

## **Inclusion Europe spoke up at important UN event on the right to education**

**On 15 April 2015, a Day of General Discussion on the Right to Education of Persons with Disabilities was held in Geneva at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters. The full day of discussions brought together leading experts on the topic from around the world. Governments, UN bodies and specialised agencies, intergovernmental organisations, national human rights institutions, and non-governmental organisations - particularly disabled persons' organizations - were invited to participate.**

Inclusion Europe was represented by two self-advocates from the Netherlands, Ellis Jongerius and Henriëtte Sandvoort, who were supported by Jose Smits, Inclusion Europe Board member. The Day of General Discussion provided an opportunity to exchange views, with the aim of fostering a deeper understanding of what the right to education actually means, and how it could be implemented. The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will draft the General Comment on the right to education taking into account the direct experiences of the speakers of the General Day.

Ms. Jongerius and Ms. Sandvoort gave splendid presentations building on their personal experiences of accessing the mainstream school system. In the beginning of their speech, they highlighted that persons with intellectual disabilities are face with the highest risk of being excluded from education. Ms Jongerius talked about the necessary adjustments and reasonable accommodation necessary for students with intellectual disabilities, including extra time to finish their school courses and provisions tailored to the individual's needs. Furthermore, she addressed the importance of having a school system that is a good mix of theory and practice, to allow students with intellectual disabilities to to 'learn not only from books, but also by doing.'

The negative attitude that students with intellectual disabilities often experience in the educational system may lead to them skipping lessons, dropping out of school, or being referred to a special school. Students with disabilities must feel welcome in schools and feel like they belong there. Ms. Sandvoort addressed the importance of learning, and highlighted that persons with disabilities should never be excluded just because they need support and adaptations. A good way to make schools more accessible is to train teachers about how to teach people with intellectual disabilities and how to adapt the classes and the curriculum to make it inclusive one.

Ms. Sandvoort discussed bullying as one of the most common struggles that students with intellectual disabilities experience in education: 'We hear around us that persons with intellectual disabilities are often bullied in school, they are called as stupid, because they cannot learn as quick. I have sadly experienced this myself,' she said. The presentations are available [here](#) (third video from the top). For more information on the Day of General Discussion please contact Magdi Birtha at [m.birtha@inclusion-europe.org](mailto:m.birtha@inclusion-europe.org)