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EXCERPTS FROM THE SPEECH BY MR HENK VREDELING, VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE
EEC COMMISSION, TO THE SYMPOSIUM ON NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN ASPECTS OF
VOCATIONAL INTEGRATION OF HANDICAPPED AND DISABLED PERSONS,
ORGANIZED BY THE BADEN-WURTTENBERG LAND GOVERNMENT
Heidelberg, 31 January 1980

WHAT THE COMMUNITY IS DOING TO IMPROVE THE LOT OF THE HANDICAPPED

A major step forward has been accomplished under the 1974 programme of action to help the handicapped and disabled: with Commission support, an association of rehabilitation and training establishments has been formed. Some thirty centres are now members.....

..... The association is a vehicle for the exchange of ideas and information. I find personal meetings and discussion particularly important here. We can probably further our aims more in this way than through more formal arrangements.

These European talks have brought tangible results, especially in the staff training field. Particular progress has been made in the area of methodology. As you will recall, back in 1972 the first European seminar for the heads of training establishments for the handicapped was held in Heidelberg. The experiment was repeated a year later with a seminar in Mühlhausen on the training of teachers and instructors of handicapped or disabled adults which covered the current situation, exchange of ideas and plans for the future.

Other gatherings followed. With Commission support, a series of pilot schemes and studies was carried out. The findings have been drawn upon repeatedly in training courses.

..... If you consider that the Social Fund also contributes to schemes for helping foreign workers to integrate, special training programmes for women, etc. then you will understand why only a relatively small amount is set aside in the budget for the handicapped: in 1979 roughly DM 150 million, or 7.5%.

I cannot give any firm figures for the current year since, as you know, the Community still has no budget. But if you ask for a political order of magnitude, the European Parliament wants a Social Fund budget of DM 2 400 million, of which DM 186 million, or 7.8% would be set aside for the handicapped.

..... In addition, the European Social Fund has responsibilities for improving rehabilitation facilities in the economically less well off parts of the Community, where a concentrated injection of funds is needed.

The economic backwardness of such areas has a marked effect on the quality and quantity of rehabilitation facilities. A vicious circle has to be broken.

The first problem is that in development areas there is simply too little money available to finance expensive rehabilitation schemes. On top of that, there is little or no interest in handicapped people as potential employees. This explains why the occupational rehabilitation of handicapped people is not pursued with the same intensity as it is for example in this ideal region where, despite numerous obstacles, rehabilitees are sought after by employers.

What we are trying to achieve is simply a practical piece of Community solidarity. Handicapped people in the less well-off areas should not become the poor relations of European integration.

The progress made in Ireland since accession indicates that it is on the right track. The Fund is contributing to both vocational rehabilitation schemes and training of specialist staff. In 1973 a little over 300 handicapped or disabled people received rehabilitation training in Ireland; today the figure has risen to over 1 000. In 1973 only eight of the 26 counties had training centres; now there are fairly well developed training facilities in all the counties. Money has also been raised to increase the allowances paid during training. Our Irish friends are always telling us that this progress would be inconceivable without the crucial Community contribution.....

..... All too often handicapped people have to make do with a simple manual job where they are perfectly capable of more demanding work. The example given above of the typewriter operated by directing a beam of light on to the points on a board shows that severely handicapped people can not only learn to type, but are also capable of doing creative work. Greater emphasis should therefore be placed on exploiting technical innovations to increase handicapped people's scope for fulfilment. I believe that this is an area of great potential in the vocational rehabilitation of the handicapped.