

 OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE
EU MONITORING AND ADVOCACY PROGRAM

 OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE
MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE



The full text of this report is available at www.eumap.org/reports/2005 and at www.pentruvoi.ro

For further information please contact Nicoleta Foica in Romania at pentruvoi@pentruvoi.ro or +4-0721-82.60.70, or Miriam Anati at OSI Budapest, manati@osieurope.org, + 36 30 2748533.

For immediate release

Romanians with Intellectual Disabilities Rejected from Schools and Jobs

Mamaia and Budapest, 31 August 2005—People with intellectual disabilities in Romania face limited education and employment opportunities, a new report finds.

The monitoring report, *Rights of People with Intellectual Disabilities: Access to Education and Employment in Romania*, was released today in Mamaia, Romania, at a conference titled “Community living for persons with intellectual disabilities.” Produced by the Open Society Institute in cooperation with the Romanian organisation Pentru Voi, the report calls on the Romanian government to enforce existing legislation by offering more education and employment opportunities to Romanians with intellectual disabilities (people whose learning ability is significantly lower than average).

On paper, Romanian regulations and policy support the inclusion of students with disabilities - including those with intellectual disabilities - in regular schools (a process referred to as ‘mainstreaming’). In practice, however, only a very small number of children with mild intellectual disabilities attend mainstream schools. “Teachers in Romania receive almost no training or resources to integrate children with intellectual disabilities into regular schools,” said Raluca Nica, the report’s author. “In addition, Romania’s inflexible education curriculum does not help children with intellectual disabilities develop the skills they need to become independent and self-sufficient.”

The majority of Romanian pupils with any kind of mental disability (over 21,000 children) still attend “special” segregated schools, which provide substandard education. Most of these special schools, however, refuse to enrol children with anything more than mild intellectual disabilities. As a result, thousands of Romanian children with intellectual disabilities do not receive any kind of education at all. The OSI report calls on the Romanian Ministry of Education, Research and Youth to establish how many children with intellectual disabilities remain without any kind of education, and to take steps to ensure that no child is denied schooling.

The disproportionately high number of Roma children in special schools also casts doubt on the procedures for assessing children with disabilities in Romania. The report urges the Romanian government to ensure that such assessment procedures are thorough and unbiased, and that each child’s individual potential is evaluated fully.

In 2003, the Romanian Ministry of Education established a National Action Plan for Access to Education of Children with Special Needs, which recognises that children with severe and profound disabilities are also entitled to education and to other support services. If properly implemented—through a coordinated effort of all sectors involved in supporting people with intellectual disabilities and with the allocation of sufficient resources—the plan holds the promise of real improvement in access to education for children with intellectual disabilities.

In the area of employment, the Law on the Special Protection and Employment of People with Handicap sets out measures aimed at giving people with disabilities equal opportunities to access the job market. The report released today however reveals that most people with intellectual disabilities in Romania do not work at all and therefore have no opportunities to live independently.

Romanian legislation provides that at least four percent of the workforce at companies and state agencies with more than 75 employees must be people with disabilities. Employers, however, do not respect this quota and avoid paying penalties by advertising positions requiring qualifications that no person with intellectual disabilities could ever meet.

NGO-operated services are currently the only place where a few people with intellectual disabilities can find jobs of any kind, and only the Timișoara-based organisation Pentru Voi provides “supported employment” services. Supported employment, internationally recognised as the best way to help people with intellectual disabilities find work on the open market, provides them with daily supports and in particular with a job coach. The OSI report calls on the Romanian Government to develop supported employment more widely in order to assist people with intellectual disabilities throughout the country.

"The main problems are the lack of specialised services, the discouraging legislation, and the weak incentives for employers" explained Laila Onu, Executive Director of the Romanian NGO Pentru Voi. “Also, while people with intellectual disabilities may be able to meet job requirements, they do not always have the social skills needed to interact in working environments. Schools do not teach people with intellectual disabilities how to behave in social situations, how to initiate a discussion, how to ask for permission to leave or how to speak with their seniors " added Laila Onu.

In Romania, as in some other European countries, statistical data specifically on people with intellectual disabilities is simply not available. For example, more than 14,000 people are estimated by the National Authority for Persons with Handicap to be living in institutions, but the proportion of these who are people with intellectual disabilities is not known. The report warns that without information on the situation and the problems facing people with intellectual disabilities as a group, policymakers cannot take effective measures to help integrate them into society.

The absence of reliable, comprehensive data has also contributed to a general lack of public attention to people with intellectual disabilities. The OSI report invites the Romanian Government to develop public awareness to help ensure that people with intellectual disabilities can become active members of their communities.

Note to editors

This report is part of a series of 14 country reports monitoring “Access to Education and Employment for People with Intellectual Disabilities” throughout Europe. The reports were prepared by EUMAP, the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program of the Open Society Institute, in cooperation with the Open Society Mental Health Initiative. All reports are available online at www.eumap.org. More information on the Open Society Institute is available at www.soros.org.

The Romanian report was developed in cooperation with Pentru Voi, a Romanian non-governmental organisation working to improve the quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities. Based in Timisoara, Pentru Voi provides community-based services to 110 people with intellectual disabilities and their families. More information about Pentru Voi is available at www.pentruvoi.ro.