisations like Shaw Trust to achieve mainstream employment is a more sustainable way of helping people with disabilities to work, even during an economic downturn.

And it is in governments’ interests to aim to help people with disabilities into mainstream employment. This reduces social security spending and maximises tax and social insurance contributions which can then be reinvested in supporting others.

Shaw Trust’s experience is that people with disabilities, even those who are considered to be some distance from the jobs market, can play a strong part in economic recovery and are equally deserving of support. Helping people with disabilities find the work they desire is a win for everyone, since it also benefits employers, governments and the wider economy.

And a time of economic crisis is no excuse to reduce any of these efforts, nor does it need to affect the rate of success of people in finding employment. It does however require ongoing attention and prioritisation from governments, employers and workers, as well as catalysts like Shaw Trust, which is why the ILO is such an important body to be showing continued leadership on this issue

I will give the last word to Ricky Oates, one of our clients who left school at 15 with learning and mental health difficulties and no qualifications, who didn't see himself ever working until he came to Shaw Trust:

“Working has turned my life around. I love my job and feel valued for the first time. Employers should give everyone a chance. People like me are longing for the opportunity to show what we can do. They could get top-notch people, all willing to work their socks off.”