



PRESS RELEASE

No chances for Estonians with intellectual disabilities to lead an independent life

Tallinn and Budapest – 9 November 2005 – Estonian legislation, policy and practice offer no chances to people with intellectual disabilities (whose learning ability is significantly lower than average) to access employment. Practically all people with intellectual disabilities have no work and are reliant on social benefits which are set at a very low level, 1200-2000 EEK per month. They have no chance of leading an independent life. These are the main findings of the monitoring report *Rights of people with intellectual disabilities: access to education and employment in Estonia* released tomorrow, on 10th November 2005. The report was produced by the Open Society Institute in cooperation with the Estonian NGO, the Estonian Mentally Disabled People Support Organization (EVPIT) and with the support of the Open Estonia Foundation.

Estonia's accession to the EU on 1 May 2004 obliges it to transpose EU directives into national law. However, Estonia has not yet transposed the two main EU anti-discrimination directives: the EU Employment Directive or the EU Race Equality Directive. These directives, particularly the EU Employment Directive, are important for ensuring the rights to equal access to employment for people with disabilities.

Supported employment is internationally recognised as the most important way in which people with intellectual disabilities can access employment. Supported employment offers the opportunity to people with disabilities to work on the open market with the help of day to day support and coaching. However, in Estonia, there is no legal framework for supported employment. Estonia also does not have a quota system for the employment of people with disabilities.

The primary way in which the Estonian Government today encourages the employment of people who are "less competitive on the labour market", is through tax concessions and active employment measures. However, these measures do not meet the needs of people with intellectual disabilities: the amount of the subsidies are too low to cover the costs of a job coach, and aids, such as instructions in simplified language, are simply not included under provisions for workplace modification.

Agne Raudmees, the report's author, urged today the Estonian Government to act and "introduce as soon as possible legislation in line with international standards and employment measures addressed specifically to help people with intellectual disabilities. The Government should also raise the awareness of employers to the value of people with disabilities as employees".

The report released tomorrow includes a detailed analysis of the opportunities offered to people with intellectual disabilities to access education and employment. It also offers a series of specific, practical recommendations addressed at improving the social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in Estonia.

Note to editors

This report is part of a series of 14 country monitoring reports monitoring “Access to Education and Employment for People with Intellectual Disabilities” throughout Europe. The reports were prepared by EUMAP, the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program of the Open Society Institute, in cooperation with the Open Society Mental Health Initiative. All reports are available online at www.eumap.org. More information on the Open Society Institute is available at www.soros.org, information about Estonian Mentally Disabled People Support Organization (EVPIT) at www.vaimukad.ee and about Open Estonia Foundation at www.oef.org.ee.