

Inclusion Europe

The European Association of societies of
People with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families



PRESS RELEASE

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Europe in Action 2011 calls for involvement of families in the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

“Family Action for the Inclusion of People with Intellectual Disabilities in Society” was the central theme of the Europe in Action 2011 – an annual congress of Inclusion Europe that took place last week in Larnaca, Cyprus. Two and a half-day conference provided an opportunity for mutual exchange of views and experiences among people with intellectual disabilities, their relatives and disability professionals as well as policy-makers at European level.

Families are major supporters of inclusion and empowerment of children and adults with intellectual disabilities. They had been among the first voices of the disability movement and still are the central life-long disability advocates.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities says that families should receive *“necessary protection and assistance enabling them to contribute towards full and equal enjoyment of the rights of people with disabilities.”* The objective of 2011 Europe in Action was thus to identify **challenges and expectations of these families** and examine **concrete measures** that can be taken by different stakeholders **to support and empower** them.

The conference was held under the auspices of **Soteroulla Charalambous**, Minister of Labour and Social Insurance of Cyprus. **Yannis Vardakastanis**, leader of the European Disability Forum and a keynote speaker of the event, underlined the need to advance the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities – particularly pressing in the times of economic crisis. **Making the UN Convention a reality should be based on a good understanding of the diversity of people with disabilities.**

The European Commission was represented by **Johan Ten Guezendam**, Head of Unit for the rights of people with disabilities who presented the **EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020**, linking it to the EU’s economic strategy **Europe 2020**. *“We need to make sure that people with disabilities will also benefit from Europe’s growth strategy”* he said during the conference. The targets related to employment, education and poverty-reduction can only be achieved if EU policies include people with disabilities.

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During the conference, self-advocates, parents, siblings and other relatives worked together with professionals to identify the **main challenges for families with a person with an intellectual disability**. These include the constant adaptation during different life phases of a person with an intellectual disability and balancing the needs of all family members. Insufficient financial support to tackle the extra cost of disability; lack of psychological assistance, professional counselling and little information about innovative methods of empowering people with intellectual disabilities as well as non-disabled family members were also named among the key issues. Moreover, families still have to fight against negative **attitudes** towards people with intellectual disabilities who often remain to be seen as not capable of taking their own decisions and living on their own.

People with intellectual disabilities want to **be part of the community**. Self-advocates at the conference claimed their rights to **live independently, have their own decisions recognised before the law and participate in political and public life** of society. *“It is not enough to be at the table or in the meeting room, people with intellectual disabilities need to have a real impact,”* **Maureen Piggot**, the new president of Inclusion Europe, said during the conference. **Andrew Doyle**, Chairperson of the European Platform of Self-Advocates, continues: *“Even with laws that give us rights, many of us are still not part of our community.”* *“With our stories we want to encourage politicians and decision makers to see us as equal members of the society,”* concludes **Senada Halilcevic**, a self-advocate from Croatia and a board member of Inclusion Europe.

In order to tackle the above-mentioned challenges, it is important to **bring together families** (including self-advocates, parents, siblings and other relatives) to share experiences and fight for their rights, including the formal recognition of unpaid family care and compensation for the extra cost of disability. Families should be involved in the national **implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**. The “dialogue” of people with intellectual disabilities, their relatives and professionals shall be supported as a means of making a difference in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

The **final event** for the European project **“New Paths to Inclusion”** was held as a part of the 2011 Europe in Action conference. The project works with an innovative method of **Person Centred Planning (PCP)** as a means to facilitate an inclusive and self-determined life for people with intellectual disabilities. The objective of the project is to transfer the concept of PCP and its practice from the United Kingdom to other countries in Europe. The Europe in Action conference, attended by representatives from almost all European countries, was thus a perfect occasion to disseminate the results of this project at a truly European level.

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About

Inclusion Europe (IE) is the European voice and representation of over 60 member organizations of people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Founded in 1988, Inclusion Europe has an over 20-year track record of successful operation and defending the rights of its constituency. <http://www.inclusion-europe.org/>

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