



ONGOING VIOLENCE: INHUMAN TREATMENT OF PEOPLE LIVING IN INSTITUTIONS

On February 17, 2023, the RA Police issued a [message](#), according to which the director and a group of employees of the biggest Psychoneurological Boarding House in Armenia (“Vardenis” Psycho-Neurological Internat) accommodating 450 persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities, were arrested on suspicion of torture and illegalities committed in the institution.

On the same day, the RA Investigative Committee [published](#) some details of the case: *during the inspections, one of the residents was found in the institution, whose bed mattress was thrown on the floor in front of the radiators, and a fabric belt was attached to the person’s abdomen, the metal chain of which was attached to the heating batteries. Another resident was found lying on his back with his hands and feet tied to the four corners of the bed.*

It was also found that people living in the institution were not continuously provided with full daily meals, serving them only lean soup and bread.

Moreover, part of the duties of sanitary workers and canteen employees were regularly performed by the residents of the institution, and some residents continuously performed cleaning work in the livestock belonging to the director of the institution and his family.

In the course of the investigation, preliminary evidence was also obtained that the indicated actions were carried out on the instructions of a psychiatrist, which the director was also aware of.

Regrettably, this case, among previously recorded cases of [labor exploitation](#), [violation of property rights](#), and [other](#) illegal cases, is not only a manifestation of a gross violation of human rights, but a reflection of the systemic problem in the field of mental health in Armenia, about which various [representatives](#) of civil society and [Human Rights Defender](#) has referred to in their [reports](#).

Effective steps are not being taken by the State to reduce the risks of violence and abuses and degrading conditions in the institutions in a timely and urgent manner. Armenia still hesitates to close down institutions and develop services that ensure living independently and being included in the community for persons with disabilities in spite of international [obligations](#) and long-standing calls from [international](#) and [national](#) human-rights bodies to end such practices.

Immediate and stringent measures are essential for the State to develop and approve a detailed deinstitutionalization action plan.

We recommend the creation of an appropriate mechanism to oversee the deinstitutionalization process in line with international standards to ensure that rights of people with disabilities living independently and being included in the community are fully guaranteed.