



FACT SHEET: Housing

1. The principles of Independent Living

“Living independently” does not mean that disabled people have to be independent in the sense of living a highly individualised and self-sufficient life, at a distance from other people. When we discuss the concept of independent living, we understand it in terms of choice, control and with grounding in the social model of disability. The social model reminds us that disabled people should not perceive barriers as a result of their impairment, but of the social and physical environment in which they live. The ‘Independent Living’ Factsheet, produced by ENIL, reminds us that “in enabling environments, things are not done to a person, but rather disabled people are supported, just like anyone else, to make independent and autonomous, and when needed, supported decisions.” Housing needs to support the ethos of independent living in just the same way as other aspects of a disabled person’s life, such as access to personal assistance and meaningful employment.

The term ‘Independent Living’ will not be defined in the same way by all disabled people. It will vary greatly depending on personal preferences and individual choice. Of the utmost importance is that disabled people can live the life they choose to and have access to the same opportunities a non-disabled person has.

1. Where should we look for legislation and guidance regarding housing?

Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises “the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community, with choices equal to others”, and requires that states take “effective and appropriate measures to facilitate full enjoyment by persons with disabilities of this right and their full inclusion and participation in the community.”

The European Disability Strategy (2010-2020) states that “people with disabilities must have access to goods, services and assistive devices. Similarly, their access to transport, facilities, and information and communication technologies must be ensured in the same way as for able-bodied people.” Thus, housing must be adapted, and the necessary assistance to ensure disabled people can live independently should be provided.



According to Article 19(a) of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, disabled people should “have the opportunity to choose their place of residence and where and with whom they live on an equal basis with others” and should not be “obliged to live in a particular living arrangement”. ENIL believe in independent living, rather than group housing, in order that disabled people may achieve autonomy, choice and control in their lives. Furthermore, Article 19(b) states, community support services for disabled people should “prevent isolation or segregation from the community”.

The European Coalition for Community Living defines an institution as “...any place in which people who have been labelled as having a disability are isolated, segregated and/or compelled to live together. An institution is also any place in which people do not have, or are not allowed to exercise control over their lives and their day-to-day decisions.” ENIL are strongly against disabled people living within institutions as independence cannot be achieved.

2. What do we mean when we talk about housing in terms of Independent Living?

- Disabled people having choice and control in terms of where they wish to live.
- Ensuring the required level of support is provided to allow disabled people to live within their own home. It is important to point out that disabled people can be isolated and be prevented from living independently both within institutions and within their own home if there is no adequate support available.
- The built environment within the house must be fully accessible and any necessary adaptations made to ensure it is fully inclusive of the disabled person’s access requirements.
- The necessary support needs to be provided to ensure the physical environment within the home is not a barrier to living independently.
- Any support services required should be separate from housing. This ensures that should any aspect of a support package need to be changed, the housing remains unaffected.



3. What do not we mean when we talk about housing in terms of Independent Living?

- Disabled people being told where they must live, with whom and what support they will receive, with little or no personal input.
- Disabled people living within groups and institutions.
- Housing provision clustered within one particular area. Housing should be dispersed throughout the community, thus providing a higher level of choice.

4. What action is being taken to help ensure disabled people have access to the housing they want?

ENIL are very active in the area of supporting disabled people to live independently. One of our key areas of work is related to the use of the EU Structural and Investment Funds. ENIL have demanded that public money should not be used to build new institutions or to renovate existing ones since this is in direct contravention of the UN disability treaty which the EU has ratified. Instead, the EU funds should be invested in developing high quality support services in the community that facilitate Independent Living and in ensuring access to mainstream services, such as housing, education, employment, transport, and others. The European Union has now explicitly stated that Structural Funds should not be used “for building new residential institutions or the renovation and modernisation of existing ones”, save in exceptional cases “where urgent and life-threatening risks to residents linked to poor material conditions need to be addressed, but only as transitional measures within the context of a de-institutionalisation strategy” (see the Report on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities).

Between 2014 and 2015, ENIL was a strategic partner to the European Core Learning Outcomes for Integration of Support and Housing (ELOSH). This was a European project aimed to improve the cooperation between social support services and the housing sector as a way to tackle institutionalisation and social exclusion of people with support needs. It addressed the need for continuing vocational education and training on the integration of support and housing, based on the co-production principle (on co-production see ENIL’s factsheet).



A recent study found there were seven necessary conditions for a “dignity-enabling home” (see Gibson’s *et al*, 2012). These conditions ranged from sustaining relationships, ensuring control over daily living, to ensuring access to the community and work or school and having opportunities for self-expression and identity affirmation. Although the study focussed on disabled people who lived within an ‘attended’ housing facility, the conditions described could be said to be in line with independent living. Indeed, ENIL actively believe that group settings are not appropriate living spaces for disabled people; rather independent living is advocated for; nevertheless, the findings of the study are important when discussing independent living and the desired outcomes.



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