

Community Living for Disabled People Must Be Made a Priority

As we mark the European Day of People with Disabilities, the European Coalition for Community Living (ECCL) calls on the Member States to take concrete steps to end the institutionalisation of people with disabilities by developing alternative services in their local communities. While there has been much progress in promoting equal citizenship for people with disabilities in Europe, thousands still live in long-stay residential institutions, isolated from their communities and from the rest of society. Large institutions for people with disabilities are not limited to Europe's new Member States; they also exist in most of the 'older Member States'. For these people, the concepts of equal opportunities, social inclusion and respect for human rights are meaningless.

Across the European Union, many Member States have adopted policies that promote the social inclusion of people with disabilities through the closure of institutions and the provision of community-based services, including those controlled by disabled people. However, contrary to the European Union's Disability Action Plan 2006 – 2007¹ and the recently adopted UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, new institutions for people with disabilities continue to be built in the European Union today.

This year's European Day of People with Disabilities conference, held in Brussels on 5 – 6 December, focuses on people with disabilities as active players in the Internal Market. It is an opportunity to promote the free movement of people with disabilities and their access to quality social services, as well as other services of general interest. In order to achieve a truly inclusive society in which people with disabilities have the freedom of movement and the opportunity to contribute to society as everyone else, they must have access to appropriate services and support in their own local communities. Relevant regulations and policies should therefore be revised so that they promote the development of community-based services more effectively². Such services and support must be developed as a matter of priority, using for example, the EU's regional structural funding mechanism. Moreover, if people with disabilities are to benefit from Europe's human rights and social inclusion policies, the European Commission and individual Member States must commit to **stop building new institutions for people with disabilities**, to **adopting a specific non-discrimination directive for people with disabilities** and to **ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**.

¹ Communication from the European Commission on the situation of disabled people in the enlarged European Union: the European Action Plan 2006 - 2007 of November 28, 2005 (COM/2005/604).

² Some examples of the regulations that should be revised are: the Council Regulation on Coordination of Social Security Schemes 1408/71 and 574/72; Directive on Services in the Internal Market 2006/123/EC; Directive on Recognition of Professional Qualifications 2005/36.

The European Coalition for Community Living (ECCL) is a cross disability initiative which works towards the social inclusion of people with disabilities by promoting the provision of comprehensive, quality community-based services as an alternative to institutionalisation. ECCL's vision is of a society in which people with disabilities live as equal citizens, with full respect for their human rights. They must have real choices regarding where and with whom to live, choices in their daily lives and real opportunities to be independent and to actively participate in their communities. To this end, ECCL advocates for and monitors progress towards de-institutionalisation in Europe, campaigns for, and provides information on, the development of comprehensive, quality community-based services and de-institutionalisation. The founding organisations of ECCL are Autism Europe, the Center for Policy Studies of the Central European University, the European Disability Forum, the European Network on Independent Living, Inclusion Europe, Mental Health Europe and the Open Society Mental Health Initiative.

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