

Speech for the meeting with the Heads of State, San Marino, 7 May 2025

Your Excellencies,

It is a pleasure to meet with you today in San Marino, to mark the Independent Living Day. On behalf of the European Network on Independent Living – ENIL, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today.

ENIL is a user-led cross-disability network, with members across Europe. Our mission is to promote and advocate for the right to independent living for all persons with disabilities, regardless of how much support they need. Independent Living refers to being able to live like everyone else, with self-determination, with choice and control over one's life. Independent Living refers to the opportunity to be an active citizen, a part of society. Independent Living is a human right – it is guaranteed by Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which San Marino ratified in 2008.

ENIL established the Independent Living Day in 2014, as a day to remind everyone of the barriers that persons with disabilities face and an opportunity to celebrate our achievements as the Independent Living movement. This year, we partnered with our San Marino member – Attiva Mente – to raise awareness about Independent Living in your country.

Independent Living cannot be achieved without political will, and we hope that this meeting will be the first step of many to put in place the necessary preconditions for this right in San Marino.

I would like to draw your attention to the importance of Personal Assistance. This is a key tool for Independent Living and allows persons with disabilities to have control over their lives, to go to school, to work, to take part in sports, culture, to travel, to be a parent, and to be active in their community. Personal assistance is mentioned in Article 19 of the Convention, because it is different from care – it puts persons with disabilities in control and offers one on one support. For personal assistance to support independent living, persons with disabilities employ and manage their assistants.

Personal assistance is also cost effective, because it provides employment opportunities and allows persons with disabilities, and their family members, to take up employment and to participate in society. Thanks to personal assistance, many parents are able to support their child in the family and to enrol them in a regular school. It can also be used by people with intellectual disabilities, with additional support to manage their assistants.

We are aware that, at the moment, persons with disabilities in San Marino do not have access to personal assistance and hope that you can help us change this. ENIL is ready to provide technical assistance or other support you may need.

This 5th May, we also focused on the right to employment and how to create opportunities for persons with disabilities in the open labour market. Employment is another right guaranteed by the UN CRPD and Article 27 comes with an obligation for countries to ensure that there is no discrimination in access to employment. There are many good practices in how to encourage employment – from access to personal assistance, providing reasonable accommodation, to financial incentives for employers. The benefits of employing persons with disabilities are many – for people themselves, who gain independence, to employers and the local community. As with personal assistance, there is much good practice that we can share with you.

Finally, in keeping with the 5 May theme, we need to work together on changing mindsets about what persons with disabilities can and cannot do, and their place in society. We need to move away from the medical approach, which sees persons with disabilities as ill, to the social and a human rights model, which recognises the value of diversity and is focused on removing barriers to participation. It is these barriers that stop people from living a good life – not so much their impairment.

Your Excellencies,

We appreciate the opportunity to address you here today and hope that you will accept our offer to work together with our members and us on improving access to independent living in San Marino.

Our motto for the Independent Living Day is Proud, Strong and Visible, and this is what we would wish for all persons with disabilities in your country.

Thank you once again for hosting us.

Ines Bulic Cojocariu, Director, ENIL