



Press Release

20 July 2011

First case concerning patients' deaths at the Poiana Mare Psychiatric Hospital communicated to the Romanian Government

An important case concerning both access to justice for people with disabilities as well as their mistreatment in institutions, *The Centre for Legal Resources on behalf of Valentin Campeanu v Romania*, has taken a significant step forward at the European Court of Human Rights.

This is the first case brought before the European Court of Human Rights painting a grim picture of the range of extreme human rights abuses routinely inflicted upon people with disabilities placed in long-term stay institutions across Europe, and who are often unable to complain or seek remedies for their plight before a court, due to their disability or because they are prevented from doing so by the authorities.

The Court has asked the Romanian Government to account for its treatment of a HIV-positive, intellectually disabled young man of Roma ethnicity, which resulted in his death at the notorious Poiana Mare Psychiatric Hospital in Romania. The case, brought on behalf of Valentin Campeanu by the Romanian NGO [Centre for Legal Resources](#) supported by INTERIGHTS, was communicated to the Romanian Government by the Court on 7 June 2011.

Valentin Campeanu, who had been abandoned at birth, never met his parents and lived his whole life in institutions, was discharged in September 2003, upon reaching majority age (18 years in Romania), from the children's home where he lived. All efforts by local authorities to identify an institution for adults willing to accept him were in vain, mostly due to Campeanu's HIV infection, and despite the fact that his medical diagnosis was engineered to make the admission process easier, by removing any reference to his intellectual disability. Eventually Campeanu was admitted to a social home, where he was brought without proper clothing or any antiretroviral treatment which he had been taking for years. He stayed there for five days, before being transferred to the Poiana Mare Psychiatric Hospital, where he was abandoned in an isolation room, lacking proper care, treatment, and in extremely degrading living conditions. Campeanu died there on 20 February 2004. The official investigation into his death, marred by procedural irregularities, did not result in any charges against officials involved in Campeanu's successive transfers, or against staff from the institutions he was admitted to during the last months of his life.

This case is also testing the Court's commitment to ensuring access to justice for people with disabilities. The Centre for Legal Resources asked the Court to adapt its admissibility criteria so as to allow NGOs to bring cases on behalf of a person with disabilities, even in the absence of specific authorisation. Currently people with disabilities in institutions, a most disempowered and marginalised group of people, cannot enjoy the protection afforded under a number of Articles of the European Convention on Human Rights, most notably Article 2 concerning the right to life, given their isolation from the world and their inability to challenge in court the breaches of their rights.

The communication of the case to the Romanian Government is an important step forward, as only a small minority of cases brought before the Court reach this stage. Now the Romanian Government will have to answer detailed questions concerning the circumstances leading to Campeanu's demise and provide full disclosure of all documents in the investigation file concerning his death.



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A second case is pending before the Court on similar issues - [Malacu and others v Romania](#). Hundreds of patients died in suspicious circumstances at the Poiana Mare Hospital during the 1990s and early 2000s. The Committee for the Prevention of Torture visited this establishment three times, in 1995, 1999 and 2004, issuing on each occasion damning conclusions regarding the conditions it found there.

More details about this case are available [here](#).

The Communication (Statement of Facts and Questions) from the Court is available [here](#).

For further information and to discuss ways of supporting the case before the Court contact Center for Legal Resources:

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