



Press Release (for immediate release)

“Stop the segregation of people with intellectual disabilities”

The Hague and Budapest – 26 April 2006. Although the Netherlands has a long history of equal protection, and an advanced system for addressing claims of discrimination, a fundamental inequality remains fixed in the education system — segregated schools. Most children with intellectual disabilities (whose learning ability is significantly lower than average) are still placed in “special schools”, contrary to international standards that call for children with disabilities and their parents to have the opportunity to choose inclusive education, in mainstream schools. Moreover, many children with intellectual disabilities remain at home and receive no education at all. Adults with intellectual disabilities have very low chances of finding work on the open labour market, alongside people without disabilities.

These are the main findings of a monitoring report presented today in The Hague. The report, *Rights of people with intellectual disabilities: access to education and employment in the Netherlands* was drafted by Jacqueline Schoonheim, and produced by the Open Society Institute (OSI) in cooperation with the Federatie van Ouderverenigingen (FvO) – the Dutch Federation of Societies of People with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families. The report includes 25 concrete recommendations addressed to policy makers.

A significant number of children with disabilities in the Netherlands remain in special schools, and until recently, this number was increasing; in 2003, for example, the Ministry of Education reported that 16,000 children with intellectual disabilities were enrolled in schools for special education [see page 39]. Since 2003, the parents of children with disabilities in the Netherlands have the option of sending their children to a school in the mainstream educational system, with a “backpack” of additional funding. However, the OSI report reveals that only a very small number of children with specifically intellectual disabilities have actually been able to use the “backpack” to make the shift from the special educational school system, to the mainstream school system.

At present, parents do not have full discretion to use the “backpack” that children with disabilities receive for the specific services their children may need. They can only finance with it the support of a visiting special education teacher and additional time with the staff at the mainstream school. These “backpack” funds should be made more flexible, to give families real options, such as a dedicated classroom aide to support children with intellectual disabilities in school – as parents interviewed for the report recommend

A pervasive attitude that people with intellectual disabilities need care rather than work is still a major barrier to improving job opportunities for this group.

In the Netherlands, people with intellectual disabilities generally qualify under programmes that give them a right to work either in sheltered workplaces – which are usually segregated environments – or in supported employment. Supported employment is internationally recognised as the preferable approach for ensuring that people with intellectual disabilities can be independent and integrated into society, thanks to daily supports such as a job coach.

However, the OSI report finds that, in practice, of those adults with intellectual disabilities who do work, the vast majority do so in sheltered workplaces (around 30,000 adults), with only around four per cent participating in supported employment.

The Netherlands needs to ensure that its high standards of protection, and pledges of equal treatment, are implemented for people with intellectual disabilities, as for the rest of Dutch society. The recommendations outlined in the OSI report detail specific actions which could improve the social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities.

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 the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program (EUMAP) of the Open Society Institute (OSI), in cooperation with the Open Society Mental Health Initiative. All reports are available online at <http://www.eumap.org>. More information on the OSI is available at <http://www.soros.org>.

The Dutch report was prepared by Jaqueline Schoonheim and produced in cooperation with the Federatie van Ouderverenigingen (FvO). The FvO is the Dutch Federation of Societies of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families. The first parents associations in the Netherlands were established in 1952. They soon began working together, and in 1964, they jointly created the FvO. More information on the FvO is available at <http://www.fvo.nl>.