



For more information contact:

Dragana Ciric Milovanovic
dciric@DRIadvocacy.org
+44 7468 105516

Maja Popovic
mpopovic@DRIadvocacy.org
+381 60 406 88 55

Press release

Belgrade, Serbia, June 24, 2021 – [Disability Rights International](#) and [Mental Disability Rights initiative of Serbia](#) released a report today, **Forgotten Children of Serbia**, documenting that Serbia has failed to address severe human rights violations and abuses in its institutions that constitute inhuman and degrading treatment – and in some cases amount to torture. In all the institutions we visited, regardless of their size, DRI and MDRI-S found severe neglect and lack of medical care that put the health and lives of children with disabilities at risk.

“Placing infants and young children with disabilities in institutions is inexcusable,” said Eric Rosenthal, Executive Director of DRI, *“And denying essential medical care and pain relief is nothing less than torture,”* added Rosenthal. **“The government of Serbia is literally throwing away the lives of children with disabilities.”**

Children with disabilities continue to linger in institutions across the country, forgotten and excluded from society. The small number of children with disabilities have been simply moved from the most abusive institutions to smaller facilities where they continue to languish without the love or care of families. The placement in Serbia’s residential facilities, large and small, is emotionally and physically dangerous for children and is likely to result in increased disability.

“Unless Serbia takes immediate action to prevent further institutionalization, children will continue to live and die in institutions,” said Dragana Ciric Milovanovic, Europe Program Director of DRI. *“Serbia has an immediate obligation to use all available resources to support families and services in the community, instead of large or small institutions,”* said Ciric Milovanovic.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) – which Serbia has ratified – requires governments to ensure that children can grow up with a family, be it the biological family, kinship or foster care. *“Large or small group homes are especially dangerous for children, for whom there is no substitute for the need to grow up with a family,”* according to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



*“The new DRI report on institutionalised children in Serbia makes for a very difficult reading. Despite some progress made by the government, it is clear that none of it has reached disabled children. **The Covid-19 pandemic had made it even more obvious that institutions of any kind must close. The European Network on Independent Living - ENIL welcomes the new DRI report, and hopes it will serve as a tipping point, demonstrating that the only place for any child is a family.** Without this, the right to live independently and being included in the community, for disabled children or adults, will never become a reality in Serbia,”* stated Ines Bulic Cojocariu, Deputy Director of the European Network for Independent Living.

*„**We are particularly concerned about women and girls in these facilities – given birth control without their knowledge or consent,**“* said Ms. Ciric Milovanovic. *„**We believe this is a cover for systematic sexual abuse and exploitation going on in some facilities.**“*

DRI and MDRI-S visited 8 social care homes for children without parental care and children and youth with disabilities, one private institution for children, 3 day centers, 5 special schools, one mainstream school and other disability programs throughout Serbia.

The report is available at www.DRIadvocacy.org and www.mdri-s.org