



# NETWORKING MANUAL

European Network on Independent Living  
2016

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## Introduction

This manual is developed as part of the project ‘Empowering Belarus CSOs to advocate for social inclusion and promote participatory decision making for people with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities in 6 regions of Belarus’. It aims to contribute to better understanding of networking as a powerful tool for raising awareness and challenging stereotypes and prejudice towards disabled people, for building capacity of stakeholders (disabled people, families and carers, professionals or policy-makers and the community in general) and for advocating for social inclusion and independent living. The right of disabled people to live independently and be included in the community is set out in Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was signed by Belarus in 2015.

The Manual begins with a brief overview of independent living philosophy before going on to present some of the key characteristics of networks and the different network types. It then discusses the process of creating and making a network sustainable and outlines the main benefits and challenges of networking. Case studies of national and European networks are also included as illustrations.

## What is independent Living?

Independent Living is ‘the daily demonstration of human rights-based disability policies. Independent Living is possible through the combination of various environmental and individual factors that allow disabled people to have control over their own lives. This includes the opportunity to make choices and decisions regarding where to live, with whom to live and how to live. Services must be accessible to all and provided on the basis of equal opportunity, allowing disabled people flexibility in their daily life. Independent Living requires that the built environment and transport are accessible, that there is availability of technical aids, access to personal assistance and/or community-based services. Independent Living is for **all** disabled persons, regardless of the level of their support needs’.<sup>1</sup>

Independent Living is often wrongly understood and translated as being self-sufficient. Independent living does not require disabled people to live alone or do everything by themselves without assistance from others or without contact with support services. It means having the control over one’s live, including making choices about where, with whom and how to live.

It is very often assumed that Independent Living is not for everyone and that institutional care is required for some groups of disabled people. For example, people with intellectual

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<sup>1</sup> European Network on Independent Living, [www.enil.eu](http://www.enil.eu)

impairments and more complex mental health and other needs are usually seen as 'too disabled' to live in the community. This is a myth. If given the right support everyone can live in the community.<sup>2</sup>

## **Independent Living Movement**

The Independent Living movement developed in the United States of America around the 1960s and 1970s. The first well-known Centre for Independent Living (CIL) was established at the California University in Berkeley in 1972 by Ed Roberts, who is often seen as the Father of Independent Living. The idea of the Independent Living movement began to spread to Europe in the late 1970's. Some of the pioneers of the movement in Europe were Adolf Ratzka who founded STIL (the Stockholm Cooperative for Independent Living) in 1984 and John Evans – one of the first advocates for and users of personal assistance services in the UK. Similar self-advocacy movements emerged around the same time in Finland, Zimbabwe, Switzerland, Japan and Canada. In the 1990s and 2000s the independent living ideas spread to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and many Centres for Independent Living were founded. Controlled by disabled people, these CILs, engage in advocacy and provision of peer support to disabled people.

Some of the key themes of the Independent Living Movement are:

- housing,
- transport,
- access,
- education,
- employment,
- community-based services,
- personal assistance,
- peer support, and
- deinstitutionalisation

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<sup>2</sup> ENIL (2014) Myth Buster.

## What is a network?

A network can be defined in different ways<sup>3</sup>, for example:

- ‘an association of independent individuals or institutions with a shared purpose or goal, whose members contribute resources and participate in two-way exchanges or communication.’
- ‘...more or less formal, more or less durable relational patterns that emerge as a result of such efforts [to build relationships with each other]. The core business is not the manufacture of products or the provision of services, but social learning, communication and the making of meaning.’
- ‘a group of expert institutions working together on a common concern, to strengthen each other’s research and communications capacity, to share knowledge bases and develop solutions that meet the needs of target decision-makers at the national and international level’
- ‘a network can be called a network when the relationships between those in the network are voluntarily entered into, the autonomy of participants remains intact and there are mutual or joint activities’<sup>4</sup>

Based on the above definitions, the following key characteristic of a network can be identified:

- **Common goals and values:** Shared goals *and* values is what brings and keeps the members of the network together (see chapter Building a network)
- **Interaction and exchange between members:** Includes various activities, such as sharing information and knowledge or engaging in joint actions, which contribute to the achievement of network’s goals.
- **Voluntary participation:** Organisations and individuals are free to decide whether to join and when to leave a network or how involved they want to be in the governance and activities.
- **Autonomy of participants:** Members of the network are independent organisations with own identity, mission and governance structures.
- **Non-hierarchical structure:** While the network may have a centre, for example a Secretariat established to facilitate the networking process, the cooperation

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<sup>3</sup> ICCO/ECDPM (2004) quoting Plucknett, Creech/Willard, and Engel. Available at: [www.mande.co.uk/docs/networkingforlearning.pdf](http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/networkingforlearning.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Church et al (2012) quoted in Østergaard, L. and Nielsen, J. (n.d.) To network or not to network: NGO experiences with technical networks. Available at: [www.wikiciv.org.rs/images/c/c7/To\\_Network\\_or\\_not\\_to\\_Network.pdf](http://www.wikiciv.org.rs/images/c/c7/To_Network_or_not_to_Network.pdf)

between the members is horizontal, non-hierarchical. All members of the network are equal.

- **Commitment to equity:** Each member brings added value to the network.

### Networks and networking

- **Networking** is a verb, which refers to the act of sharing information and participating in activities together with other individuals or/and organisations.
- **Network** is a noun, which refers to the arrangement, the structure that facilitates the collaboration between individuals or/and organisations.

Joining a network or being a member of a network does not necessarily mean networking. Some members of a network could be more passive and not seeking to engage in exchanges with others, i.e. in networking.

## Types of networks

There are various classifications of networks, based on characteristics, such as structure, legal status, duration, purpose, membership, geographical coverage, etc. It is important to underline that while such classifications could help understand the diversity of networks, they create an incomplete picture. The division between the different types of networks is not as clear cut as the classifications may lead us to believe. Networks often fall into more than one category at the same time (e.g. working at local and national level) or they move from one category to another (e.g. from informal to formal).

### Types of networks according to their structure

- Informal networks: coordination is shared or based on rotation of members.
- Formal networks: with established durable structures and operating mechanisms, usually with centralised coordination, for example, secretariat with (paid) staff.

These two categories are not homogenous; they include organisations with different degrees of formality/informality. Therefore, it will be more useful to present the structure of the networks as a continuum from informal to formal rather than as two distinctive categories. Most of the organisations will fall between the two ends of the scale.



As networks develop and change their degree of formality can vary considerably. Some networks are established as formal institutions. Others start as informal union of individuals and/or organisations and become more formal at a later stage, when a need arises. Yet

others prefer not to formalise and remain informal.

Both types of structures – informal and formal – have their advantages and challenges. Informal networks allow for greater flexibility but when the number of members increases it might be difficult to ensure equitable relations and participation in decision-making. Formal networks, on the other hand, may have in place mechanisms to support democratic decision-making, but there is a risk that they become more hierarchical. The following table presents a summary of the potential advantages and disadvantages of formalisation.

<b>Potential advantages of formal networks</b>	<b>Challenges related to formalisation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- enhanced legitimacy with policy-makers</li> <li>- opportunity to apply for funding directly</li> <li>- can cope with increased workload (hired staff)</li> <li>- better communication and coordination as a result of the introduction of mechanisms supporting democratic decision-making (for networks with more members)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- risk of concentration of power in the centre of the network (hierarchisation)</li> <li>- members who prefer more informal relationships can drop out</li> <li>- more costs (e.g. for staff, office) and therefore need to secure funding</li> <li>- increased bureaucratisation</li> </ul>

Some examples of informal networks in this chapter include the Coalition of non-governmental organisations in Bulgaria and Dizabnet in Romania, and of formal networks – the Latvian movement for Independent Living. For more information, see chapter Network structure and management.

### **Types of networks according to duration**

- Short-term: some networks are formed for specific periods of time to respond to sudden changes in the context or to mobilise support to forward specific issue. This could include, for example, opposing change in legislation, preparing a report, etc. When their goal is achieved, they dissolve.
- Long-term: aim to achieve a goal, which will require long-term efforts, for example, deinstitutionalisation, inclusive education, etc.

A network, which is formed as a temporary union to address certain issue, can transform into a long-term network. However, moving from short- to long-term duration or from informal to formal structure is not necessarily the best way forward for all networks and it should not be seen as an indicator for the successful development and effectiveness of the network. The decision to continue to work as a network on long-term goals should be based

on an analysis of the situation, members' interests and preferences and the expected costs and benefits. Sometimes the time and energy to maintain a network significantly outweighs the outcomes.

#### **Coalition of NGOs in Bulgaria – informal, short-term, advocacy network**

In 2004 five Bulgarian-based NGOs with expertise in the area of social and human rights policy, including Save the Children, International Initiative for Human Rights, EveryChild, Centre for Independent Living – Sofia and the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, gathered together in a temporary informal coalition. The aim of the coalition was to draft an Alternative Regular Report on Bulgaria's Progress Towards European Union Accession. After the report was drafted and presented to the relevant institutions the coalition disbanded. Some of the organisations have been involved in other joint activities since.

#### **Types of networks according to membership**

There are different typologies of membership depending on the criteria used, for example:

- Individuals/organisations: Some networks are composed entirely of individuals or organisations, while others have both individual and organisational members.
- Cross-sectoral/one sectoral: Includes individuals and/or organisations from one or different sectors, for example, NGOs, private companies, government, media, and academia.

#### **Latvian movement for Independent Living – formal, cross-sectoral advocacy network**

Latvian movement for Independent Living is a formal cross-sectoral network working to promote independent living, deinstitutionalisation and the implementation of the social model of disability in Latvia. Its membership consists of individuals and organisations and includes service providers, professional organisations, organisations of people with disabilities, organisations of parents, and individual academics.

For more information, see: [www.lkndz.lv](http://www.lkndz.lv)

#### **Types of networks according to geographical coverage**

- Local
- Regional
- National
- International



## Types of civil society networks according to their purpose

The two most common purposes of NGO networks include social change and building the capacity of their members.

- **Social change:** Often referred to as ‘alliances’, ‘coalitions’ or ‘advocacy networks’ these networks seek to achieve their goal by influencing policies. Their activities involve direct engagement with policy-makers through advocacy and lobbying as well as organising campaigns. Most of the examples in the Manual are of advocacy networks, including the Latvian movement for Independent Living and the Coalition of NGOs in Bulgaria, described above, the Alliance against Disability Cuts and Disabled People Against Cuts (see chapter Network Structure and Decision-making).
- **Mutual learning and/or capacity building:** Networks engaged in various activities that facilitate the exchange of information and experience between the members of the network, such as websites, newsletters, libraries, workshops and trainings, exchange visits sharing of information, experience, problems and good practices.

### **Dizabnet – informal, cross-sectoral, capacity-building network**

Dizabnet is a Romanian network of social service providers in the field of disabilities with more than 70 members from public and private sectors. Its goal is to encourage the active collaboration between organisations providing services for disabled people and to contribute to the improvement of quality of these services.

For more information, see: [www.disabnet.ro](http://www.disabnet.ro)

There are also other types of network goals, more common among organisations working in a specific area. For example, international development organisations establish coordination networks to coordinate policies, programmes and activities to avoid duplication<sup>5</sup>. Publicly funded organisations and institutions in the health and human service sectors form networks (service provision or integrated services networks) to ensure that the care provided is person centred (based on users’ needs) and timely and to reduce duplication and gaps in service delivery<sup>6</sup>.

Some networks have one single purpose, for example, to facilitate the mutual learning of

<sup>5</sup> Ashman, D, Charles, C., Cuenca, A., Luca, C., Singer, B. and Schmith, M. (2005) *Supporting civil society networks in international development programmes*. Academy for Educational Development. Available at: <http://www.ngoconnect.net/documents/592341/749044/Supporting+Civil+Society+Networks+in+International+Development>

<sup>6</sup> Liebler, C. and Ferri, M. (2004) *NGO networks: building capacity in a changing world*. BDCHA. Available at: [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/Pnadb767.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnadb767.pdf)

the members on topics of common interest, such as deinstitutionalisation or organisation of support services in community. However, many of the networks have multiple purposes – advocacy as well as capacity building of members.

#### **Deinstitutionalisation Network (MDI) – informal, one-sectoral, advocacy and capacity-building network**

MDI is a Slovenian network uniting non-governmental organisations working on deinstitutionalisation. It provides support to NGOs with the aim to improve their resources and knowledge and to increase their role and influence in the process of deinstitutionalisation in the country. At the same time, it seeks to influence the policy-making process to ensure successful deinstitutionalisation and provision of quality community-based services for disabled people.

For more information, see: <http://www.za-mdi.si>

## **Benefits of networking**

The pooling of knowledge and resources of several organisations and/or individuals can have a number of benefits for the members of the network, including<sup>7</sup>:

- **Increased impact:** Participation in a network can facilitate the achievement of members' goals and objectives. For example, advocacy networks allow members to 'amplify their voices'<sup>8</sup>, to reach out to higher policy levels and thus, to achieve greater impact. On the other hand, service providers can improve the quality of their services, expand the scale of their programmes and reach out to more people when they are part of a network.
- **Increased access to resources:** All members have access to the shared resources of the network, such as information, expertise, knowhow, contacts, channels for influence, etc.
- **Increased efficiency:** The sharing of lessons learned and good practices can reduce the costs of the individual organisations. In addition, participation in a network allows for some specialisation, which can also make the work of the members more cost-effective.
- **Increased visibility:** By working together organisations can reach to wider audience, which increases the visibility of their work (e.g. good practices, successful campaigns) and the issues they are working on (e.g. deinstitutionalisation or

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Ashman, D. et al. *op. cit.*

inclusive education).

- **Increased credibility:** Since many networks have specific requirements for membership, for example with regard to their values, experience, or the area of work, participation in a network shows that the organisation is a capable and reliable partner. This can open doors to policy-makers, donors and new partnerships.
- **Solidarity and support** among the network members.
- **Reduced Isolation:** Through networking, NGOs in even the most remote locations have access to the knowledge and resources of partners across the world.
- **Improved social capital:** The good links established with other organisations and individuals sharing similar values and goals remain even after the network has disbanded and could be used as a resource for future actions.

## Building a network

Overall, the process of building a network goes through a series stages in which key questions need to be discussed and clarified<sup>9</sup>. This includes questions related to network's goals and objectives, scope, activities, structure and management, decision-making, membership, resources, etc. However, the evolution of a network is not a linear process of moving from one stage to the other. As the network grows and changes it may need to go back and discuss some of the questions again.

### Network formation

Networks can begin their lives in different ways. Sometimes networks naturally grow out of different events (protests, working groups, conferences, workshops, etc.) where people with common interest and values gather together. For example, the European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) was established at an independent living conference (see the case study at the end of this chapter). Disabled People Against Cuts, a network of disabled people and supporters in the United Kingdom, was formed after a march, which served as a catalyst for the founding of DPAC (see the case study in chapter Network Structure and Decision-making).

The formation of a network can also be initiated by individuals and/or organisations which seeks to facilitate closer cooperation towards a goal of particular importance for them.

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<sup>9</sup> Augustin, E. (2009) *Civil society networks – types and success factors*. Available at: [www.saaned.com/file/Network%20analysis\\_Cairo\\_2009.pdf](http://www.saaned.com/file/Network%20analysis_Cairo_2009.pdf)

**The European Coalition for Community Living (ECCL)** is a Europe-wide cross disability initiative working towards the social inclusion of people with disabilities by promoting the provision of comprehensive, quality community-based services as an alternative to institutionalisation. ECCL was founded in 2005 by the European Network on Independent Living, Autism Europe, the Center for Policy Studies of the Central European University, the European Disability Forum, Inclusion Europe, Mental Health Europe and the Open Society Mental Health Initiative. It now has 85 members – individuals and organisations.

For more information, see: <http://community-living.info/>

The stimulus for the establishment of a network can also come from the outside – from a donor or from external organisation.

**The European Disability Forum (EDF)** was first created by the European Commission as a consultative body for one of its Action Programmes with the purpose to express the views of disabled people. It was comprised of representatives of disabled people's organisations as well as employers' organisations and trade unions. After the end of the Programme, EDF was formally established as a network representing disabled people in Europe. Currently it unites national disability councils and European NGOs/nationally representative organisations of disabled people and disability NGOs with members in a majority of the European countries.

For more information, see: <http://www.edf-feph.org/>

It is important to note that the stimulus for the formation of the network will have impact on its development.

### **Identifying the issue and setting out values and goals**

Usually the first stage in the development of a network is the recognition by a group of people (representatives of organisation/s or not involved in organisations) of an issue which a network could help address. This could be, for example, the lack of awareness among disabled people, policy-makers and society as a whole of a certain philosophy or approach (for example, independent living), the limited effectiveness and impact of NGO activities in specific area (for example, deinstitutionalisation or personal assistance), the insufficient access to information or capacity of professionals in a particular field, the need to improve the quality of services provided, etc.

Early in the process of development of the network, its founding members need to agree on its main values and goals by answering the following questions:

- What do we believe in?

- What change/s do we want to achieve?
- How are we going to work to achieve these changes?

The question about network's goals is very important. First, a focused and clearly articulated goal to which all members agree, can prevent future problems in the functioning of the network stemming from members' different ideas about its goals. Membership of the network should be restricted to people and/or organisations sharing its goals and values (see the next section – Deciding about network's structure and management). Second, clear and shared goals will also ensure that the activities of the network are in line with its goals and values. This may involve making difficult decisions to refuse funding or other resources<sup>10</sup>. Third, since the goals are the base on which decision about structure and scope are made, well-defined goals will ensure that the structure and the scope of the network are adequate to its needs.

It is often better to discuss the values and goals of the network with a core group of network founders and to open up to new members once a clear mission has been agreed. If the network is too big at the start, it will be more difficult to satisfy all the members when defining the goals.

The values and the goals can be presented as network's vision, mission, goals and objectives.

- Vision: The image of the ideal future situation. For example, 'A world where disabled people have control over their lives and can live independently'.
- Mission: Usually one sentence describing the network, the overall change it wants to achieve and how it is going to achieve it. For example, 'The mission of XXX is to campaign for, and provide information on, independent living'.
- Goals and objectives: Goals could be long-term or short-term (often referred to as 'objectives'). 'Promote the right of disabled people to live independently and participate fully in an inclusive and accessible society'. The objectives are more specific and measurable, for example, 'Closure of residential institutions for disabled people and their replacement with accessible mainstream services and adequate community-based support, including personal assistance'. Based on the goals and the objectives, specific actions are identified, for example, 'Publication of a Manual on the transition from institutional care to community-based services'.

Depending on the focus of the network, the same statement, for example, 'Deinstitutionalisation and development of community-based services' could be a goal or

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<sup>10</sup> ICASO (2002) *HIV/AIDS networking guide*, second edition. Available at: [http://gametlibrary.worldbank.org/FILES/464\\_HIV%20AIDS%20Networking%20Guide\\_ICASO.pdf](http://gametlibrary.worldbank.org/FILES/464_HIV%20AIDS%20Networking%20Guide_ICASO.pdf)

objective. For example, for a network, which seeks to promote independent living in general, this is an objective but it could be a goal for a network, which is primarily concerned with deinstitutionalisation. It is important to keep in mind that goals are not wishes. They should be realistic and concrete enough to be realisable.

### **Deciding about network's structure and management**

This involves deciding about:

- what will be the scope of the network (local, national or international),
- what will be the membership (individuals and/or organisations, from which sector/s, etc.)
- what decision-making process to adopt, and
- how much structure and what structure to have.

The decision about the membership may also involve introducing criteria related to the values or the approach of the members, in addition to criteria related to the sector, coverage, etc. Organisations working in the same area could have very different, even conflicting values and approaches. For example, some organisations may share a social understanding of disability as caused by environmental barriers while other may support an individual/medical understanding which explains the difficulties disabled people face in their daily living, with their physical, sensory or intellectual impairment. The former are likely to support the development of inclusive education, while the latter – the proliferation of special educational settings. Even when the stated goals of the organisations are similar, for example, to improve the quality of life of disabled people, some may focus on providing charity while others – on advocating for rights. Therefore, at an early stage the network members need to decide whether the goals of the network require additional criteria related to the values or the approach of the members. For example, the European Network on Independent Living requires that '[t]he person or association who wishes to be a Member of ENIL should defend, accept and abide the principles of Independent Living and Personal Assistance'<sup>11</sup>. This criterion follows logically from ENIL's main goal, which is to promote the Independent Living philosophy.

The next chapter will look in more details at the different network structures and decision-making arrangements.

### **Getting the network operational**

Once the mission, goals and objectives of the network are clear, the network enters into an

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.enil.eu/join-enil/>

operational stage. If in line with its mission, this could involve activities aimed to promote the network and attract new members, such as creating a website and sending out information about the network to potential future members and other stakeholders.

Regular communication between members (for example, in the form of a newsletter) can also be established at this stage. Depending on the available financial and human resources, the network can organise joint activities, for example, online or face-to-face workshops. At the beginning, especially if the resources are limited, it might be better to focus on one joint activity and to do it properly. Unsatisfactory performance can discourage members and potential members, while success can contribute to building trust and to more active engagement and participation.

### **Growth and sustainability**

Often growth is a natural outcome of networks' functioning. For example, successful activities can improve the visibility of the network and can lead to more organisations/individuals applying for membership. In addition to increasing the number of members, growth may involve expanding the scope (e.g. from local to national or to international) and developing new areas of work or activities, including joining other networks and setting up alliances or networks on specific topics.

Growth usually poses various challenges to networks. It often requires revision of the governance structure and a move from informal to more formal organisation, including, for example, establishing a Secretariat and hiring staff. Questions about network's mission and goals may also appear with the growing number of new members who bring their own views and ideas and with the increasing involvement of the network in other networks and groups. The fast expansion can also lead to overextending the resources of the network. All these challenges need to be acknowledged and discussed openly to find the most suitable solution.

With the growth of the network comes the issue about sustainability – how to ensure network's long-term functioning. Depending on the type of network and its goals, this may require mobilising both internal resources (financial, human and in-kind, such as office space and equipment) and external resources. The higher the cost of the administration of the network, the more difficult it is to ensure its sustainability without external funding. Fundraising for networking is challenging, therefore for sustainability it is essential to ensure that core network costs are covered by own resources or by a donor. The key is to have appropriate and affordable network structure.<sup>12</sup>

Not all networks seek long-term sustainability or growth as this may not be in line with their goals. For example, networks established to achieve a very specific and time-bound goal

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<sup>12</sup> Augustin, E, *op. cit.*

usually dissolve after their initial goals are achieved. However, their members may decide to adopt new goals and seek sustainability.

## **Evaluation**

The on-going evaluation of the work of the network is essential to ensure that it is effective and efficient in pursuing its goals and that it brings value to its members. In general, evaluation involves comparing what was planned with what actually happened. The evaluation can cover:

- Network's functioning: including issues related to membership, communication between members, decision-making process, etc. For example, expanding the membership or creating more stable network structures can be a great accomplishment.
- Network's activities (output evaluation): provides information about the products produced by the network. For example, number of trainings, number of participants, number of publications, etc.
- Network's progress towards its goals and objectives (outcome or impact evaluation): provides details about the changes that have happened as a result of activities. For example, improved knowledge and skills of participants in trainings, changes in legislation as a result of advocacy, improved quality of services, etc.

In addition to outcomes, evaluation should also provide information about the process, that is, how the outcome was achieved and whether there are other ways to achieve the same or better outcome. For example, if the desired outcome is empowerment of disabled people, which is achieved through trainings, it is essential to ensure that disabled people are involved in the design and the delivery of the training, not only as participants.

### **Establishment and development of the European Network on Independent Living (ENIL)**

In April 1989 more than eighty disabled people from fourteen European countries gathered at the first European Independent Living conference in Strasbourg. The conference resulted in the founding of the European Network on Independent Living with a mandate to promote an understanding of independent living and to spread the independent living philosophy and concept in Europe.

ENIL's initial structure had three levels: members, Board and General Assembly. Membership consisted of disabled people and organisations of disabled people supporting independent living philosophy and, in the case of organisations – run represented and controlled by disabled people. ENIL's first activities focused on capacity building and mutual



learning and were organised with very limited resources. For example, the participants in ENIL's third seminar, which took place in 1991 and was hosted by the Stockholm Independent Living Cooperative (STIL), were put up at STIL members' homes and shared food and transportation with them<sup>13</sup>.

Member's commitment and willingness to invest time and resources in the development of ENIL led to the establishment and the growth of the network. Twenty-seven years after its creation, ENIL is a strong network with hundreds of individual and organisational members representing most of the countries in Europe. It advocates and lobbies for Independent Living values and principles by targeting local, regional and national authorities, the European Union institutions, other European and international organisations and agencies, media and the general society. It also works to develop and support the Independent Living Movement in Europe in order to improve its capacity to address barriers to independent living, advocate for reforms and empower disabled people.

ENIL uses a human rights-based approach in its work, with all of its activities based on the principles of empowerment and self-determination. ENIL's activities include holding *capacity building events*, such as conferences, training sessions and workshops, and promoting role models; creating opportunities for *mutual exchange* and the sharing of best practice through study visits, summer schools and webinars; *monitoring* and collecting information through surveys and questionnaires; *advocating* for changes in policy, legislation and practice through roundtables, seminars, meetings with policy and decision makers, and publishing briefings, statements and reports; *campaigning* through organising and supporting protests and marches, and publishing the disability watchdog; *disseminating information* by maintaining a website [www.enil.eu](http://www.enil.eu), publishing an online newsletter, issuing press releases and using social media.

In terms of structure, ENIL now has a Secretariat with hired staff members to support the work of the network. Since 2015 the Secretariat is in Brussels but not all staff are based at the Secretariat. ENIL works in a decentralised manner, which ensures close links with local disability organisations and better engagement with disabled people. Currently ENIL has staff members in Sweden, Belgium (Ghent and Brussels), Bulgaria and the United Kingdom.

For more information, see: [www.enil.eu](http://www.enil.eu)

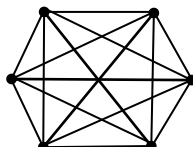
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<sup>13</sup> ENIL (1991) Third ENIL seminar, report. Available at: [www.independentliving.org/docs2/enilstockholmsem1.html](http://www.independentliving.org/docs2/enilstockholmsem1.html)

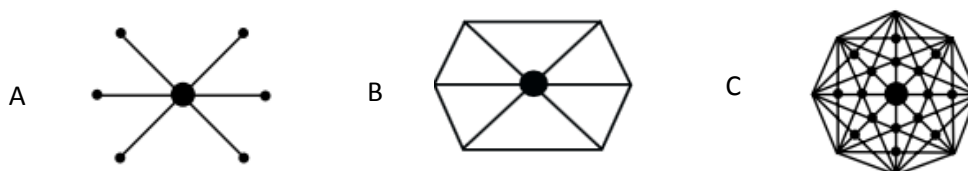
## Network structure and decision-making

The structure of the network should be designed in a way that helps the network achieve its goals. The structure should be based on the goals and not vice versa.

Some networks, usually informal, have relatively unstructured and free interactions and exchanges between their members, without the mediation of a central body (see the figure below).



Others require more formal structure to accomplish their goals. One of the simplest structures involve setting up a Secretariat (or Steering Committee, Executive Bureau, etc.) The Secretariat acts as a focal point within the network and as a support service to facilitate the work of and the communication between members. The communication between the Secretariat and the members can be organised differently, as shown in the three figures below<sup>14</sup>. In Figure A, the members communicate with each other through the centre – they send information to the Secretariat and it distributes it across the network. In Figure B, the Secretariat plays major role but members also exchange information among themselves. In Figure C, there are very active interactions between members and the Secretariat has mostly supporting role for activities carried out by the members.

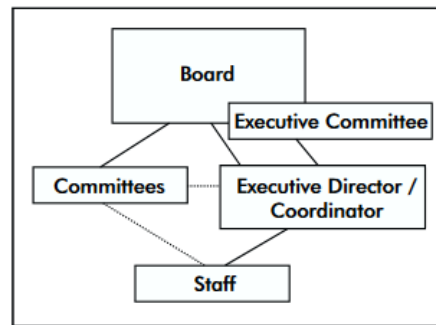


Yet other networks will require a more elaborate structure, for example:

- **A board** to keep a bird eyes view on the work and set long term goals for the network.
- A **management committee** and/or **executive director** to coordinate the work of the network **staff**.
- **Regional groups or specialised committees** to follow up the situation in a specific, topic area or region.

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<sup>14</sup> ICASO, *op. cit.*



### The decision-making process in a network

Once the management structures are in place, it is important to establish decision-making mechanisms. Clear decision-making mechanisms will help avoid conflicts and will ensure the smooth working of the network. Three typical forms of decision-making are consensus, democratic and command and control<sup>15</sup>.

**Consensus**, or collaborative, decision-making does not mean that the final decision is the preferred one for all members of the network. It does mean that members feel comfortable with the final decision, agree with it and support it. Discussion is essential part of consensus decision-making and it should be organised in a way to allow input from all involved in the process.

**Consultative**, or democratic, decision-making is based on information and consultation. Network members are encouraged *and* supported to share their views. Decisions made this way will not necessarily be approved by all members but everyone will know their voice was heard.

**Command and control** decisions are made by the director or the governing body of the network without broad consultations with members. While perhaps the most efficient of the three forms of decision-making, it should be used carefully. If command decisions are made too often, the network members will feel left out of the decision-making process, which will reduce their support for the network.

Usually, all three forms of decision-making are used within a network. There are some issues on which it is essential to have consensus, such as the vision and mission of the network. When a change of a network policy or process is planned, it is important to have the opinion of all members in a democratic consultative process. In times of emergency when fast action is required, for example, if the network is asked to provide input for a policy paper which will be published shortly, command and control decision-making is most suitable.

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<sup>15</sup> ICASO, *op. Cit.*

Overall, it is essential to ensure a transparent and democratic decision-making process with involvement of members.

### **Case studies of different types of network structures and decision-making arrangements**

#### **Alliance against Disability Cuts (AaDC), Europe**

The Alliance against Disability Cuts is an informal civil society coalition established with the goal to counter the disproportionate impact of the economic and financial crisis in Europe on disabled people by raising the awareness about it and putting it higher on the European political agenda.

Formed in 2013, at the initiative of the European Network on Independent Living, currently the Alliance unites 10 national and European networks, including: the European Network on Independent Living, the European Foundation Center, the European Disability Forum, Inclusion Europe, Mental Health Europe, Autism Europe, the European Network of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry, Disabled People Against Cuts, the European Platform for Rehabilitation and the European Association of Service Providers for People with Disabilities.

The Alliance has an informal structure with no hired staff. It has a Chair, representative of one of the members, who leads the internal meetings, prepares the agenda and reviews the minutes before dissemination. It is an equal partnership and all members take part in the preparation and implementation of its activities.

The members of the Alliance meet approximately every three months to plan and coordinate their joint activities, such as hearings at the European Parliament, debates and public meetings. At the last meeting for the year they adopt an activity plan for the next year. There is no formal decision-making procedure but usually the agreement of all members is sought. The participants in the meetings have an opportunity to express their views and support for certain decisions. Minutes are then sent to all, including members who were unable to attend, and they are invited to comment.

#### **Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC), United Kingdom**

DPAC is a large network with outreach of over a million people, which has remained informal despite its size. The network grew organically from a small group of people who came together to plan an anti-cuts march in Birmingham. Here is how Debbie Jolly, one of DPAC's founders, describes DPAC's organisation of work:

*'DPAC was set up in October 2010 after disabled people led a march and protest against the*

*incoming Coalition government. We weren't really intending to do anything other than the march which we saw as a way of waking up our own formal disabled peoples' organisations to the impacts of the policy proposals that the Coalition government were making. People asked us to keep going for a few weeks, those weeks turned into months and then years.*

*DPAC's early infrastructure in 2010 was organised by three people, a web site was set up, a Facebook account and a twitter account. The DPAC core group is the elected steering group. It was set up in 2011 with a second election in 2014. This is where many of the decisions are made, but decision making is not restricted to the steering group. If someone has an idea they will put it forward by email or other means, it will be discussed with feed-in, practical issues, people volunteering to do this aspect or that. We also have lots of requests from other groups and campaigns. So while the steering group are the ones doing the main day-to-day research, planning of direct actions, networking, keeping the infrastructure moving and functioning, DPAC stretches much further. For example, taking input from our 24 autonomous local DPAC groups, other groups we work with, members and non-members alike.*

*The core issue is not 'who is in charge', disabled people have had enough of top down hierarchies, but: what do we, as a collective, need to do next to expose what is happening to disabled people, what do we need to do next to empower and support more disabled people, to introduce them to independent living rights and human rights.*

*These are the aims of all of us working with DPAC, it is that and the passion and commitment of many individuals that keeps the network growing and developing.'*

For more information about DPAC see: <http://dpac.uk.net/>

### **Assembly of NGOs, Belarus**

The assembly is an association of non-governmental organisations and civil initiatives with more than 300 members. The structure of the Assembly includes:

**Congress:** The superior body of the Assembly. It is held once in 2 years with the participation of representatives of all member organizations. The Congress approved the Strategic Plan of the organisation, discusses and approves Assembly's Charter and introduce changes into it; elects the members of the Working Group (the governing body of the Assembly between Congresses). It makes declarations, statements and adopts other documents on behalf of the Assembly. The Congress adopts and approves the reports from the Head of the Working Group and from the Head of the Audit Committee.

**Working Group (WG):** It is the governing body of the Assembly, which operates between

the Congresses and ensures implementation of the decisions made at the Congresses. The WG has its meetings once every two months. It adopts documents regulating the work of the bodies of the Assembly and the mechanisms for their coordination based on the Charter. It approves programs and plans within the frame of the Strategic Plan of the Assembly. It makes decides about membership in accordance with the Regulations of Membership in the Assembly.

**Governing Board of the Working Group of the Assembly:** It coordinates the work of all other bodies of the Assembly, represents its interests and approves its projects. The Governing Board consists of the Chairman of the Working Group, the Vice-Chairperson/s and the Head of the Executive Bureau of the Assembly. The Chairman of the Board is the Head of the Working Group. The Governing Board works in between the sessions of the Working Groups, gathering once in 2 weeks.

**The Executive Bureau of the Assembly of NGOs** is the permanent executive body of the Assembly. It ensures the implementation of decisions of the Governing Board and of the Working Group.

Source: <http://belngo.info/>

## Challenges and success factors

Networking is not always a story of success and remarkable achievements. While there are numerous potential benefits of pooling resources and working towards a common goal, there are many challenges to building and maintaining an effective network.

### Challenges

Some of the main internal challenges networks face include:

- **Resource demand:** While participation in a network can lead to more effective use of resources for its members, it will also require from them to dedicate resources, such as time, to support the operation of the network. For example, effective networking may require participation in meetings, regular email correspondence, writing articles for the website promoting the work of the network, providing information to support the activities of the network (e.g. research), etc. This could be too demanding for some organisations and their core activities may suffer.
- **Conflicts:** Although members of a network share common goals and values, they are independent organisations with own priorities and interests, which could lead to conflicts. For example, they may compete for funding from the same organisations

or for contacts, etc. Some may have previous experience of working together that can affect negatively (but also positively) their ability to cooperate, which is essential for effective networking. Cultural differences (ethnic, social, political discourses, underlying values) can also be a source of conflict in a network.

- **Power imbalances:** Having more experienced and established organisations together with relatively new and inexperienced can result in unequitable relationships between them, with the most powerful members taking control over the network. The network may become a 'possession' of the more powerful members.
- **Limited participation:** Active participation and contribution of members is at the heart of networks and networking - without contribution, there is no network. It is, however, difficult to build and sustain commitment. Signs of missing commitment can be limited response from members, members not fulfilling the tasks they agreed to do, etc.
- **Excessive administration/bureaucratisation:** With the growth and formalisation of the network, its administrative needs (record keeping, financial management, communications, etc.) will increase and the balance between administration and activity could be damaged.
- **Funding as primary motivation:** This is a challenge many organisations face as well – the balance between focus on funding and focus on goals. If the primary motivation for establishing a network is to improve members' access to funding, for example, to apply for a specific call for proposals or programme, then the network most likely will disband after the funding is over.

### Success factors

Many of the factors that can help address the above challenges and ensure successful operation of networks were already mentioned in previous chapters. They include, for example, making sure that:

- the **goals and objectives** of the network are clear and supported by all members,
- the **management structure** reflects the needs of the network,
- all members are familiar with their **responsibilities**,
- there is a transparent and **democratic decision-making** procedure with clear rules,
- there is effective **coordination**, etc.

For successful functioning it is also essential to dedicate efforts to ensure good communication and to build and sustain members' commitment and trust.

- **Communication:** Networks need to communicate clearly on all levels – to their

members, target groups, stakeholders and to society as a whole. This will improve network's image and can have positive impact on its ability to achieve its goals (e.g. by attracting supporters, establishing contacts, attracting funds, etc.). Good communication and regular meetings are also important to create trust and to build commitment.

Useful tools to facilitate communication are information and communication technologies. Via email and Skype network members can stay in contact and exchange information across borders. Regular internet meetings are a good way to complement face to face meetings which are often more difficult to organize. Online communication is also very useful to inform the network's target group about the networks activities. With an active website and/or regular newsletters the network's message and activities can easily be made public.

- **Trust:** Trust is a key precondition of both for setting up and sustaining a network. Networks consist of people and trust is the glue that keeps the network together. If there is no trust, there is no stable foundation to build a network. Trust develops from working together towards a common goal, sharing a history and being engaged in an effective and fair partnership. Reciprocity is key to building trust and to strengthening the network – network members should be willing to share information with other members and at the same time accept new information and learn from the experiences of others. Trust can be fostered by good network leadership and clear network structures and procedures. Good communication and regular face-to-face meetings are also important.
- **Commitment:** Members participate and contribute to a network because they want to, not because they have to. Therefore, ensuring members' ownership and commitment is essential for successful networking. Involving members in the decisions about network's goals, structure and activities and taking into account their views is crucial to ensure commitment. In addition, network members will be more committed if the goals and objectives of their joint work are clear and the workload is shared. The success of the network' activities, both in terms of outcomes and process (see the section on evaluation), is also a strong motivation for more active participation. A network cannot exist just to exist but has to have a clear added value to society and its members.