



## PRESS RELEASE

*For immediate release*

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### **European Commission spends millions of Euros illegally funding segregation of 18,000 people with disability in Romanian institutions**

Abuse of people with learning disabilities and mental health issues in Romanian institutions is at crisis levels. On Wednesday 16 April at 22:30 GMT, Al Jazeera's "[People and Power](#)" series exposed multiple abuses inside Romanian institutions including systematic strapping, forcible medication, segregation, and physical and sexual violence.

Thousands of people with disabilities are warehoused by the Romanian government in institutions where they are segregated from society and subjected to inhumane conditions. Since 2007 the European Commission has approved and is funding this shocking practice, **which violates its obligations under international law.**

Figures on EU Structural Funding are notoriously opaque. Information currently available shows that the European Commission has spent at least 24 million Euros propping up over 50 residential institutions across Romania where people with disabilities are segregated. For many residents, they will never see freedom again.

"Dumping people with disabilities in institutions is a gross human rights violation," said Oliver Lewis, Executive Director of the Mental Disability Advocacy Center. "Conditions inside these institutions are often deplorable. Forced feeding, light deprivation, physical and mental violence and deaths have all been uncovered in numerous institutions across Romania. Many have been funded by the European Commission."

The lifelong segregation of people with disabilities is in direct violation of obligations held by the European Union since it ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2010. This requires governments to provide community-based living options rather than warehousing them in institutions, denying them dignity, autonomy and freedom.

Admitting that the European Commission does not monitor its funding to EU Member States, the Commissioner for Regional Policy Johannes Hahn said: "We have no evidence that institutions funded by the EU are abusive." This is despite concerted attempts by civil society in recent years to raise concerns at the highest levels.

MDAC calls on the European Commission to make amends to the victims of this policy of financing institutions which breach the provisions of international law, in line with the [2005 UN General Assembly Resolution on the right to remedy and reparation](#):

1. **Establish a Reparations Fund** to compensate victims of its policy of segregation which violates EU and Romanian obligations under international law.
2. **Establish a Reparations Agency** to administer the Reparations Fund. This should be chaired by an independent expert who has the trust of all parties and have members drawn from civil



society. The Agency should seek out victims of EU funding, ensuring they are rescued from segregation and assisted to live in the community.

3. **Close all institutions segregating people with disabilities from society**, not only in Romania but across the European Union, immediately creating plans to transition all people in institutions into the community with supports.
4. **Immediately withdraw all EU funds being used to keep institutions open**, in all countries. The money should be immediately reallocated only to those programmes transitioning people into community living, with supports. Specifically, the 12 million Euros assigned to Hungary to build new institutions should be withdrawn.

Oliver Lewis, Executive Director of MDAC is available for interview. Twitter [@olewis75](https://twitter.com/olewis75).

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#### Notes to Editors

- Across Europe, some 1.2million children and adults are held in institutions on the basis of a disability.
- The right to community living for people with disabilities is guaranteed by Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It has the status of international law, creating binding obligations on States Parties including Romania and the European Union.
- European Union funds have been spent on institutions which breach international law in several other countries. The European Commission is currently financing 12 million Euros to build new institutions in Hungary instead of spending this on community-based living options and supports for people with disabilities. Across Europe, the magnitude of this funding runs into hundreds of millions of Euros.
- The European Commissioner for Regional Policy Johannes Hahn holds primary responsibility from this systematic violation of human rights. He has not only failed to take preventative action, but has signed off the funding of new institutions in complete violation of Article 19, CRPD. The Ludus institution in Harghita, Romania is being built with EU Structural Funds and will segregate a further 108 people with disabilities.
- Please see: [www.mdac.info/Romania](http://www.mdac.info/Romania) for full details, and MDAC's call to the European Commission to provide compensation and reparations to all victims of human rights abuses in Romanian institutions.

#### About MDAC

The Mental Disability Advocacy Center is an international human rights organisation which uses the law to secure justice, equality and inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities and people with mental health issues worldwide.

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