



Ambitions. Rights. Belonging.

20 years in EU

10 countries joined the EU 20 years ago.

What has changed for people with intellectual disabilities and their families in that time?



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Inclusion Europe, 2024

2004 EU enlargement

What is the EU?

The European Union is a group of 27 countries in Europe.

These countries came together to make things better, easier and safer for people.

They agreed to work together and help each other.



The paragraph above and the map come from [easy-to-read page about the EU](#).

What is EU enlargement?

Enlargement is when new countries join the European Union.

This has taken place several times in the EU's history.

Each country that applies to join the EU must fulfil some requirements and follow a process to become a member of the EU.

There are 3 steps when a country joins the EU (this is called the accession process):

1. **Candidacy.**

A country wishing to join the EU must submit a membership application to the Council of the EU.

The Council then asks the European Commission to check the applicant country's ability to fulfill the membership criteria.

Based on the Commission's recommendations, the Council decides whether to grant the country candidate status and to begin formal negotiations for its accession to the Union. All EU Member States must agree on this decision.

2. **Membership negotiations.**

The candidate country prepares to implement EU laws and standards.

The Commission monitors the candidate's progress, and keeps the Council and European Parliament informed.

3. **Accession.**

The Commission gives its opinion on whether the country is ready to join the EU.

If the Commission says the country is ready, an accession treaty is prepared.

The accession treaty must be approved by the European Commission, the European Council, and the European Parliament before being signed and ratified by all EU Member States and the candidate country.

These countries currently have candidate status to join the EU:

- Albania
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Georgia
- Moldova
- Montenegro
- North Macedonia
- Serbia
- Türkiye
- Ukraine

Kosovo has applied to join the EU, but has not received candidate status yet.

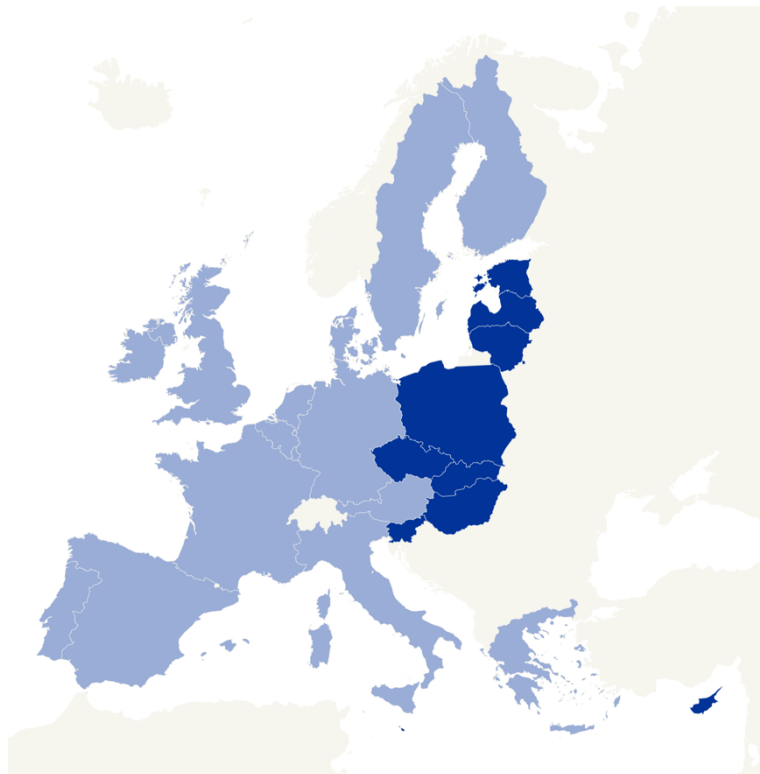
This information comes [from this page](#), and is up to date as of end of April 2024.

Which countries joined the EU in 2004?

On 1 May 2004, 10 countries joined the EU. It was the biggest number of countries to join the EU at the same time.

The countries that joined the EU in 2004 are:

1. Cyprus
2. Czechia
3. Estonia
4. Hungary
5. Latvia
6. Lithuania
7. Malta
8. Poland
9. Slovakia
10. Slovenia



Before the [2004 enlargement](#), the EU had 15 member countries, with a total population of almost 385 million people.

The 10 new countries had 74 million citizens.

After this enlargement, the EU had 25 member countries, and 459 million citizens.

Since then, Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007, and Croatia joined in 2013.

The United Kingdom left the EU in 2020.

There are now 27 EU countries, with 448 million citizens.

Why does this matter to people with intellectual disabilities and families?

When countries want to join the EU, there is an opportunity to advocate for changes in laws and policies that improve rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

Being in the EU also means there are many laws and policies that are directly about people with disabilities, for example:

Amsterdam Treaty (1997):

Article 13 of Amsterdam Treaty allows the EU to combat discrimination on various grounds, including disability.

Directive for equal treatment in employment and occupation (2000):

Article 1: "The purpose of this Directive is to lay down a general framework for combating discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual

orientation as regards employment and occupation, with a view to putting into effect in the Member States the principle of equal treatment."

EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (2009):

EU institutions, and national governments need to respect the Charter when drafting EU law and policy. National policymakers should respect the Charter when implementing EU law.

Article 21: "Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited. Within the scope of application of the Treaties and without prejudice to any of their specific provisions, any discrimination on grounds of nationality shall be prohibited."

EU is party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2010):

In 2007 the EU signed the UN CRPD, which is the first international human rights treaty ratified by the EU. From 2010 the EU is obliged to respect and fulfil the rights of people with disabilities as ratified in the CRPD.

EU member states must also fulfil the rights of people with disabilities, as they themselves ratified the CRPD too. In 2018, all EU members states have ratified the CRPD.

Web Accessibility Directive (2016):

This Directive applies to public sector organizations of member states of the European Union. Its goals is to ensure that public sector website are accessible for people with disabilities in the EU.

Pillar of Social Rights (2017):

The European Pillar of Social Rights defines 20 principles for the European Union to become more inclusive and fair. It was jointly approved by the European Parliament,

the European Council, and the European Commission in November 2017 which means all institutions of the European Union and all of its member states support the principles and rights expressed in the declaration.

European Accessibility Act (2019):

This directive aims to improve accessibility of products and services by removing country specific rules.

European Disability Rights Strategy (2021):

The ten-year strategy sets out key initiatives around 3 main themes: EU rights; Independent living and autonomy; Non-discrimination and equal opportunities.

EU Child Guarantee (2021):

The European Child Guarantee aims to ensure that every child in Europe who is at risk of poverty has access to essential services. Children with disabilities, and children in institutions are among the priority groups.

EU joins Istanbul Convention (2023):

The Council of Europe document sets out to prevent violence against women and girls.

All of EU countries have ratified the CRPD too.

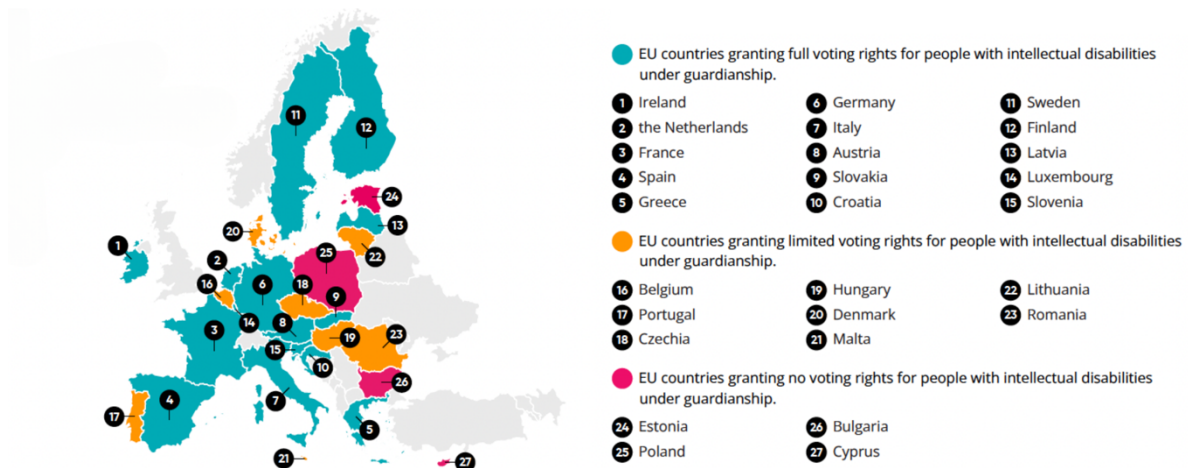
10 countries' overview

*4 of these countries completely deny people under guardianship their right to vote:
Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, and Poland.*

They are the only EU countries to do so.

Full voting rights for people with intellectual disabilities under guardianship are respected in Croatia, Latvia, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

The remaining countries allow the right to vote to be removed by a court decision.



Segregation of people with disabilities in so called “care” institutions remains a big problem.

Several of our members were involved in [our work](#) to advocate for deinstitutionalisation, and to develop self-advocacy. There were many activities in this area when these countries were joining the EU. Since then, a lot of other project and activities were done, benefiting from the [joint advocacy for transition from institutional to community-based care](#).

But still, many people remain institutionalised.

Larger institutional settings (30+ places) in use ([EEG report 2020](#)):

Country	Children	Children with disabilities	Adults with disabilities	Adults with mental health problems	Older adults	Unaccompanied and migrant children	Homeless people
Austria	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND
Belgium	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND
Bulgaria	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND
Croatia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND
Cyprus	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND
Czechia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND
Denmark	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND
Estonia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND	ND
Finland	ND	YES	YES	YES	YES	(NO)	ND
France	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND
Germany	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND
Greece	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Hungary	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Ireland	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	ND
Italy	YES		YES	YES	YES	YES	ND
Latvia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND	ND
Lithuania	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND	ND
Luxembourg	DN	(YES)	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
Malta	DN	(YES)	YES	YES	YES	(YES)	ND
Netherlands	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	(NO)	ND
Poland	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Portugal	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND
Romania	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND
Slovakia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND
Slovenia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND
Spain	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	ND
Sweden	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	ND

Cyprus

- [Cyprus signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007 and ratified it in 2011¹.](#)
- [The ratification led to the establishment of the Department of Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities under the Ministry of Labour in 2009¹.](#)
- [The first National Disability Action Plan was approved by the Council of Ministers in 2013¹.](#)

Inclusion Europe member:

- Pancyprrian Parents Association for People with Mental Handicap

Cyprus hosted the [Europe in Action conference in 2011.](#)

- The conference was about families role in disability rights.

Cyprus is one of the 4 EU countries that [completely deny right to vote](#) to people under guardianship.

Czechia

- [Czechia ratified the UN CRPD in 2009²](#).
- [The country has been transitioning from a medical model and welfare law to a civil and human rights law with regard to people with disabilities³](#).

Inclusion Europe members:

- [SPMP / Inclusion Czechia](#)
- Sebeobhájci Praha
- [Rytmus](#)

Czechia hosted two Europe in Action conferences in [2005](#) and [2017](#).

There was also event organised as part of European [Hear our Voices! self-advocacy conference in 2021](#).

[Ivo Vykydal](#) was president of Inclusion Europe in 2010-2011:

“Our vision is that communities in Europe include all people as full citizens. Action in different areas is necessary to ensure our values and vision are turned into reality.”

[Czechia](#) scores 4.3 out of 10 in Inclusion indicators about rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and families (2023).

- Czechia limits the right to decide, and the right to vote.
- There are quite a lot of people in large “care” institutions.

Estonia

- [Estonia defended its first national report of compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in March 2021⁴.](#)
- [The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities issued recommendations to Estonia in May 2021⁴.](#)

Inclusion Europe members:

- [Vaimukad](#): Eesti Vaimupuudega Inimeste Tugiliit (EVPIT)
- EVPIT Self-Advocacy Group

Estonia hosted Europe in Action conference in [2003](#); it was the first Europe in Action.

And also Hear our Voices! self-advocacy conference in [2023](#).

[Estonia](#) scores 5.5 out of 10 in Inclusion indicators about rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and families (2023).

- Estonia limits the right to decide.
- Estonia is one of the 4 EU countries that [completely deny right to vote](#) to people under guardianship.

Hungary

- [Hungary adopted its first Strategy for Persons with Disabilities in February 2021⁵.](#)

Inclusion Europe members:

- [ÉFOÉSZ](#)
- ÉFOÉSZ Self-Advocacy Group

Hungary organised an event as part of European [Hear our Voices! self-advocacy conference in 2021.](#)

In 2019, **László Bercse** was elected chair of the European Platform of Self-Advocates, and vice-president of Inclusion Europe:

***“Segregation means people with disabilities
are excluded from the community and cannot
take part in everyday activities.
I want us to live freely, like everyone else.”***

[Hungary](#) scores 5 out of 10 in Inclusion indicators about rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and families (2023).

- Legal capacity can be fully removed. People with intellectual disabilities have to do an exam to be able to vote.
- Most adults with intellectual disabilities live in larger institutions, also many live in psychiatric hospitals. Some of them live in smaller institutions.

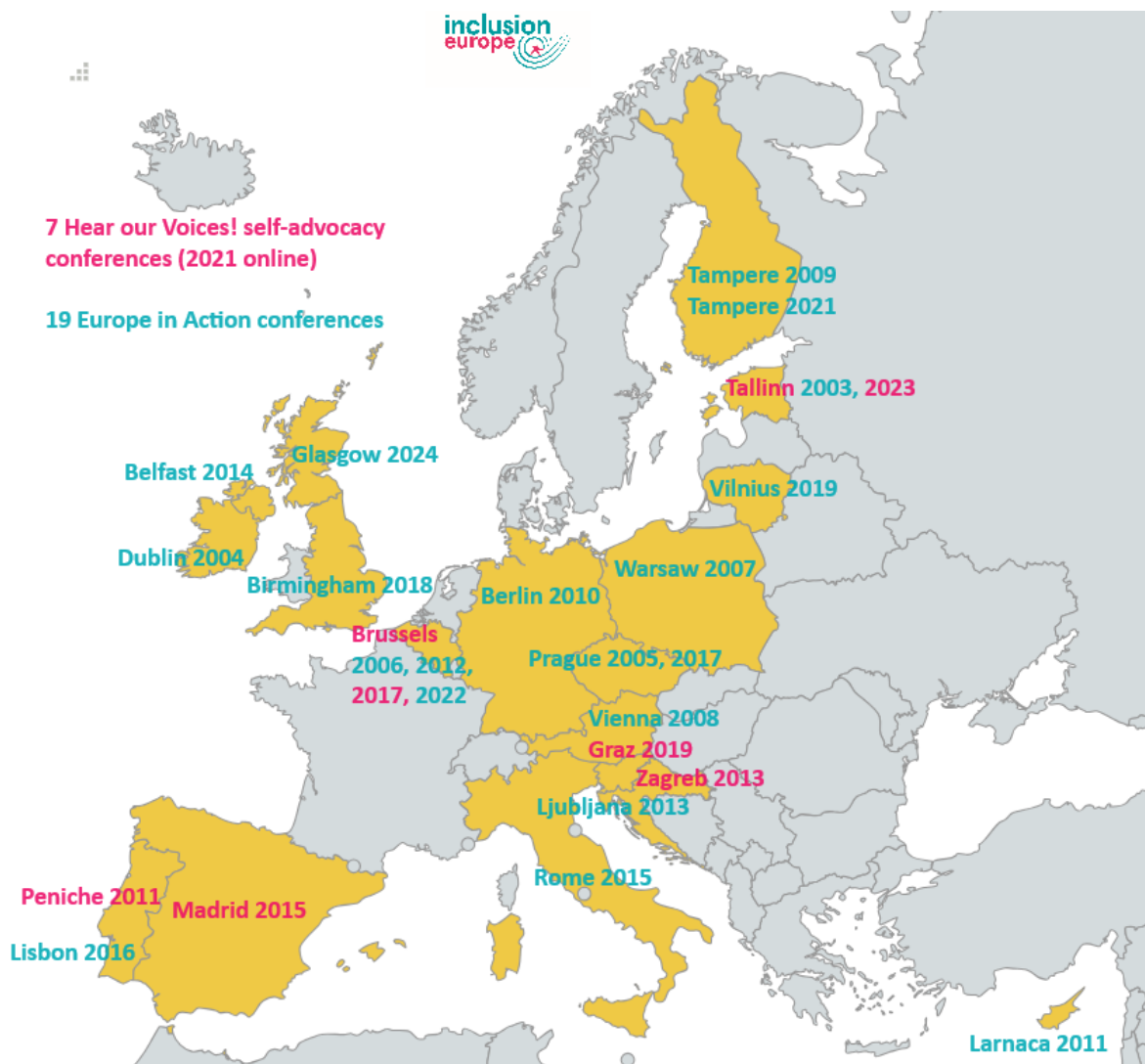
ÉFOÉSZ currently [participates in our work to improve representation](#) of self-advocates in cross-disability organisations, and in advocacy for deinstitutionalisation.

Latvia

- [Latvia has been moving from a medical disability assessment towards a bio-psycho-social model⁶.](#)
- [The first Strategy for Persons with Disabilities was adopted by the Council of Ministers in February 2021⁷.](#)

Inclusion Europe has currently no member in Latvia. Previously, Rupju berns was a member.

Map of Inclusion Europe conferences:



Lithuania

- [Lithuania has been moving from a medical disability assessment towards a bio-psycho-social model⁶.](#)
- [The first Strategy for Persons with Disabilities was adopted by the Council of Ministers in February 2021⁵.](#)

Inclusion Europe member:

- [Viltis](#)

Lithuania hosted Europe in Action conference in [2019](#).

[Lithuania](#) scores 4.7 out of 10 in Inclusion indicators about rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and families (2023).

- Legal capacity can be fully removed and this limits people with intellectual disabilities in their right to vote or stand for elections.
- Very few people with intellectual disabilities have a job on the open labour market, and they risk to lose their disability benefits when they earn their own salary.

View from Lithuania:

What changed in the past 20 years?

By **Dana Migaliova**

president of [Viltis](#), Lithuania;
board member of Inclusion Europe



On May 28, 2010, the Lithuanian Seimas (parliament) ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This is a big step forward to ensure fulfilling life for people with disabilities.

People with disabilities have the right to education, to work, to care, to receive accessible information, to have informal education, to attend a day care center or to live in adapted housing.

People's [attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities and families have improved](#), although society still needs to be educated to accept every person with a disability.

Relations between organisations of people with disabilities, municipalities, politicians, ministries of the Republic of Lithuania have strengthened. Opinions of organisations of people with disabilities are important when creating or changing laws. Several projects have been completed thanks to the cooperation of municipalities and the "Viltis" community, for example, *Vilties sodas* in Panevezys (Garden of Hope).

For 10 years, the transformation of institutional care has been underway in Lithuania: Transition from institutional care to family and community-based services for disabled and orphaned children. Not a single boarding school for children is left in Lithuania.

49 group homes for people with intellectual and mental disability were established by 2022; 426 people live in them. There are plans to open 50 group homes for 500 persons. Sheltered housing is being developed, and social workshops opened.

Group home in Lentvaris and group living home in Vilnius started its activities in march 2024. They are part of the project “Creation and development of a network of infrastructure of social services for persons with intellectual and mental disabilities” funded by the European Union.

Adaptation of the environment and accessibility of information (text, video, audio). Easy-to-read language is developed. The websites of some companies already offer information in an easy-to-read language. It makes it easier for people with disabilities to better understand the activities of companies.

Participation in various programs and projects organised by the European Commission strengthens partnership relations between participants. International cooperation is accessible to people with disabilities and broadens the horizons of people with intellectual disabilities. "Viltis" has partners in Western and Eastern European countries, participates in project activities.

In 2022, the basic amounts of social benefits have been doubled; social pensions paid to disabled people have been increased, as well as targeted compensation for disabled people with special needs.

What changes would you like to see in your country?

- To Improve the system of organization and provision of complex services for persons with disabilities. Services must be available to meet individual needs, especially for people with profound and complex disabilities, and therefore also for their parents. Not only highly qualified specialists are needed, but also many assistants to ensure the quality of the life of persons with intellectual disability.
- Inclusive Education: The need for inclusive education will help to build an inclusive, progressive society. From September 2024, approximately 3,000 children with disabilities will have the opportunity to join the mainstream school communities.
- To develop the reform of Article 12 (equal recognition before the law), which is stalled now;
- To develop supported decision-making system, which is stalled too;
- To reduce bureaucratic barriers to representing the interests of people with intellectual disabilities because there is a lack of national funding for advocacy;
- To eliminate many shortcomings: lack of funding for services, sluggish involvement of municipalities, too many reforms and lack of continuity;
- To reduce excessive requirements on service providers: the staff, the environment, because this limits the opportunities for NGOs to participate in the social services market.

Malta

- [Malta has been working on the Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030⁸.](#)
- [The country is preparing the third EU disability card project⁸.](#)

Inclusion Europe members:

- [INSPIRE](#) – The Foundation for Inclusion
- [Malta Federation of Organisations of Persons with Disability](#) (MFOPD)
- Movement in Favour of Rights for Persons with Disability – Down Syndrome Association
- [National Parents' Society of Persons with Disability](#)

[Malta](#) scores 5.7 out of 10 in Inclusion indicators about rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and families (2023).

- Legal capacity can be partially removed, but people with intellectual disabilities are allowed to vote. It does limit the right to stand for elections.
- Most adults with intellectual disabilities live with their family and there is little support. Almost no one lives in their own place.

Poland

- [Poland published a comprehensive research study on employment of disabled people in 2004⁹.](#)
- [The first Polish Strategy for Persons with Disabilities was adopted by the Council of Ministers in February 2021⁵.](#)

Inclusion Europe member:

- [PSONI](#)

Poland hosted Europe in Action conference in [2007](#).

Poland is one of the 4 EU countries that [completely deny right to vote](#) to people under guardianship.

Slovakia

- [Slovakia is currently preparing the third EU disability card project¹⁰.](#)
- [The country is also working on the Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030¹⁰.](#)

Inclusion Europe member:

- [ZPMP](#)

[Malta](#) scores 4.7 out of 10 in Inclusion indicators about rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and families (2023).

- Most adults with intellectual disabilities live in larger institutions, few live in smaller institutions.
- Most adults with intellectual disabilities live with their family, and they receive little support. Few live in their own place.

ZPMP currently [participates in our work to improve representation](#) of self-advocates in cross-disability organisations, and in advocacy for deinstitutionalisation.

Slovenia

- [Slovenia published a comprehensive research study on employment of disabled people in 2004⁹.](#)
- [The country is working on the Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030¹¹.](#)

Inclusion Europe members:

- [ZVEZA SOŽITJE](#)
- Center for training, work and protection Dolfka Boštjančič, Draga

Slovenia hosted Europe in Action conference in [2013](#).

[Slovenia](#) scores 4.3 out of 10 in Inclusion indicators about rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and families (2023).

Slovenia [recently restored](#) the right to vote for all people under guardianship.

This is just a brief overview. There is [much more work](#) that was done, projects realised, events organised that organisations from these countries were involved in.

Inclusion Europe

Inclusion Europe speaks up for people with intellectual disabilities and their families since 1988.



We advocate for equal rights and full inclusion in all aspects of life representing 20 million people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

We are a European organisation with members in over 30 countries representing in a democratic way the rights and interests of all people with intellectual disabilities and their families in Europe.

www.inclusion.eu



Co-funded by the
European Union

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