

2 April – World Autism Awareness Day:

Free our people!

The World Autism Awareness Day was instituted by the UN in 2008 to spread information and raise awareness about autism. ENIL will celebrate this day by demanding the states in Europe to give persons with autism the support they need to leave the institutions and live like other citizens in the society.

- 40 percent of all people with autism have no language at all. 50 percent never develop any usable language.
- Many people with autism live according to strict routines or rituals that are difficult for others to understand. If the routine is broken the person with autism can become desperate or fly into a rage. Small changes in the environment, as if one thing is moved from one location to another, may cause strong reactions.
- People with autism may have a limited repertoire of strategies. Someone has learned to wave his hands in front of his face when the environment becomes too bothersome. Others have developed self-harming behaviors such as biting in his hands.

Autism is a lifelong disability that is not curable. However, many children with autism are helped by early, well-designed and individually tailored educational intervention. As adults, most persons with autism need lifelong support and service.

Experience from Sweden and Norway shows that personal assistance is more suitable for persons with autism – because personal assistance can be organized on the user's own condition – than a place in an institution. Persons with autism – generally speaking – find it difficult to empathize with others' needs, have impaired communication skills and need to follow their own routines and procedures. To live at institutions and share staff with other persons with the same type of problem is of course no solution for those persons.

Despite this, a large proportion of those who is living their lives on Europe's institutions have an autism diagnosis. In addition to the lack of freedom and the impossibility of achieving independent living, there is a risk that these persons come across situations where they harm themselves or are exposed to violence and coercion.

ENIL request European states to take vigorous action to accelerate the dismantling of institutions for people with disabilities, regardless of diagnosis, and that the EU is actively involved in shaping a society that

gives people with disabilities the opportunity to participate in society in accordance with Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.