

Civil society organisations for human rights and fundamental freedoms issue:

Statement

The recently reported deaths in social care institutions in Serbia are not isolated cases

In respect of the recent deaths of residents at the social care home in Trbunje, and the social care home in Tutin, and an earlier case of suffocation of a 23 year old resident in social care institution Sremčica, **these are not isolated cases but just a small number which have gained the attention of the Serbian public.**

The mortality rate in social care institutions for persons with disabilities is **several times higher than in the general population.** Medical care for persons living in social care homes is inadequate and people are often deprived of important medical treatments. Residents are exposed to various forms of violence, neglect and ill-treatment. Such treatment of persons with mental disabilities on the part of the state institutions sends a message that their lives are less worthy, while no one is held accountable for their degrading circumstances, poor status and widespread, systemic violations of fundamental rights.

Consequences of institutionalisation are long-term and have deeply adverse affects on persons with disabilities:

- Institutionalisation is often **life-long – 71% of adult residents and 40% of children residing in social care homes in Serbia live there until their death.**
- A life in an institution is characterized by **segregation and isolation, depersonalisation, lack of privacy, deprivation of liberty,** rigid daily routines, inadequate protection against neglect and ill-treatment, a lack of an individualised approach and understanding of the needs of residents, and unequal treatment based on the type and severity of the disability.
- Children and adults living in social care homes are exposed to **excessive administration of psychiatric medication and denial of necessary medical interventions,** and unnecessary and prolonged **use of restraints.**

The only adequate measure of protection for persons with disabilities is to **get released from institutions back to society.** A social care institution is not an environment where the adequate realization of the human rights of persons with disabilities is possible. **Prompt deinstitutionalization for all persons with disabilities is necessary.** However, taking into consideration that transition from institutional to community-based care is a time-consuming process, we request immediate measures to ensure realization of fundamental rights and freedoms for children and adults living in social care institutions, respect for privacy, personal preferences and needs, primarily through adequate care, medical protection, active social inclusion, and by opening these institutions for public and media scrutiny.



mdri.serbia@gmail.org
www.mdri-s.org



femplatz@gmail.com
www.femplatz.org

For all that said, the below-signed civil society organizations call upon **the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry for work, employment, veteran and social affairs, the Republic Public Prosecutor and other responsible authorities to:**

- Inform the public on **the results of investigations** taken regarding the recent deaths in social care homes in Trbunje, Tutin and Sremčica;
- Ensure that **responsible individuals are held accountable and prosecuted** for the acts or omissions that lead to the controversial deaths;
- Urgently **prioritize improving the status of persons with disabilities living in social care homes**, and start taking steps to address multiple and systemic forms of discrimination;
- Adopt a **strategic document for deinstitutionalization**;
- Amend or repeal regulations which allow for the institutionalization of persons with disabilities against their free will;

Nonetheless, we call upon media to consistently follow and report about this topic and thus facilitate promotion and understanding of the position of persons with disabilities who live in social care institutions in Serbia, and contribute to the elimination of systemic discrimination against persons with mental disabilities.

Statement supported by:

1. Mental Disability Rights Initiative MDRI-S
2. Association of citizens FemPlatz
3. Child Rights Centre
4. Gayten –LGBT, Centre for promotion of LGBTIQ rights
5. Astra – Anti trafficking action
6. Belgrade Centre for Human Rights
7. YUCOM- Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights
8. Network SOS Vojvodina
9. Center for Independent Living of PWDs Serbia
10. A11- Initiative for economic and social rights
11. ...Iz kruga Vojvodina
12. Association of citizens Peščanik
13. Initiative for inclusion Veliki Mali
14. National Organization of Persons with Disabilities of Serbia (NOOIS)
15. Association of citizens „RIME“
16. Association „Naša Kuća“
17. ERA- LGBTI Equal Rights Association for the Western Balkans and Turkey
18. International Aid Network IAN



mdri.serbia@gmail.org
www.mdri-s.org



femplatz@gmail.com
www.femplatz.org

19. Women Space
20. Autonomous Women's Center
21. House of Gender Knowledge and Politics
22. Women's peace group ZMIG- Pančevo
23. Women's Research Center for Education and Communication
24. ...Iz kruga Belgrade
25. Creative Affirmative Organization Parnas
26. Civil Rights Defenders
27. Disability Rights International
28. Validity Foundation- Mental Disability Advocacy Centre
29. European Network on Independent Living- ENIL
30. People in Need



mdri.serbia@gmail.org
www.mdri-s.org



femplatz@gmail.com
www.femplatz.org