

FRA Press Release

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Free to choose, free to decide for people with disabilities

Choosing where to live, with whom, and what to eat, when, are some of the realities of independent living that most of us take for granted. But for people with disabilities theory and practice can be worlds apart, finds the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights' latest report. It explores what enables and what hinders the drive towards independent community living for people with disabilities.

"Everyone is born free and should have the right to choose and decide how they live their lives," says FRA Director [Michael O'Flaherty](#). "Empowering people with disabilities to be full and independent members of the community allows them to enjoy all their rights and to actively engage in society."

The report '[From institutions to community living for persons with disabilities: Perspectives from the ground](#)' draws on the experiences of people directly involved in the transition to independent living. This includes people with disabilities and their families.

It underlines the strong legal framework in the EU and its Member States to support this transition, such as the UN's Disability Convention (CRPD) and the EU's Fundamental Rights Charter, and recent commitments, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights.

However, the lack of available and affordable support services, persisting stigma and discrimination, and inaccessible environments impede people with disabilities from fully realising their legal rights. The report suggests ways to counter this, such as:

- All Member States should ensure there are clear targets and deadlines with sufficient funding, including EU funds, to enable people with disabilities to live independently in the community.
- The EU and its Member States should raise awareness of the benefits of independent living, including by using personal stories to further the positive change in attitudes towards people with disabilities.
- Member States should coordinate all efforts to support and provide services for independent living. This includes fully involving people with disabilities and frontline organisations in decision making and shaping policies.
- Member States should offer practical guidance and training on how best to make independent living a reality.
- Member States should offer specialist services and make general services accessible to cater to the wide range of needs of people with disabilities. This also involves empowering them with the skills to live independently.

The report draws on fieldwork in Bulgaria, Finland, Ireland, Italy and Slovakia. But the understanding of what works and what doesn't, and why, applies to all Member States.

For personal stories, infographics, national case studies and more, consult the [press pack](#) or contact: media@fra.europa.eu / Tel.: +43 1 580 30 642