**Inclusive Employment in Social Firms**

How Social Firms in Europe are realizing the Inclusive Employment of People with Disabilities in Accordance with Article 27 of the UNCRPD

**About Us**

Founded in 1987, **Social Firms Europe (SFE) CEFEC** has been representing social firms across Europe for more than 30 years. We inform, support and connect social firms, social enterprises, cooperatives and employment initiatives in all of Europe with the aim of contributing to an inclusive European labour market.

We promote and support the **inclusive employment of people with disabilities and mental health problems as well as other socially marginalized persons in the regular labour market**. It is our goal to enable participation and autonomy for these particularly affected individuals and thereby to contribute to an inclusive European society.

SFE CEFEC has organized **34 annual conferences** on the topic of inclusive employment, shares **best practice** across Europe and contributes to the permanent improvement of the social firms model by **legislation and validation** at European and national level, regularly highlighting the importance of the **UNCRPD**. As SFE CEFEC we have been a board member of **the European Disability Forum** for many years.

As a European network of associations, social firms, social enterprises, cooperatives and employment initiatives specialized on inclusive employment we gladly offer our expertise, experience and know-how to **help implement Art. 27 UNCRPD** in the European Union and its member countries.

**About Social Firms**

For many years, social firms in Europe have focused on the equal participation of people with disabilities and disadvantages in the regular labour market. They have created tens of thousands of jobs, contribute billions of euros to the European economy, relieve social security systems and offer participation to people who would otherwise be excluded from the labour market.

Some **key facts** about social firms in Europe:

* Social firms employ **people with and without disabilities**, mental health problems and other disadvantages, thus creating an *inclusive* work environment. All types of disabilities and disadvantages are represented in the workforce.
* Social firms compete in the **regular market** and are active in **all industries and sectors**.
* They ensure **reasonable accommodation** for people with disabilities in the workplace.
* Remuneration is based on **customary or tariff wages** and should be at a level appropriate to the specific working position.
* Employees benefit from **social security protections** like pensions, unemployment benefits and medical insurance.
* Social firms strive to offer **long-term employment** and permanent working contracts.
* Social firms invest their possible profit for the **creation of new employment opportunities** for persons with vulnerabilities.
* **Vocational training** in close connection with, and leading to, the provision of permanent jobs is vital. Social firms focus on **the** **personal development** and encourage individual talents and aptitudes.
* Inclusive employment in social firms is based on **equal opportunities, equal remuneration as well as safe and healthy working conditions**.

By following these important employment standards, social firms in Europe are actively putting **Article 27 UNCRPD** into practice. They are an exemplary model for the inclusive employment of people with and without disabilities as well as other vulnerable groups in the mainstream labour market. **Many best practice examples show day by day how social and economic responsibilities likewise lead to the success of social firms.**

**About the Implementation of Art. 27 UNCRPD**

To promote positive action in the labour market it is important to **improve, simplify and standardize the legal framework**, which must be based on the right to work and employment according to Article 27 of the UNCRPD.

In addition to legislation and sanctions, for example in connection with the **implementation of a quota system** reserved for people with disabilities, it is necessary to **support social and inclusive employers** and create incentives to promote the employment of people with disabilities.

One special model for the employment of people with disabilities is provided by **social firms**. There are numerous ways to strengthen these companies within EU and national.

Our proposals include:

* To create **incentives to promote social entrepreneurship** for example with social security bonuses and VAT benefits.
* To support social firms with **funds from the European Union** in order to reduce the dependence on national budgets.
* To create a legal framework which allows member states to establish regulations concerning the **preferential procurement of public contracts** to social firms.
* To promote social firms as a **reference model** for the employment of people with disabilities in EU member states.
* To recognize the model of social firms as a guarantor for **equal opportunities, equal wages and safe and healthy working conditions**.
* To support the development of **national umbrella organisations** of social firms.
* And to launch and support **awareness-raising measures** in order to promote social entrepreneurship and to eliminate prejudices connected to people with disabilities.

Other fundamental ways to promote an inclusive European labour market include:

* To introduce compulsory workplace diversity **quotas** for the employment of people with disabilities, with sanctions for non-compliance including fines.
* To ensure mutual **recognition of disability status** across member states in order to promote free movement of workers with disabilities.
* To ensure **reasonable accommodation** for people with disabilities in the workplace.
* And to support **skills** **training for people with disabilities** including vocational training for young people with disabilities and individual measures for the transition from school to working life.

**Our Conclusion**

It has to be the goal of the European Union and its member countries to realize an inclusive labour market in accordance with the UNCRPD. With the implementation of these proposed measures, we see great opportunities to substantially and permanently promote the goal of inclusive participation in working life for persons with disabilities.

Social firms, social enterprises, cooperatives and employment initiatives are an innovative but proven way to successfully employing people with disabilities in the mainstream labour market. Promoting and supporting them as best practice examples

for inclusive employment could be a cornerstone for a more modern and more inclusive Europe.

It should be a concern of the EU Commission and a pillar for future EU policy to initiate, validate and promote the social firms model in all EU member countries as a model for the social inclusion of people with disabilities and mental health problems as well as other vulnerable groups.

As SFE CEFEC, we are gladly at your disposal for further consultations.



Felicitas Kresimon Klaus Meyer zu Brickwedde

SFE CEFEC President SFE CEFEC Executive Committee member