

Quick look

Deinstitutionalisation in Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia

Deinstitutionalisation involves closing large institutions where people with intellectual disabilities live isolated from the community, and replacing them with community-based services that allow individuals to live more independently.

For Deinstitutionalisation (DI) to succeed, both individuals and the organisations working on this transition need the right tools and support.

People who have lived in institutions must be given the chance to participate in self-advocacy, where they can speak up for themselves and influence the decisions that directly affect their lives.

At the same time, organisations responsible for DI need proper funding, training, and resources to create alternatives like supported housing, personal assistance, and employment opportunities.

Projects focused on DI are crucial for overcoming the many obstacles that slow progress, such as resistance from local communities, a lack of financial resources, and underdeveloped care services.

The [JUDY project](#) provides us the opportunity to support our members in advancing with this process and, at the same time, to promote the growth of self-advocacy at national level.

Situation in 5 countries

A closer look at how Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia are managing DI, their challenges, and key efforts towards independent living, shows some differences but also some common challenges.

The information below is a summary of reports produced by JUDY project partners, each for their respective country.

Efforts Towards Deinstitutionalisation

The table below provides an overview of the current efforts towards DI in five countries:

Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia.

Each country is at a different stage of the process, with varying levels of progress, challenges, and strategies in place.

While all five countries have committed to DI, their approaches and the speed of implementation differ significantly.

Country	Current Status of Deinstitutionalisation	Progress	Challenges
Albania	Committed to deinstitutionalisation, but services for independent living are extremely limited.	National plan in place.	Lack of infrastructure, funding, and community-based support slows progress.
Bulgaria	Significant progress in closing institutions for children, but adult institutions remain, with resistance from local communities.	Child deinstitutionalisation almost complete.	Adult care remains heavily institutionalised, and local communities resist change.
Hungary	Started a deinstitutionalisation plan in 1998, but only 900 people have left institutions by 2023—far short of the 10,000 target.	Full deinstitutionalisation is planned by 2036.	Still relies on large institutions, and supported housing often acts like institutions.

Romania	Adopted a law in 2023, but little real change has happened—focus is mainly on downsizing rather than closing institutions.	Law for deinstitutionalisation in place.	Focus on reorganising rather than creating community services.
Slovakia	A national project started in 2018 to deinstitutionalise, but progress is slow due to financial and political issues.	28 institutions are working on deinstitutionalisation	Regional institutions are major employers, making changes difficult.

Key Challenges

All five countries face similar challenges in trying to close large institutions:

- **Lack of Community Services:** Many countries lack the necessary community services for independent living. This is especially true for Albania and Romania, which struggle to provide enough support for those transitioning from institutions.
- **Resistance to Change:** Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria face resistance from institutions and communities. Institutions are often big employers, and communities are not always aware of alternative care models, which makes it difficult to close them.
- **Funding Problems:** Low funding for social services is a major obstacle. Countries like Romania and Albania do not have enough money set aside to create effective alternatives to large institutions.
- **Deinstitutionalisation Progress by Country.** Deinstitutionalisation is a complex and gradual process that involves shifting from large, traditional care institutions to more personalised, community-based services that support individuals' independence.

Progress varies widely between countries, depending on factors such as the

government's commitment, financial resources, and the development of alternative care systems.

In some countries, like Bulgaria, significant progress has been made, especially in closing child care institutions, while other countries are still far behind their targets.

Hungary and Romania, for instance, have long-standing strategies for DI but are experiencing slow implementation, with many institutions still operating, albeit in a downsized capacity rather than fully closed.

Slovakia has started projects to push forward DI, but progress remains slow due to various financial and political obstacles.

Meanwhile, Albania, despite having a national strategy in place, is still in the early stages, with only minimal changes seen so far.

Across all these countries, there is a commitment to full DI, but the reality on the ground shows a mix of challenges and delays, making the journey toward replacing institutional care with community-based alternatives uneven and slow-moving in some cases.

Country	Institutions Involved	Closed or Downsized Institutions	Plan for Full DI	Current Status
Albania	Working on child care	Some community services created	National strategy in place	Very slow progress
Bulgaria	All child institutions	Adult institutions next	National strategy in place	Success in closing child institutions

Hungary	6 institutions involved	6 partially closed (670 people moved)	Planned by 2036	Far behind targets
Romania	496 institutions	Some downsized but not closed	National strategy in place	Downsizing instead of closing
Slovakia	93 institutions	28 involved in the process	New national project underway	Slow progress

Self-Advocacy in Deinstitutionalisation

Self-advocacy plays a crucial role in the process of DI, as it gives people living in institutions the opportunity to voice their needs, concerns, and aspirations for independent living.

In many cases, individuals in these institutions may face barriers to participating in decisions that affect their lives. The development of self-advocacy movements is therefore essential to ensure that their voices are heard and that they can actively engage in shaping policies that impact their future.

In some countries, self-advocacy is more established, with active groups discussing issues like closing institutions and promoting independent living. However, in other countries, self-advocacy is still limited, especially for people living in large institutions. These individuals often have fewer opportunities to participate in advocacy efforts, and the movement is frequently led by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) rather than the individuals themselves.

While countries like Bulgaria and Hungary have more organised self-advocacy groups, involvement is still restricted for those in larger institutional settings.

In Albania, the self-advocacy movement remains underdeveloped, and there is minimal participation from people living in institutions. In these situations, advocacy for change, particularly in areas like legal capacity and independent living, is largely driven by external groups.

Overall, while self-advocacy is recognised as an important component of DI, the level of involvement and impact varies greatly across countries. This highlights the need for further development of self-advocacy initiatives to ensure that people in institutions can have a direct say in the decisions affecting their lives.

Most countries have a limited level of self-advocacy, with people in institutions rarely involved. NGOs tend to lead the self-advocacy efforts, and Bulgaria and Hungary are a bit more advanced in this regard, while Albania is quite behind.

Country	Self-Advocates in Institutions	Active Self-Advocacy Groups	Main Issues Discussed
Albania	No	Limited	Legal capacity, independent living
Bulgaria	Limited involvement	Yes	Closing institutions, inclusive education
Hungary	Few	Yes	Independent living, supported decisions
Romania	Limited	Yes	Human rights, independence
Slovakia	Few	Yes	Deinstitutionalisation, independent living

Support for Independent Living

Services that help people live independently are vital for DI, but these services are often lacking. Support for independent living is a key element in the success of DI. It involves providing individuals with the services and assistance they need to live independently within their communities, rather than in large, segregated institutions. These services may include supported housing, personal assistance, social rehabilitation, and access to employment opportunities.

Across the five countries, the availability and quality of these support services vary significantly.

In some countries, such as Slovakia and Hungary, services like supported employment and housing do exist, but they are often insufficient or too closely resemble the institutional care models they are meant to replace. This limits real opportunities for individuals to live independently.

Other countries, like Romania and Albania, face more severe shortages of services for independent living. In these places, people with disabilities or other needs often remain dependent on their families due to the lack of formal support systems. There is very limited access to personal assistance, social housing, or mobile support teams, leaving individuals with few alternatives to institutional care.

In contrast, Bulgaria has made some progress in offering services, especially in supported employment, though care services for adults remain underdeveloped.

This uneven availability of independent living support across the countries highlights a significant challenge for the DI process. Without adequate community-based services, the transition from institutional care to independent living remains difficult for many people, slowing down progress towards full DI.

Country	Support for Independent Living
Albania	Very limited services, with most people relying on family rather than formal support.
Bulgaria	Some supported employment services are available, but adult care services are still limited.
Hungary	Supported housing exists, but still follows institutional models, which limits real independence.
Romania	Very limited services, with little access to personal assistants or social housing.
Slovakia	Some services like supported employment and social rehabilitation are available, but not widely enough.

When we look at the five countries, they all are trying to close large institutions and move towards more community-based care, but progress is slow and uneven.

Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania have made plans, but implementation is lagging.

Bulgaria has been more successful with children, but adult services are still behind.

Albania is still at the beginning stages.

Deinstitutionalisation is a critical step toward promoting human rights, dignity, and independence for individuals who have long been confined to large care institutions.

However, as seen across Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, the journey towards fully closing institutions and establishing community-based alternatives is complex and full of challenges.

While all five countries have shown commitment to the process, progress has been uneven, with some making significant strides and others struggling with slow implementation and financial or political barriers.

A lack of adequate community services, resistance from institutions and local communities, and insufficient funding are common obstacles.

In addition, the development of self-advocacy, which ensures that the voices of individuals directly affected by deinstitutionalisation are heard, remains underdeveloped in many countries. Without strong self-advocacy movements and effective support systems for independent living, the shift away from institutional care will remain limited.

About this briefing

This is a summary of country reports created by JUDY project partners.

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