

Inclusion Europe

The European Association of Societies of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families
L'Association Européenne des Organisations des Personnes Handicapées Mentales et leurs Familles

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Position Paper Poverty and Intellectual Disability

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The UN Convention specifically highlights in its Preamble the multi-dimensional nature and objectives of the fight against poverty and social exclusion: *“Recognizing the valued existing and potential contributions made by persons with disabilities to the overall well-being and diversity of their communities, and that the promotion of the full enjoyment by persons with disabilities of their human rights and fundamental freedoms and of full participation by persons with disabilities will result in their enhanced sense of belonging and in significant advances in the human, social and economic development of society and the eradication of poverty”*. The Preamble of the Convention also underlines the closely-related issue of poverty and disability by *“highlighting the fact that the majority of persons with disabilities live in conditions of poverty, and in this regard recognizing the critical need to address the negative impact of poverty on persons with disabilities”*.

Although the issue of poverty is a huge challenge in developing countries, social and financial exclusion due to intellectual disability is also at stake in many European countries. As Inclusion Europe pointed out in a research project on Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe, “poverty and disability reinforce each other. Not only does disability exacerbate poverty, by increasing isolation and economic strain for the individual, but it also affects the family of the respective disabled individual¹”.

Inclusion Europe highlights the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion by demanding action by the States Parties to the Convention in order to combat poverty in the following areas:

1. Ensuring a reasonable standard of living for all citizens

All European citizens, regardless of the kind and/or level of their disability, should have the possibility to realize for themselves a reasonable quality of life. A basic precondition for this is access to those financial means that are necessary in a specific society for financing the basic needs of a person.

¹ In 2005, Inclusion Europe carried out a research project on Poverty and Social Exclusion in Europe. The results were discussed with persons with intellectual disabilities, family members, professionals and policy decision-makers from 36 European countries at a conference in Bucharest, Romania. The discussions provided valuable input into the policy discussions of Inclusion Europe and Inclusion International as to how poverty and social exclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities could be overcome.
Inclusion Europe and Inclusion International: Poverty and intellectual disability in Europe. Brussels 2005.

Therefore Inclusion Europe calls upon all European States, the European Union and the Council of Europe

- To develop and finance programmes that provide an equal level of basic financial security and income to all those citizens who may not be able to meet their financial needs from own income.
- To strive for a harmonization of the standard of living in all European countries.

2. Improved access to education and life-long learning for persons with intellectual disabilities

Pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary education are important basic elements for the inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities in society in general and in the labour market in particular. Education does not only increase their skills and competencies, but is, in inclusive settings, an opportunity to meet and interact with non-disabled children. Inclusion Europe has detailed its demands in this area in its Position Paper entitled "Education for all - Diversity as an opportunity for school education".

3. The fight against discrimination towards persons with intellectual disabilities in employment

In its Article 27 on work and employment, the Convention requires governments:

- to prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability
- to provide persons with disabilities with the support they need to participate in the open labour market and to provide reasonable accommodation in the workplace
- to promote their employment, both in public and private sectors
- to enable persons with disabilities to have effective access to vocational training, placement services and life-long learning training and to promote employment opportunities.

Therefore Inclusion Europe calls upon all European States, the European Union and the Council of Europe

- To ensure that the transposition of the Council Directive 2000/78/EC in EU Member States is meaningful for persons with intellectual disabilities and that its effective non-discrimination measures protect them at work.
- To recognize a denial of reasonable adjustments (legally: reasonable accommodation) as discrimination.
- To ensure that all measures directed towards improving employment opportunities for European citizens contain specific provisions for the employment needs of people with intellectual disabilities. This includes the allocation of European Union funds in an effective manner for this group of citizens.
- To employ persons with intellectual disabilities wherever possible to contribute to good practice examples.

4. Ensuring equal access to mainstream health care and social protection

The UN Convention requires the government, in its Article 25, to:

- Prevent discrimination in health care, health services and social protection on the basis of disability

- Provide people with disabilities with the same quality and standard of health care and programmes as provided for other people

Therefore, Inclusion Europe calls upon the European States, the European Union and the Council of Europe to adopt non-discrimination legislation in the field of health care and social protection to prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability, as well as to provide reasonable accommodations where necessary. Inclusion Europe calls upon the States to ensure necessary training and qualification of health care staff to care adequately for persons with intellectual disabilities

5. Caring at home: Focus on families of persons with intellectual disabilities

The Convention recognizes that families play an important role in the lives of children and adults who have a disability and that these families need support. The necessary care work, which is mostly done by the mother, impacts the family status in the labour market and, consequently, its income. Parents also experience many difficulties in the attempt to reconcile their professional and private lives while taking care of their dependent son or daughter. The parents of people with intellectual disabilities are therefore often victims of “discrimination by association”.

Inclusion Europe has detailed its demands in this area in its Position Paper on Women and Intellectual Disability.

6. Ensuring legal capacity and access to rights and justice for everyone

Equal and effective access to rights and justice is an important dimension in the fight against social exclusion and poverty. The issue of legal capacity of people with intellectual disabilities as full citizens of their own country is considered as one of the core elements of the Convention.

Inclusion Europe has detailed its demands in this area in its Position Paper on Key elements for a system of supported decision-making.

7. Addressing the link between poverty, exclusion and institutionalization

The Convention recognizes in its Article 19, the right for persons with disabilities to have access “to community support services, including personal assistance necessary to support living and inclusion in the community, and to prevent isolation or segregation from the community”. Several studies have demonstrated that local communities where the majority of citizens have inadequate resources, have a lower capacity for inclusion of persons with disabilities. This has often led to the placement of people with intellectual disabilities in residential institutions.

Inclusion Europe thus calls upon the European States, the European Union and the Council of Europe:

- To strongly support the creation and extension of community-based care systems that support the independent living of people with intellectual disabilities.
- To establish efficient quality monitoring and evaluation systems for all disability services.

- To ensure that European and national funds support the development of community-based support systems.
- To collect statistical information at the level of the Council of Europe about the inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities and other disability groups

8. Compensation for extra disability costs

The Convention requires in article 28 governments to ensure access:

- for persons with disabilities and their families living in situations of poverty to assistance from the State for their disability-related expenses, including adequate training, counseling, financial assistance and respite care.
- to affordable aids and devices which people need due to their disability.

Inclusion Europe calls upon the Member States:

- to recognize that the presence of a disability causes extra costs for disabled individuals and/or their families and to design benefit schemes that compensate adequately for the extra costs of disability.
- to encourage the development of personal budgets or direct payment schemes to allow disabled persons to purchase the support they need.

9. Better monitoring of social inclusion policies

The UN Convention recognizes, in its Article 28, the right of persons with intellectual disabilities and their families to adequate living standards. The Convention therefore recognizes to right to have access to:

- Retirement benefits and programmes
- Public housing programmes
- Social protection programmes

The Convention underlines the importance of ensuring access in particular for women and girls with disabilities and older persons with disabilities to these programmes.

Inclusion Europe calls upon the European States, the European Union and the Council of Europe:

- To develop specific measures and policies to combat poverty and social exclusion of this special group of their citizens.
- To pay special attention to persons with intellectual disabilities in the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion and as a global issue to be addressed with the aid of the Open Method of Coordination.
- To ensure access to mainstream housing programmes for people with intellectual disabilities and to ensure accessible flats.
- To ensure, as far as possible, equal living conditions for persons with disabilities in all Member States of the European Union and of the Council of Europe
- To collect and monitor statistical information at the level of the Council of Europe about the inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities and other disability groups

10. Mainstreaming of intellectual disability in national, European and world policies

The UN Convention emphasizes in its Preamble, *“the importance of mainstreaming disability issues as an integral part of relevant strategies of sustainable development”*. One of the main challenges regarding policy is the complexity of social exclusion. While

some National Action Plans on Social Inclusion identify persons with disabilities as a vulnerable population, the challenge is to develop effective multi-level responses to the complex set of factors impacting on persons with intellectual disabilities and their families.

Inclusion Europe calls upon the European States, the European Union and the Council of Europe:

- To mainstream disability issues in the planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and revision of policies and actions at all levels of society – at local, regional, national and international level.