Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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Deinstitutionalisation of persons with disabilities

Motion for a resolution
tabled by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

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This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

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Deinstitutionalisation, a process seeking to limit the systematic and long-term placement in institutions, is vital in order to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities. The living conditions and treatment experienced in institutions frequently violate the fundamental rights of the individuals concerned, in particular the prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment. Moreover, institutionalisation often results in a failure to respect the autonomy of persons who lose control of their lives.

Deinstitutionalisation, whose purpose is to release residents into the community, can however be "harmful" if it is not properly organised and given appropriate support; it also requires special supervision. Some families welcome the return of their loved ones, and take on much of the legal responsibility, along with the financial and medical burden that this entails. However, many persons with disabilities end up excluded from society, sometimes homeless or in prison. In both cases, the lack of support and monitoring can lead to abuse and violence, or a return to institutions.

If deinstitutionalisation is to be effective and uphold the dignity of persons with disabilities, it must be accompanied by specific access to services outside institutions, enabling people to obtain care, work, social assistance, housing, etc. In contrast to the widely adopted approach of an almost one-size-fits-all response, these services must be adapted to the individual needs of the people concerned.

The Parliamentary Assembly should study the process of deinstitutionalisation and, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the overall objective of the Council of Europe Disability Strategy 2017-2023, call on member States to ensure that autonomy, freedom of choice and full and effective participation in the life of society and the community are guaranteed to persons with disabilities, including persons with mental health conditions.