



Ambitions. Rights. Belonging.

Housing for people with intellectual disabilities

Issues, ideas, practices

Living in your own place.

Having friends.

Making your own choices.

Being good at something.

Belonging.

That is what being part of a community and being included is about.

But there is a lack of accessible, available and affordable housing for people with intellectual disabilities.

In Europe, very few adults with intellectual disabilities live in their own place.

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I am a person with an intellectual disability,
and I have been living on my own for over 17 years.

I first moved into my apartment in 2006.
It was the first time that I could call a place my own.

Housing means more to me than just having a roof over my head.

Housing means having a good place to live.
It means having a home.
Housing is something that everyone needs.
It makes life better for everybody, including families and
communities.

This is very true for me!
Having a place I can call my own is great!
I like having my own keys, having my own mailbox, and an
address.
It means I can come and go as I please.

It means that I can invite family and friends over.
To play computer games,
watch movies and have dinner with me.

Having my own place makes me feel like I am a part of the
community.

It has given me the chance to get to know my neighbours.

I know where everything is that I need and want.
This makes me feel safe and comfortable.
I know my way around the public transport system
and what shortcuts I can take on my way to work.

It makes me sad that this is not the case for everybody.
Many people with intellectual disabilities have never experienced
what it means to have their own home.
They live with their parents, or in institutions.

This must change!

People with intellectual disabilities have the right to housing,
just like everyone else.
Everyone has the right to choose where and with whom to live.
I want to live in a world where these rights are respected.

Soufiane El Amrani
self-advocate, Accessibility expert of Inclusion Europe



Housing: a basic need, a human right

Housing means to have shelter and to have a home of your own.

It is more than a roof over your head.

It is having a place to live that feels like home because you can be who you are and live the way you see fit.

It is the foundation of personal freedom.

It gives people a safe space from which they can go into the world, and to which they can return.

It's the foundation of independent life and inclusion in the community.

Problems faced by people with intellectual disabilities

For people with intellectual disabilities, making use of their right to adequate housing,^{1;2} can be very hard and, in some cases, impossible.

- At least **852.000 people with intellectual disabilities are 'housed' in segregated care institutions** across Europe³.
- An additional **32.000 are in psychiatric hospitals**.

¹ Article 25 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 11.1 of the 1966 International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognises adequate housing as a part of the right to an adequate standard of living. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-housing/human-right-adequate-housing>

² The right to adequate housing contains certain freedoms and entitlements. It also determines a number of conditions that need to be met before shelter can be considered "adequate housing". These include availability of services, affordability, habitability, accessibility, and location. [Report on the right to housing of persons with disabilities, United Nations, 2017](#).

³ Inclusion indicators report 2024, <https://www.inclusion.eu/indicators>

- The **majority are staying with family members** for most of their lives. People with intellectual disabilities rarely have a home of their own⁴.

Contrast this with the fact that over two thirds of people in the EU in 2022 lived in households that owned their home.⁵

Segregation

When adults with intellectual disabilities are forced to live in institutions, they are excluded from the community. They have limited social relations outside of the institution. They cannot access public services like other members of the community.^{6; 7}

Sometimes, institutions are located on the outskirts of cities, suburbs or in the countryside. Most people choosing to live in cities do so because they offer a higher quality of life when it comes to employment opportunities, and access to public services.⁸

Spatially segregating people with intellectual disabilities takes away their opportunities. Available, affordable, and accessible housing needs to include everyone and be available to everyone. Housing should ensure inclusion in the community and allow people to have real control over their life.

⁴ Persons with intellectual disabilities and with complex support needs most likely to live in institutions – report, Inclusion Europe, 2021 <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/people-intellectual-disabilities-complex-needs-institutions-report/>.

⁵ Eurostat, Housing in Europe – 2023 interactive edition.
ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/interactive-publications/housing-2023

⁶ Common European Guidelines on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care, EEG, 2012
<https://deinstitutionalisationdotcom.files.wordpress.com/2017/07/guidelines-final-english.pdf>

⁷ General comment No. 5 on living independently and being included in the community, Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2017

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD/C/GC/5&Lang=en

⁸ World Happiness Report 2020, [Chapter 4: Urban-Rural Happiness Differentials across the World](#).

For example in Czechia, “people with intellectual disabilities often have to move away from home to access services, because even services that meet the conditions for quality of life and inclusion are not available everywhere. For nearly 11,000 people with intellectual disabilities living in cities of 50,000 inhabitants, there are only 755 places that meet the conditions for quality of life and inclusion in the community.”⁹

Deprivation of legal capacity and lack of supported decision making

In many European countries, people with intellectual disabilities are not legally allowed to decide where and with whom they want to live. They can’t sign contracts to own property, rent a home or set up energy or phone services¹⁰.

Taking away someone’s legal capacity also means taking away their independence. People with intellectual disabilities have the right to choose what is best for them.

For many people with intellectual disabilities, lack of support for making decisions is another barrier that stands in their way of finding adequate housing.

Financial challenges

Housing has become increasingly inaccessible for many people.¹¹

⁹ Article entitled “Life like the others” (“Žít jako ostatní”, in Czech), 2021 <https://jdicz.eu/vyzkumna-zprava-zit-jako-ostatni/>

¹⁰ European Disability Forum’s report 2024 on legal capacity, <https://www.edf-feph.org/publications/human-rights-report-2024-legal-capacity/>

¹¹ One of the main findings of the report on [Roma Access to Quality and affordable housing in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Spain](#) by the [European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network \(ERGO\)](#) was that the high costs of housing and overcomplex administrative procedures further reduce the access to housing for Roma. The same hurdles reduce access to housing for people with intellectual disabilities.

Even more so for people with intellectual disabilities who are often at risk of poverty or already experiencing poverty.^{12; 13}

While the demand for social housing has increased, its availability has not.¹⁴

Finding available, accessible, and affordable housing within the community is almost impossible for adults with intellectual disabilities.

This is directly related to the fact that much less than 10% of people with intellectual disabilities have a paid job. And that in many countries they risk losing their disability benefits if/when they earn a salary.¹⁵

Without the financial support of their families, people with intellectual disabilities are almost certainly excluded from buying or renting their own place. But of course, having a family that can afford to provide financial backing is not a given.

Family responsibilities beyond the norm

People with intellectual disabilities want the same chances at life as everyone else.

This means that when children with intellectual disabilities grow up and become adults, they want to start their own lives, make their own rules, and create their own homes.¹⁶

¹² Poverty of people with disabilities and their families, Inclusion Europe, 2020 <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Briefing-Poverty-of-persons-with-intellectual-disabilities-and-their-families-2020.pdf>

¹³ Eurostat found that housing costs are a heavier burden for people with disabilities in Europe. “In most EU Member States, people with disabilities live in households where housing costs place a heavier burden on disposable income than in households without disabilities.” [Eurostat, 2021](#).

¹⁴ “Social housing is particularly pressured with long waiting lists. Over one million households are waiting for social homes. Last year 29 000 social homes were sold or demolished, and less than 7000 were built.” This was the situation in the UK in late 2022, found by the Adult Social Care Committee of the House of Lords in the report ‘[A “gloriously ordinary life”: spotlight on adult social care](#)’, Chapter 6: [Independent living](#), Point 338.

¹⁵ In 18 countries, people with intellectual disabilities risk losing their disability benefits when they earn their own salary. Inclusion indicators, Inclusion Europe, 2024. <https://www.inclusion.eu/indicators>

¹⁶ “There is a need to consider appropriate housing for young adults who desire a choice of who they live with and where. They require the option of living with people of a similar age, with similar interests, rather than living in the same homes as older people.” House of Lords report ‘[A “gloriously ordinary life”: spotlight on adult social care](#)’, Chapter 6: [Independent living](#), Point 337.

In Europe in 2022, the average age of young people moving out of their parental homes in the EU was 26.4 years old.¹⁷ The same should apply to people with intellectual disabilities, but the lack of housing prevents many from taking this step.

When housing is not created and available with everyone in mind, it limits their options.

Many adults with intellectual disabilities are stuck in their childhood bedrooms, and family members taking on responsibilities to house and care for them longer than ‘normal’. This is not fair to adults with intellectual disabilities wanting to ‘flee the nest’, and it is also not fair to their families.

Families should be just that – families. Spending time together because they want to, not because they have to as result of inaccessible housing or support.

**“I want to have an independent life, not always relying on parents or family members to accompany me or give me a home.
I have to get my family’s help with everything because I can’t get a job to earn my own money.
I deserve to be treated as an adult, not as a child!
My parents can’t provide for me for the rest of my life.
I worry about how I can afford to live independently and join in my community if I am always fighting to be seen.”**

Tamara Byrne, self-advocate from Ireland¹⁸

¹⁷ When do young Europeans leave their parental home, Eurostat, 2023
<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20230904-1> .

¹⁸ I want people to treat me as an equal member of society, Tamara Byrne article by Inclusion Europe 2023
<https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/i-want-people-to-treat-me-as-an-equal-member-of-society-tamara-byrne/>

Housing exclusion

FEANTSA developed a common framework to define situations of homelessness or housing exclusion:

- **Rooflessness:** people living in rough or emergency accommodation.
- **Houselessness:** people in accommodation for the homeless, in women's shelters, in accommodation for migrants, people due to be released from institutions and people receiving long-term support due to homelessness.
- **Living in insecure housing:** people living in insecure tenancies, under threat of eviction or violence.
- **Living in inadequate housing:** living in unfit housing, non-conventional dwellings or in situations of extreme overcrowding.¹⁹

Many people with intellectual disabilities find themselves in several of these situations.

- There are people with intellectual disabilities living on the streets, roofless.²⁰
- Hundreds of thousands of people in institutions are effectively houseless;²¹
- As could be those who live with their parents at risk of institutionalisation the moment their family is no longer there.²²

¹⁹ **ETHOS**, the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion <https://www.feantsa.org/en/about-us/faq>

²⁰ FEANTSA found that there were 895.000 people homeless in 2023. An undefined but not small amount of the people living on the streets or in informal settlements are persons with intellectual disabilities. [Report: 8th Overview of Housing exclusion in Europe, FEANTSA, 2023.](#)

²¹ Discussion paper on the risk of (re)institutionalisation, <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/why-are-people-with-intellectual-disabilities-still-at-risk-of-institutionalisation/>

But because most people with intellectual disabilities stay with family or in institutions, policymakers do not consider people with intellectual disabilities as needing or seeking housing²³.

Urban planning

Accessing public spaces is a strong marker of inclusion in the community.

However, too few authorities set targets on accessibility in their urban planning. And existing minimum accessibility standards overwhelmingly focus on physical disabilities. The lack of clear incentives from policy-makers which leaves housing developers prioritise profit over accessibility.²⁴

Too often, neighbourhoods are not thought in an inclusive way. This means houses are built in areas that lack connections to public spaces, support services and do not take people's individual needs and wishes into account. For example, many houses are far from public transport networks which makes travels to the city more difficult, as well as access to jobs and public services.

This situation is largely due to the lack of participation of people with intellectual disabilities in urban planning. They are often not heard in decision-making committees on urban planning or in public consultations for construction permits.

²³ The Eurostat Disability Data Base on housing conditions does not cover “those who moved out of the country’s territory, those with no usual residence, living in institutions or who have moved to an institution compared to the previous year.” https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/en/ilc_sieusilc.htm

²⁴ House of Lords in the report ‘A “gloriously ordinary life”: spotlight on adult social care’, Chapter 6: Independent living, Point 339-341.

Registration and administrative aspects

For people with intellectual disabilities, tasks like finding a place to live, dealing with paperwork, or getting financial support can be difficult. There is almost no information on housing available in easy-to-read. This makes it difficult to understand what properties are available to rent or buy, and which requirements need to be met.²⁵ Also, getting the necessary documents can be expensive and complicated.

Without the right support it becomes very hard for people with intellectual disabilities to find and keep a place of their own.²⁶

“I often thought I was lucky for my achievements in life. [...]

I don’t think people realise how our society is set up and can take away my choice on so many things, like where I want to work and what kind of job I want, where I want to live and who I want to live with.”

Tamara Byrne, self-advocate from Ireland²⁷

The challenges mentioned above are exacerbated for people with complex support needs. They are more likely to live in institutions and face even more barriers in accessing accessible, affordable and adequate housing.²⁸

²⁵ This is especially true for the private sector, where information on the accessibility of properties is particularly poor. House of Lords in the report ‘A “gloriously ordinary life”: spotlight on adult social care’, Chapter 6: [Independent living](#), Point 340.

²⁶ This situation is again comparable to the one that Roma face: [Roma Access to Quality and affordable housing in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Spain](#), Chapter: “Housing-related administrative exclusion”, page 46.

²⁷ I want people to treat me as an equal member of society, Tamara Byrne article by Inclusion Europe 2023 <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/i-want-people-to-treat-me-as-an-equal-member-of-society-tamara-byrne/>

²⁸ Inclusion Europe report on empowerment of people with complex support needs, <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Empowerment-of-people-with-complex-support-needs.pdf>

Examples solving some of the problems people with intellectual disabilities face in housing

Peer housing or supported housing

In Greece, the parents' association of people with intellectual disabilities (Petagma) operates supported living flats so tenants can live independently in the community. The association makes sure the needs and wishes of tenants are met in a person-centred plan and facilitates their active participation in society.²⁹

Financial support

The City of Prague, Czechia, supports people with intellectual disabilities to pay their deposit or the rent if they might be late. This way, landlords feel secure to rent flats to people with intellectual disabilities.³⁰

Partnership with social housing and private landlords

In France, Adapei69 developed a partnership with social landlords to secure places for people with intellectual disabilities. The NGO also carries out mediation services with the neighbourhood in case of problems so that the inclusion process works as smoothly as possible.³¹

²⁹ Petagma's website page, <https://www.petagma.gr/>

³⁰ Website page, <https://www.socialninadacnifond.praha.eu/why-we-are-here/>

³¹ Housing Page, Adapei 69, <https://www.adapei69.fr/accompagner-le-handicap-pole-habitat-et-vie-sociale/service-logement#:~:text=En%20tant%20qu'acteurs%20du,une%20location%20en%20toute%20sécurité>

In Brasil, the JNG Institute is a group of families who partnered with a student apartment provider to make use of the available housing stock for independent living. The housing is part of common building where people with and without disabilities live, in an urban neighbourhood.³²

Separating housing services and support

In Germany, Lebenshilfe Wetzlar-Weilburg provides solutions for people with intellectual disabilities by buying flats, and then they have a housing service.³³

There is a list of available flats, and people with intellectual disability can register on the list to get a flat when it becomes available. Even if the service is provided by Lebenshilfe, they can choose to be supported by other service providers (for support, cleaning, food, transport). This enables the support to be better, less biased.

Social housing

In the Netherlands, Sam&Zo is an example of social housing organised in an inclusive and sustainable way. The apartments will be in the centre of the city. The apartments are meant both for people with intellectual disabilities wanting to live independently and people without disabilities in need of social housing. Neighbours will help each other out or swing by for a cup of coffee in this social housing set up. Care is separated from housing with different service providers available to provide care and support. In addition, the housing corporation is looking to work together with the neighbourhood to make the apartments truly part of the community.³⁴

³² JNG Institute's webpage, <https://institutojng.org.br/en/independent-housing/>

³³ Website page Lebenshilfe Wetzlar-Weilburg, housing counselling, <https://www.lhwww.de/de/wohnen-leben/beratung.html>

³⁴ Website, <https://samenzo-wonen.nl/over>

Public developers of housing

The city of Lyon, France, when building in the city centre, built apartment buildings with social housing, to allow more diversity. Accessibility requirements were met, and solutions for local NGOs to flourish were thought of.³⁵

Supported-decision making

In Sweden, the Ombudsman is a public authority responsible for helping people with intellectual disabilities to make their decisions in important areas of lives, including housing³⁶.

Accessible information on housing

The Housing Agency of Ireland offers the Home and Support Hub which gathers information on accessing housing towards independent living. This hub gathers easy-to-read and understand information on how to access social housing, to buy or rent a home, to benefit from support services. Beyond information, it facilitates connections of people looking for housing solutions with the right interlocutors and help them to manage their home once tenant or owner. This platform is part of the Irish National Housing Strategy for Disabled People³⁷. In this framework, Inclusion Ireland works for the empowerment of people benefiting from this housing programme³⁸.

³⁵Online project description, <https://cdn.archilovers.com/projects/44e1b3cc111543aca2547080c24e3e3d.pdf>

³⁶ Website, <https://kunskapsguiden.se/omraden-och-teman/psykisk-ohalsa/personligt-ombud/>

³⁷ National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027

³⁸ Website, <https://www.homeandsupportshub.ie/support-and-services/awareness-campaign-and-stories/sarah-janes-story/>

Recommendations

To counter the barriers people with intellectual disabilities face in access to housing:

Count everyone

Local, regional and national authorities need to start counting adults with intellectual disabilities in housing-needs statistics. This includes adults living in institutions, with their families, and on the streets, as individuals seeking (social) housing.

To come up with accurate information, they must:

- collect data specific to people with intellectual disabilities
- involve people with intellectual disabilities and complex support needs in the design of data collection mechanisms and the collection of data
- review minimum standards of accessibility on a national level.

“We want to be able to connect with others, and to work together for our goals. We work together to build an inclusive society. We must share and learn from each other. We all have knowledge to share. Together we can change the world.”

Hear Our Voices manifesto³⁹

³⁹ Make it real, self-advocates' manifesto, 2023 <https://www.inclusion.eu/make-it-real-manifesto-from-hear-our-voices!-conference?e2r=1>

Collecting and evaluating data regularly will help understand what requirements must be included in the planning and building of all new housing by authorities and developers. Accurate data will make clear the different aspects of accessibility and inclusivity currently still ignored.

Registration for (social) housing

People with intellectual disabilities should register for (social) housing in their city. Families, support services etc. should help them to learn about this in good time, and to register.

Build new homes

Europe needs new housing. A lot of it. Build it.

And apply guidelines that ensure that parts of it are earmarked and made available to people with intellectual disabilities.

Provide realistic budgets for housing and support

National governments must recognise the lack of sufficient funding for inclusive and accessible (social) housing. Realistic budgeting is needed to counter the current shortage of available properties within the community.

To fulfil their responsibilities to provide available, affordable and accessible housing to all, national authorities must increase their spending to construct inclusive (social) housing. There should also be a boost in funding to create a consistent, long-term sustainable housing benefit regime for supported housing and services that assist people in living independently.

“My biggest fear is that I will be put back into an institution.

**If I feel good about something I also fear that this good feeling will
be taken away from me.”**

Mirjam Braspenning, Netherlands⁴⁰

Minimum accessibility requirements for current and future housing

Needs are diverse and individual. Governments must create, endorse and enforce guidelines to ensure that new housing meets the needs of everyone, including those with intellectual disabilities. By mandating minimum accessible standards for all new housing being built, policymakers and authorities can improve independence, well-being, and social inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities.⁴¹

Firstly, housing providers and developers must recognise sensory and neurodiverse needs as equally important to less ‘invisible’ accessibility requirements. This would provide many with a more inclusive living environment and should become the norm, not the exception.

To create adequate housing for people with intellectual disabilities, national and regional governments should move away from ‘build-and-fill’ and base their approach to housing on person-centred planning instead.⁴² This way people with intellectual

⁴⁰ <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/my-biggest-fear-is-that-i-will-be-put-back-into-an-institution/>

⁴¹ House of Lords report ‘A “gloriously ordinary life”: spotlight on adult social care’, Chapter 6: Independent living, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5803/ldselect/ldadultsoc/99/9909.htm#_idTextAnchor163

⁴² Report ‘Good Lives: Building change together’, Chapter 1: ‘A home’, report by Learning Disability England, 2022, page 14, https://www.learningdisabilityengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/The_Good_Lives_Framework-9.3.22.pdf

disabilities, their families, housing, and service providers would come together to plan the housing they want and need.

(Peer) supported housing

Supported housing creates supportive and inclusive environments that enable individuals to live independently and thrive within the community.

To make adequate and inclusive housing a reality for people with intellectual disabilities, governments need to create comprehensive national and local planning and policy frameworks for supported housing.

There should be rules about how much rent can be charged to help pay for new supported housing for those who need extra help.

It is important that people can live near their families and other people who support them within the community, if they choose so. This way they can foster local connections and ‘natural support’ when they need to.

“I think that it is very important that people with an intellectual disability or disability in general encourage each other to make the move.”

Rory, self-advocate from Ireland⁴³

⁴³ 19 Stories of Social Inclusion – Ireland: Stories of Belonging, Contributing and Connecting, National Disability Authority, 2018 <https://inclusionireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/19-stories-social-inclusion-ireland.pdf>

Make information accessible to all

Information in plain language, easy-to-read, easy spoken language, visual support, and alternative communication methods will help people with intellectual disabilities understand what (social) housing is available to them.³⁸

Investment in information, resources and skills will help them understand how to get access to housing that will suit them. This way they can make informed decisions on where to live.

“We want to understand the world we live in.

Information should be easy to understand, and available to all.”

Hear Our Voices manifesto⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Make it real, self-advocates' manifesto, 2023 <https://www.inclusion.eu/make-it-real-manifesto-from-hear-our-voices!-conference?e2r=1>