

President of Latvia discusses social inclusion of people with disabilities

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President of Latvia Egils Levits met with Apeirons Organisation of people with disabilities and their friends, Riga Centre for the Blind and Visually Impaired “Redzi mani/See me”, Latvian Association of the Deaf and Social Cohesion Department experts from Society Integration Foundation on 24 January. Meeting focused on social inclusion of disabled and ways to reduce discrimination.

President of Latvia Egils Levits praised the efforts of stakeholders in helping people with disabilities and raising social awareness. ‘We are all building a society that is inclusive towards everyone living in Latvia. Over time, we have made good progress, but there is still a long way to go to be able say that we have achieved the desired inclusivity,’ President Levits said as he commented on the social inclusion of people with disabilities in various kinds of social processes. He also confirmed his continued commitment to social inclusion of people with disabilities.

According to NGOs, the main obstacle for more inclusive society is insufficient environmental accessibility. Ivars Balodis, Chair of Apeirons Organisation of people with disabilities and their friends, mentioned the low turnout of people with disabilities during the elections because of polling stations being set up in structure inaccessible for people with physical disabilities. Chair of Apeirons also underlined the support for accessing education and labour market, and public awareness as main issues that need to be solved to give people with disabilities equal opportunities, more independence and self-confidence.

Social Cohesion Department experts of Society Integration Foundation urged President Levits to advocate for targeted funding for non-governmental actors working on behalf of disabled every day. They also urged government departments and public bodies to bring the focus back to access to services.

President of Latvia Egils Levits also received a unique artistic gift during the meeting, a textile papier colle created by more than 200 disabled individuals and people who want to draw society's attention to social inclusion of people with disabilities and

reduction of discrimination.



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