<https://ss-cg.org/?p=4310>

Social and child protection services are not available to persons with disabilities in the territory of Montenegro

**Podgorica, PR press service** - At the conference of the Union of the Blind of Montenegro (SSCG) it was announced that social and child protection services are not available or accessible to persons with disabilities in the territory of Montenegro.

**The conference “Are social and child protection services available to people with disabilities in Montenegro"** was organized within the project "**With achieved equality towards a dignified life for PWDs in Montenegro**".

**Executive Director of the Union of the Blind of Montenegro Goran Macanović** emphasized in his introductory words that all system institutions should undertake activities and measures aiming to create conditions for inclusion of PWDs in all aspects of life on the basis of equality and principles of human dignity.

“In order to achieve that, institutions shall work on removing different barriers and obstacles imposed by them, the society in general and the state on PWDs on a daily basis,” said Macanović.

Macanović highlighted that it was necessary to apply an individual approach to PWDs presuming that each person with disability is a separate individual. Each one of them has different desires, goals, abilities, people close to them, and the state is, together with institutions, responsible and obliged to respect these different preferences and desires.

“To have an opportunity to implement their decisions independently does not imply that PWDs should do everything by themselves, they need support through support services,” said Macanović.

According to conference’s plan, representative of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare should participate in the introductory part, but she did not show up.

**Project assistant of the Union of the Blind, Anđela Dragović**, presented the key findings of the Analysis and the programme of providing the sighted guide service.

“In order to provide visually impaired persons with the opportunity to live according to independent living principles, it is necessary for the state to introduce new support services, recognized precisely through “other services”. The sighted guide service provided by the Union of the Blind is among these services,” stated Dragović.

According to what she said, there are no prerequisites for visually impaired persons which should enable them to move independently. That is the consequence of an absence of a training programme in the use of a white cane, the lack of experts and peripathologists who would carry out the necessary training, and the existence of numerous obstacles and barriers in the surrounding which discourage visually impaired persons from using the white cane since they are self-taught.

The analysis showed that many services recognized by the Law on Social and Child Protection, precisely in the domain of community life support, were not implemented in practice. These services include supportive housing, drop-in centres, and sign language interpretation and translation.

Dragović said that PWDs have the equal right to live independently and be included in the community, with the freedom to choose where and with whom they want to live.

Representatives of three local non-governmental organizations of persons with disabilities discussed relevant topics in a panel “Availability of social and child protection services for persons with disabilities in Montenegro". They highlighted the unavailability of social and child protection services that are essential on a daily basis, emphasizing the following services: personal assistance, home care services, psychosocial support and support for life in family.

When speaking about the necessity of a personal assistant, **Executive Director of the NGO Initiative of Youth with Disabilities of Boka, Miroslava Mima Ivanović,** assessed that there were numerous barriers in exercising this right. “I need a personal assistant, but it is very difficult for me to finance having one all the time. I can only afford to pay a personal assistant for 10 to 12 hours a day,” said Ivanović.

She believes that there are many problems the competent institutions do not solve, although they affect PWDs and their everyday life. “I have to undergo an evaluation procedure again,” she said. She added that PWDs had to pay more money to have a personal assistant, but it cost more money than they received.

“Why do we even fight, if the representatives of the Ministry think that 800 EUR is enough for us? They do not know what that means or they do not want to know,” pointed out Ivanović.

When asked whether services for PWDs were available in Bijelo Polje, **Project assistant and the Executive Director of the Association for the Support of Persons with Disabilities Bijelo Polje Samir Guberinić** said that the situation was not on an enviable level.

“There are certain services within larger organizations in Bijelo Polje, but systemic solution does not exist,” said Guberinić.

He directed attention to a series of problems that PWDs face every day, but also to the ongoing inaction of competent organizations and persons when it comes to solving these problems. “It is very difficult, but we manage somehow,” emphasized Guberinić.

**Blagoje Šturanović, the Executive Director of the NGO Mozaik in Nikšić,** said that the situation regarding the availability of services for PWDs is not satisfactory in that city either.

“As a young person who is using wheelchair all his life, I was insufficiently informed about the rights of PWDs. I notice that employees in the service of the Centre for Social Work do not show much empathy and without a second thought I can say that they do not do their work properly,” said Šturanović.

During the panel discussion, it was assessed that the necessary services have not been developed and available, even if they are, they are not affordable or sustainable, and that most services are offered and delivered by the NGO sector. All this leads to the social exclusion of PWDs and prevents the active and meaningful participation of PWDs in all aspects of life.

Ivanović reminded in the final part that PWDs have right to free legal aid.

“Contact as much as possible, because with greater number of applications we lodge, there is a greater possibility for the institutions to respond,” said Ivanović.

According to her words, they have been fighting for something that belongs to them for 20 years and “she does not want to teach anyone their work”.

Guberinić said it was difficult to do anything.

“I have and do not want to say anything to the authorities, because they do not hear anything,” emphasized Guberinić.

Šturanović invited and encouraged PWDs to become a part of local organizations in order to jointly continue fighting for them and their rights.

“I hope that we will not have to go to Germany or Sweden and that we will succeed in creating a welfare state,” Šturanović said.

He called on the competent authorities and organizations to include PWDs in their work.

This conference is held in the framework of the project “With achieved equality towards a dignified life of persons with disabilities in Montenegro”, implemented by the Union of the Blind of Montenegro in cooperation with the Association for Support to Persons with Disabilities Bijelo Polje. It was financed by the European Union (through support of CFS – the Civil Society Facility) and Ministry of Public Administration, Digital Society and Media.