

Charter for Work

For People with Rheumatic Diseases in Europe

Rheumatic diseases cover more than 200 musculoskeletal conditions and affect over 100 million people of all ages across Europe.

Rheumatic diseases have a significant impact on people's ability to work. By work we include paid employment, work undertaken in the home to support a family and voluntary work.

The right to work is essential for people with rheumatic diseases to fully participate in society. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹ everyone has the right to work. The European Employment Directive² provides a legal framework and should prevent people from being discriminated against on grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. This right has been reinforced by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities³. It is important that existing law protecting the rights of more than 100 million European citizens is fully implemented at a national level. Work is important to people with rheumatic diseases and their families both financially and for their quality of life and well being.

The direct and indirect costs of providing health and social care for just individuals with rheumatoid arthritis in 2007⁴ was **45 billion Euros**. Evidence suggests that enabling people with rheumatic diseases to work and including them in the workforce is of significant financial benefit to society.

This charter recognises the role that policy makers, employers, healthcare providers and other stakeholders can play in creating a legal framework for a working environment that is inclusive of people with rheumatic diseases. The collective voice of people with rheumatic diseases should be sought through their representative patient organisations and be included in all decisions that affect them.

This Charter calls for:

Awareness and recognition

This charter calls for greater public awareness and understanding of rheumatic diseases. It demands the recognition of the knowledge, skills and experience which people with these conditions bring to the workforce and to wider society. Opportunities and choices at work need to be increased for people with rheumatic diseases. Flexible working and creative job design can play a positive role in opening up access to paid employment and voluntary work.

Policy makers to legislate for access to work

This charter calls for policy makers to create and enforce legislation requiring employers and planners to create an accessible environment so people with rheumatic diseases can get to and from work and access the workplace. Appropriate technology, education, training and support allowing people to work must also be provided. Good employment conditions could include tax incentives for employers and employees, part time work, job share and the promotion of flexible working conditions. Such practice benefits all members of society.

Employers to create an inclusive and flexible work environment

This charter calls for employers to be active in creating an inclusive work environment where people with rheumatic diseases are not discriminated against and feel free to discuss their situation with employers and co-workers without prejudice. Employers must also be active in creating more flexible work conditions with an accessible and adaptive environment and appropriate technologies to ensure people with rheumatic diseases are able to contribute fully to the productivity and profitability of their employer.

Support from healthcare providers

This charter calls for healthcare providers to focus on the abilities of people with rheumatic diseases rather than on what they cannot do and give them the support they need to find work or to remain in their current employment. Success in this area should be regarded as a legitimate clinical outcome. Early diagnosis, access to the most appropriate treatments and therapies, rehabilitation and ongoing care will enable people to rejoin or be retained in the workforce.

1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights by UN 1948, Article 23

2 Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000

3 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by UN 2008, Article 27

4 The burden of rheumatoid arthritis and access to treatment: health burden and costs. Lundkvist, L.; Kastäng, F.; Kobelt, G. published online, Springer Verlag 2007