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Contribution to the Commission Communication
“Towards a New Strategy on Waste Prevention and Recycling”

Workability International Europe (WIE) is Europe’s largest umbrella organisation representing companies and organisations providing work and employment services to people with disabilities. Our 24 member organisations are active in 20 European countries and provide employment to more than 800,000 disabled people.

Our companies are active in a very wide range of business, from manufacturing to the provision of services. One of those business, which has proven particularly successful in the labour integration of people with disabilities is the waste and recycling business. WIE companies have been active in the recycling business for a number of years. Dismantling and processing of electrical and electronic waste, collection, refurbishment and resale of large domestic appliances and PCs, management of hospital and biodegradable waste, collection and remanufacturing of ink and toner cartridges, are only some examples.

In this context, WIE sincerely welcomes the Commission’s Communication “Towards a Thematic Strategy on Waste Prevention and Recycling” and the opportunity it offers to all stakeholders to express their views and provide their input to the design of the future waste policy of the European Union.

Considering that 2003 was declared European Year of People with Disabilities by the EU, with the main aim of raising awareness about the rights of people with disabilities and the mainstreaming of disability issues, we believe that this consultation exercise offers an excellent platform to incorporate the social considerations in general, and the disability issues, in particular, into the EU waste policy. Indeed, social and environmental issues are two sides of the same coin, the coin of sustainable development and as such they should be dealt with. WIE considers that a good way to do so is to further analyse the existing synergies between both aspects and to study how they can be boosted and generalised.

In addition, environmental and social issues are also the two main pillars on which Corporate Social Responsibility is founded. An integrated CSR strategy by European firms should ideally approach both aspects in a coordinated way. Besides, the incorporation of people with disabilities (which represent around 10% of European population) into the workforce should be seen as a competitiveness advantage (and never as a burden) in a moment when there is a considerable scarcity of human resources.
To this effect, WIE proposes that in the conception of the future European Strategy for the Waste Prevention and Recycling, the European Commission makes an impact assessment that not only takes account of the economic and environmental aspects but also of the social ones. WIE suggests that, in future EU documents and legislation, explicit mentions about the importance that the economic activities and the employment generated due to the new legal obligations imposed by the new strategy, contribute to the labour integration of people with disabilities and consequently to the reduction of the existing social inequalities, are included. Only in this way, the new strategy will successfully foster sustainable development in an integral manner.

WIE also believes that the potential synergies between environmental and social considerations, and disability ones in particular, are innumerable and need to be further explored. That is why WIE proposes that, within the framework of the European Year of People with Disabilities, a multistakeholder forum is created with a view to identifying, and disseminating, examples of good practice that combine recycling and environmental activities with the employment of people with disabilities.

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