

How can cross-disability organisations promote independent living services for people with disabilities?

Relevant articles of the CRPD: 19, 26

Country: Serbia

Region: South East Europe

Good practices available in: English (full report available in Albanian and Serbian)

Centre for Independent Living in Serbia

Description of the practice and the process involved

Centre for Independent Living of People with Disabilities of Serbia (CIL Serbia) was founded in Belgrade in 1996 and it works on the **promotion of human rights and the potential of persons with disabilities**. The mission of CIL Serbia is to promote the philosophy of **Independent Living** and create conditions for its **implementation** in Serbia.

It is based on the **cross-disability principle**, i.e. its members are persons with various types of disabilities who are bound together by common needs and interests. CIL Serbia's activities take place both through network of its **local branches in 6 cities** in Serbia and through **central office** in Belgrade.

Its main activities include:

- Expanding the **network of centres for Independent Living** at the **grass-roots** level,
- Promoting **human rights** as well as the **UN Standard Rules for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities**,
- Organising **education and capacity-building** for persons with disabilities and general **awareness-raising** about the status and rights of persons with disabilities,
- Working towards the creation of **Personal Assistance Services** for people with disabilities,
- Working towards the creation of an **accessible environment**,
- **Campaigning and awareness-raising** on the specific needs and the status of women with disabilities,
- **Research and publishing** pertaining to various disability issues,
- **Advocacy work** including monitoring and lobbying for changes of existing legislation and adoption of new legal acts that would improve the status of persons with disabilities.

Since its establishment, CIL Serbia has completed many projects and activities aimed at raising awareness around the Independent Living philosophy and initiating activities towards its achievement in Serbia. All of CIL Serbia's projects have **been development oriented, working on information provision, skills development and the strengthening of people with disabilities as well as the improvement of their quality of life**. Over the past 3 years, CIL Serbia developed a pool of **its own trainers** who are **persons with disabilities** and conducted **educational and disability awareness raising workshops and seminars** in more than 30 cities throughout Serbia, whose participants were both people with and without disabilities.

The work of CIL Serbia has a **strong advocacy component**. The Centre has its own group of **disability experts in legislation**, whose main tasks are to follow the legislative process in the country, evaluate government policy regarding disability and monitor implementation and propose measures to improve legislation. One of such examples is the lobbying initiative that brought for the first time in Yugoslav history, a change in article 3 of the Charter on Human and Minority Rights, which is part of Serbia and Montenegro's Constitutional Acts, where it is stated that it is forbidden to discriminate people on the grounds of disability. Currently CIL Serbia's legal expert is actively taking part in the work on the UN Convention on the Protection of Rights and Dignity of People with Disabilities, as an official member of Serbia and Montenegro's delegation to the UN.

With the financial support of OXFAM, the Centre for Independent Living in Serbia organised an experimental project of **Personal Assistance Service (PAS)** in 2000-2001 in Belgrade, as an **alternative form of support** to people with disabilities. The aims of this project were to **estimate the demand** for this type of support, identify **changes** that occurred in the lives of users, **analyse and compare the quality of services** provided through the Personal Assistance Service and to **gauge institutional support**. The project included a **research study** that was published at the end of the pilot phase.

On the basis of the first experience and research results, CIL Serbia, with the help of the Irish and Serbian governments, has initiated a **new Personal Assistance Service project**. The **two-year** project started in February 2003 and is being implemented in **four cities**: Belgrade, Smederevo, Leskovac and Jagodina.

There are **40 beneficiaries with 43 personal assistants** allocated.

The project has many objectives, such as the establishment of the **first consumer controlled Personal Assistance Service** in Serbia, which is regarded as a key aspect of independent living of people with disabilities. How was this achieved? Initially, a **series of training sessions and workshops** were held for both users and personal assistants. **User workshops** were held on several topics, including the philosophy of Independent Living, the assessment of the user's own needs and key criteria for the selection of assistants. The **National Employment Office** was involved in the project by

helping in **advertising** as well as **security testing** for potential personal assistants, who were then interviewed and chosen by the users themselves. The workshops organised for assistants included training on key approaches to disability and training on lifting, feeding and toiletry of people with disabilities. **Various training methodologies** were used including: presentations by facilitators, work in small groups, debates, exchange of information and experiences, practical exercises, case studies and role-playing. The project manager insists that all workshops are based on the **participatory principle**. Concurrently with the workshops, **lobbying and advocacy activities** are taking place.

The philosophy of Independent Living and the Personal Assistance Service project are promoted through **meetings and round tables** with the presence of the media and politicians. An integral part of the project is the **Participatory Action Research** that is aimed both to measure **the changes in quality of life of users and cost-effectiveness of the service** and develop recommendation on how to mainstream this type of social support for disabled people.



Some of the difficulties encountered

CIL Serbia is currently experiencing great difficulties **in providing sustainability of the Personal Assistance Service**, as the Serbian Government funds that were supposed to contribute to the provision of service in part of tax and insurance payments for the assistants are still not provided.

The effects / impact of the practice

The Personal Assistance Service became operational in August 2003 and even after the first period of activity **significant improvements in the quality of life of users has been noted**. Users of the service are starting **to identify their real needs and to satisfy those desires** that they could not satisfy before:

- *"Over the last two years my life was reduced to waking up in the morning and then enduring a long hard wait for darkness to come so I could go to bed again. Now, since obtaining an assistant, my life has started to make sense again"* said a user from Belgrade.

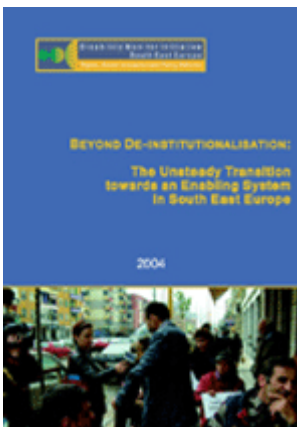


Photo taken by CIL Serbia during the project

What are the main points that require attention? How could it be improved?

With the establishment of this project, one step has been taken: people with disabilities are becoming **aware of their capacities and potentials**. Even this takes time, to quote Ms. Rajkov: "*The basic lesson learned is that the process of introducing new concepts and ways of working **takes time. Prolonged efforts** will have to be made in order to implement **new ideas** and in particular to introduce **new concepts** into people's consciousness and to adopt **new behaviours and attitudes** towards people with disabilities*". Moreover, lobbying activities by CIL Serbia are slowly but perceptibly **raising the awareness of politicians and the general community**.

Background and context



Full project report: [Beyond De-Institutionalisation: The Unsteady Transition towards an Enabling System in South East Europe \(DMI SEE, 2004\)](#)

Criteria for the good practices: see page 21 of the full report.

Recommendations from the good practices: see page 91 of the full report.

Links to further resources:

[Full text on article 19 – Living independently and being included in the community](#)

[Full text on article 26 – Habilitation and rehabilitation](#)