



For Immediate Release

PRESS RELEASE

***Institutions are Dead End Streets:
Continuing Barriers to the Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Europe***

20 – 21 April 2007, Zagreb (Four Points Sheraton – Panorama Hotel Zagreb)

Brussels and Zagreb – April 20, 2007. On 20 – 21 April 2007, the Brussels-based European Coalition for Community Living (ECCL), in cooperation with the Association for Promoting Inclusion from Croatia, is hosting a European conference in Zagreb on the topic of **User Involvement: Involving people with disabilities in the planning, provision and evaluation of quality community-based services**. The event will bring together more than one hundred representatives of disability organisations, self-advocates, service providers, international experts in the disability field and government officials from across Europe, who will share models of good practice and discuss strategies to overcome the barriers to the social inclusion of people with disabilities in Europe.

The European Coalition for Community Living (ECCL) is a Europe-wide 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 works closely with its member organisations in Croatia and more than 20 other European countries, in order to ensure that de-institutionalisation is recognised as a priority among policy and decision makers in countries across Europe and by the European Union.

In cooperation with the Association for Promoting Inclusion, ECCL has chosen Zagreb as the location for its 2007 annual conference in order to urge the Croatian Government to take the necessary steps to develop quality community-based services for people with disabilities in the country. The Government's failure to take action has left hundreds of people with disabilities in Croatia living in large institutions without any prospect of living with appropriate support in the community any time soon. Ingrid Körner, President of Inclusion Europe stated that: "My disabled daughter would not accept having to live in a large institution, and no other citizen should have to do so because of a lack of alternatives. The right to live in the community is a fundamental human right."

In failing to implement policies and action plans for the development of community-based services, the Croatian Government has fallen behind neighbouring countries such as Serbia, where the Government launched a comprehensive deinstitutionalisation plan at the beginning of this year. It is also acting in violation of Article 19¹ of the new UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, signed by Croatia on 30 March 2007.

Speakers at the User Involvement conference include, among others, Christian Zechert (Dachverband Gemeindepsychiatrie, Germany), Michael Chapman (Chesapeake Management Consulting, United States), Angela Garabagiu (Council of Europe), Julie Beadle-Brown (University of Kent, UK), Ingemar Färm (European Disability Forum) and John Evans (European Network of Independent Living). The Minister of Health and Social Welfare of the Republic of Croatia Neven Ljubičić has been invited to give a closing speech on behalf of his Government.

The conference will take place at Four Points Sheraton – Panorama Hotel Zagreb (Room Zagreb), with the beginning at 14:00 h on Friday, 20 April. Members of the press are invited to attend the Opening Plenary Session.

Note to editors: Please contact Neda Miščević, Association for Promoting Inclusion, at 091 252 9029 or Ines Bulić, European Coalition for Community Living, 091 535 8622 for more information and for direct contact with a representative of ECCL's Management Committee for interviews and comments.

¹ Article 19 recognises the equal right of all disabled people to live in the community, with choices equal to others, and requires States to: '... 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.'