

# **First Recommendations of the User Steering Committee for the Deinstitutionalisation Process in Slovenia**

**within the framework of the Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia  
for Deinstitutionalisation in Social Care 2024–2034  
(StaDI 2024–2034)**

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**Opening doors to  
equal rights.**

## Introduction

In accordance with the Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia for Deinstitutionalisation in Social Care 2024–2034 (hereinafter: StaDI), the Ministry for a Solidary Future established the User Steering Committee (hereinafter: USC) in September 2025. The Committee was established to participate in monitoring, evaluating and overseeing the quality of the deinstitutionalisation process.

The USC is composed of experts by experience. Members of the Committee support the ministry responsible for deinstitutionalisation<sup>1</sup> and the Centre for Deinstitutionalisation at the Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia in planning and implementing activities. We provide on-site support to stakeholders involved in the deinstitutionalisation process (institutions undergoing transformation, non-governmental organisations, multidisciplinary teams, service users and their families). We also participate in national and local promotion of deinstitutionalisation and prepare observations and recommendations on the progress of deinstitutionalisation in Slovenia, which are then presented to the ministry.

### The USC consists of five members:

- **Nevenka Kos** is a self-advocate and an Easy-to-Read ambassador at the RISA Institute, where she works as a test reader and consultant and contributes to the preparation of various publications (e.g. the *Guide to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, brochures published by the Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia and the Human Rights Ombudsman). As a speaker, she regularly participates in seminars, conferences and other events in Slovenia and abroad. She has extensive experience in leading self-advocacy groups and providing peer support. She is the co-author of several Easy-to-Read publications (e.g. *Julija in Petra* and *Pod svobodnim soncem*) and also writes and publishes articles and other content on the rights of service users. She has participated in numerous Slovenian and international projects (*Lahko je brati*, *myPart*, *Train2Validate*, *Voices for Justice*, among others). Through her work in the Deinstitutionalisation of CUDV Črna na Koroškem project as a member of the user group, she has gained extensive knowledge of deinstitutionalisation, institutional living, transition processes and community-based services.

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<sup>1</sup> The Strategy for Deinstitutionalisation in Social Care 2024–2034 was adopted by the Ministry for a Solidary Future in March 2024. Responsibility for deinstitutionalisation was transferred to the Ministry of Demography, Family and Social Affairs on 5 June 2026 in accordance with the Act Amending the Government of the Republic of Slovenia Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 555/26).

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- **Sara Fras** is a social worker. In her bachelor thesis on suicide among young people, she gave voice to people with lived experience of suicidality. She completed her Master's degree with research on adult guardianship, presenting first-hand experiences of people who have been placed under guardianship. Between 2021 and 2022, she volunteered in the transformation processes of Dom na Krasu and CUDV Črna na Koroškem, where she prepared person-centred plans and risk assessments together with residents and contributed to the organisation of staff training in both institutions. During the same period, she provided individual community support through the Hearing Voices Association Slovenia. At the Faculty of Social Work, she participated in the research project Transformation of Secure Wards into Community-Based Care for Adults and Children with Disabilities.
  - **Tina Burlin** has collaborated with the Hearing Voices Network Slovenia for several years. She studied philosophy and anthropology. Her experience in the field of personal assistance has significantly contributed to her knowledge of the disability support system and the provision of individualised support in everyday life. She completed peer support worker training organised by the Hearing Voices Association Slovenia. She facilitates peer support groups and a book club, gaining extensive experience in group facilitation and group work. She is a speaker and lecturer at numerous public events related to mental health. She is also an Italian language teacher and has volunteered for many years in various organisations, both in Slovenia and abroad, working in the fields of mental health, culture and human rights.
  - **Gregor Benedik** has been actively involved in the deinstitutionalisation process at Dom na Krasu for many years. During the past year, he has also participated in the Dom na Krasu Deinstitutionalisation Project, contributing to several working groups. For many years, he served as Chair of the Dom na Krasu Residents' Council. He is an active member of several user groups and regularly participates in professional and cultural events. He has extensive knowledge of institutional care in Slovenia, transition processes from institutions to the community, and community-based services.
  - **Blaž Pirman** completed a two-year vocational programme in biotechnology and care assistance at the Biotechnical Education Centre Ljubljana (BIC) and is employed at Druga violina. Together with his colleagues, he produced the film *The Invisible Ones*, in which he plays the leading role. The film makes an important contribution to reducing stigma and raising awareness of the rights of
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persons with disabilities. As a trainer and lecturer, he has extensive experience in adult education (e.g. Inclusive Adult Education for Persons with Disabilities). He is an active member of a self-advocacy group and a well-known advocate who regularly appears in the media and speaks at conferences.

## Framework for the First Recommendations

On 23 April, the members of the User Steering Committee carried out our first field visit. We visited Dom na Krasu, a social care institution in Dutovlje, including two community group homes. During the visit, we met with the institution's Professional Director, the Residents' Council of Dom na Krasu, and service users living in the community group homes.

The observations and recommendations presented below are based on the findings from this visit.

## Recommendations

Dom na Krasu, which was visited by members of the USC, is a specialised social care institution for persons with disabilities. Over the past six years, the institution has been actively engaged in the deinstitutionalisation process, primarily through European-funded projects. During our visit, we gathered information about the progress of deinstitutionalisation within the institution, the transition process, the everyday lives of persons with disabilities both in the institution and in its community group homes, the support they receive, and the challenges they encounter in their daily lives. Below are the recommendations developed following our field visit.

### 1. Deinstitutionalisation

One of the main objectives of the Strategy for Deinstitutionalisation in Slovenia is to enable approximately 3.400 people who currently live in institutions to move into the community. Some institutions in Slovenia, including Dom na Krasu, have already begun the deinstitutionalisation process by supporting people to resettle from institutional settings into smaller community-based housing arrangements. Most people move into community group homes or supported housing units.

Institutions will not be able to complete their transformation if they continue admitting new service users to replace those who have moved into the community, or if substantial public funding continues to be invested in institutional buildings – such as renovations, roof repairs, new extensions and similar infrastructure – instead of community-based support.

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We also wish to emphasise that persons with disabilities must always be involved in leading and monitoring the deinstitutionalisation process – both at national level and within the institutions undergoing transformation.

Based both on our field visit and on our own lived experience, we have observed that decision-makers, professionals and staff working in institutions sometimes believe that they have actively involved service users simply by informing them about what deinstitutionalisation is, where they will move, and with whom they will live. While it is important that persons with disabilities are informed about what is happening, information alone does not mean that we are equally involved in leading and monitoring the deinstitutionalisation process. It is not enough for professionals and others simply to tell people what will happen. Persons with disabilities must have the opportunity to express their views and to make decisions together with others. We must participate in all important decisions concerning deinstitutionalisation.

**We recommend that the Ministry of Demography, Family and Social Affairs (hereinafter: The Ministry) ensures that as many people as possible move from institutions into the community. Wherever possible, people should move into ordinary, individual homes rather than only into community group homes or supported housing units. The Ministry should invest in developing community-based support services, while reducing investment in the renovation and expansion of institutional facilities. The Ministry should also ensure the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in leading and monitoring the deinstitutionalisation process at every level. In all decisions, the guiding principle must be: Nothing about us without us.**

## 2. Transformation of Secure Wards in Social Care Institutions

Institutions often continue admitting people to secure wards even when all available beds are already occupied. As a result, secure wards become overcrowded, preventing the provision of appropriate conditions for people's recovery.

Dom na Krasu also continues to admit new service users to its secure ward. As the institution is currently undergoing transformation, it will be difficult to complete this process if new people continue to be admitted.

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During our visit, we observed that transforming secure wards and supporting people to move out of them is particularly challenging. People should receive more support to enable them to leave secure wards – and other institutional wards – as quickly as possible.

**We recommend that the Ministry develops a comprehensive national plan for the transformation of secure wards in Slovenia. This plan should include the development of community-based services that support people in their transition back into the community, enabling them to leave secure wards as soon as possible.**

### 3. Preventing Poverty among Persons with Disabilities

During our field visit, service users at Dom na Krasu told us that the cost of institutional care is becoming increasingly unaffordable. They pointed out that while the fees they are required to pay for care continue to increase, the quality of the services they receive does not improve accordingly. They are also concerned that although residential care fees have risen, the amount of personal spending money they receive each month has remained unchanged.

As care costs continue to increase while personal spending allowances remain very low, service users are left with less and less money each month to cover their personal needs and interests, such as leisure activities and other opportunities to participate in community life.

We have observed that many persons with disabilities living in institutions and community group homes experience poverty. This limits their independence and their opportunities to participate fully in community life.

Our country must take action to prevent poverty among persons with disabilities who require support.

**We recommend that the Ministry examines the financial situation of people living in institutions and community group homes and develops a comprehensive strategy to prevent poverty among people who require support. Such a strategy should also include amendments to legislation affecting the financial situation of persons with disabilities.**

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**We further recommend that the Ministry amends the relevant legislation so that the cost of the support a person requires is no longer borne by the individual, their family or the municipality, but is instead financed through the national budget.**

#### **4. Employment of Persons with Disabilities**

During our visit, several service users told us that they would like to have a job. Many people living in institutions and community group homes are highly motivated to work. They enjoy working but would like to have better working conditions.

The members of the User Steering Committee agree that every person should have the opportunity to work, to choose where they work, and to earn an income. Members of the USC ourselves are employed in different forms of work. We believe it is important that people receive fair pay for their work, are employed under a contract of employment, and enjoy all employment rights.

Based both on what we observed during the field visit and on our own lived experience, we believe it is unacceptable that a person who attends a day activity centre workshop or participates in occupational therapy every working day receives only EUR 22 per month as a so-called "reward".

It is equally unacceptable that people carrying out work do not have access to basic employment rights such as paid annual leave, paid sick leave or other labour rights. Moreover, if a person living in an institution or a community group home manages to obtain regular employment, their earnings are largely used to pay for the support services they receive.

People who work in workshops or occupational therapy programmes should not receive only symbolic payments. If their work creates value, they should receive fair remuneration. Work should promote greater independence and improve people's quality of life, not place them in a more disadvantaged financial position.

The country must ensure better employment opportunities and better working conditions for persons with disabilities.

**We recommend that the Ministry, in cooperation with the other responsible ministries, ensures that persons with disabilities have the same opportunities for employment as everyone else. Persons with disabilities must have the opportunity to:**

- **choose where they wish to work;**
- **obtain regular employment under an employment contract concluded directly with their employer;**
- **receive fair pay for their work;**
- **enjoy the same employment rights as other workers, for example paid annual leave.**

**We further recommend that the Ministry ensures the availability of services that provide persons with disabilities who wish to work with the support they need to find employment and to retain it.**

**Finally, we recommend that the Ministry amends the relevant rules so that people living in institutions or community group homes are able to keep the income they earn from their work.**

#### **5. Better Working Conditions for Staff Providing Support to Persons with Disabilities**

During our field visit, we learned that the institution is facing difficulties in recruiting new staff. Based on our own experience, we also know that it is often difficult to attract professionals to provide support to persons with disabilities. The quality of the support that persons with disabilities receive depends to a large extent on the competence, stability and working conditions of the people providing that support.

**We recommend that the Ministry, together with the other responsible ministries, invests in the development of a well-trained and fairly paid workforce capable of providing high-quality community-based support to persons with disabilities. The Ministry should also promote these professions and improve working conditions in order to make them more attractive to current and future employees.**

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