

**Member States measures taken to protect people with disabilities during the current Covid-19 situation and contributions of civil society**

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**(AT) Austria**

Employment

- For employers using the model of short-time work there is a financial subsidy to cover the rest of the wage costs. This is an incentive to guarantee the jobs of people with disabilities during the short-time work period.
- For employees with disabilities who are not in short-time work, existing subsidies are more flexible and being increased.

- Self-employed people with disabilities have the possibility to receive additional financial subsidies.

#### Social protection and everyday life

- Relatives of people with disabilities have the possibility of a 3-week special leave for care in case a care facility is closed or personal assistance cannot be provided.
- Temporary disability passes and special parking permits get prolonged for additional 8 months.
- The special family allowance for children with disabilities gets prolonged automatically until the end of 2020.
- To meet the special needs of people with disabilities, there are two exemptions in the current restrictions: People who are not able to wear a mouth and nose protection due to health issues are exempted from the obligation. Furthermore, the obligation to keep 1-meter distance shall not apply between people with disabilities and their accompanying person giving personal assistance or care.

#### Participation

- Before implementing measures, the Federal Ministry involves Organisations of people with disabilities, the Ombudsmann for people with disabilities and the Austrian Monitoring Committee. The COVID-19 crisis team of the Federal Ministry is also in contact with a representative of people with disabilities.

#### Accessible information and communication

- The Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection as well as the Austrian Agency for Health and Food Safety provide information about COVID-19 in sign language (<https://www.sozialministerium.at/Coronavirus---Sprachen/Informationen-zum-Coronavirus-in-OEGS.html>). Sign language interpretation is also used during public announcements of the Minister (e.g. press conferences).
- The Federal Ministry is also providing easy-to-read information on the website (<https://www.sozialministerium.at/Coronavirus---Sprachen/Leichter-Lesen---Corona-Virus-in-Oesterreich--Die-wichtigsten-Informationen.html>).
- Special telephone hotlines for COVID-19 are accessible for deaf people via special relay-service.

### **(BE) Belgium**

The covid-19 crisis has a special impact on the living situation of people with disabilities. Several national and international middle field actors formulated recommendations for an inclusive approach to the crisis. In order to help citizens through the covid-19 crisis in the best possible way, the different levels of power in Belgium haven taken various measures in their areas of competence. Below are a number of actions taken by the different governments.

#### **At the federal level**

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1) The federal government has in place a **"Task Force Vulnerable Groups"** to seek solutions to the problems faced by different groups, **including persons with disabilities**, during the corona period. This Task Force is responsible for:

- Assessing the impact on vulnerable people of the epidemic, the measures taken in the context of the corona crisis and the socio-economic measures taken by the various levels of government;
- Identifying people who are not covered by the socio-economic measures and making their problems apparent;
- Propose additional socio-economic measures;
- Encourage coordination with the federated entities to ensure better alignment of measures.

The Task Force is composed of the federal and regional ministers in charge of social affairs. It is assisted by a Social Impact Working Group COVID-19, which provides technical and scientific analysis, and a consultation group composed of experts from civil society organizations (including the National Higher Council for the Disabled - CSNPH).

2) A **series of measures** have been proposed, such as combining certain benefits for disabled persons with temporary unemployment, or extended "covid-19" parental leave for parents of disabled children or specific aids. Also noteworthy are several **communications** from the Minister of Health **on non-discrimination in access to health care for persons with disabilities**.

#### **In Flanders :**

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1) **COVID Task Forces established at the Flemish level** : various project groups within the 'COVID 19 care' assess notably the policies to be pursued within the care sector in the broadest sense (i.e. not limited to facilities for PwD, but also with regard to so-called residential care centres for the elderly, for psychiatric facilities and so on). Protective material is provided as much as possible - and partly in function of the risk - both to PwD who stay in the home situation and make use of the services of one or more assistants, as well as to facilities where PwD stay. Persons with disabilities and their representative organisation are involved in many Flemish 'task forces' set up as a result of the corona crisis (for example the task force 'Vulnerable Families' and task force 'COVID 19 care'.

2) **Good practices with regard to the crisis in the organisation of VAPH's services** (Vlaams Agentschap voor Personen met een Handicap) : The COVID-19 virus and the measures imposed by the government to combat it have an enormous impact on the daily operation and services, on users and their families, on staff and management, on committed volunteers, informal carers ... But this situation also unleashes a great deal of creativity and creates an unprecedented level of solidarity :

- **Organisation of crisis operations** (monitoring too / training for the staff, provision of instructional videos for using protective equipment and applying hygiene measures / developing a crisis scenario tailored for specific groups of people in the population / installing additional living group(s) for clients for whom home care is no longer possible)
- **Communication** (designation of one central communications manager / daily update of information for staff, telephone and online briefings / access to corona information on the website / FAQ for internal use, arranged by theme)

- **Informing and maintaining contact with parents of clients who are now staying at the facility 24/7 and clients who are staying at home** (offering digital communication options / newsletter, chain letters to inform parents and persons staying at home / telephone and online contacts / Daily posting of photos and messages on the website / online activities / distributing material for activities at home)
- **Psychosocial well-being of staff and clients** (Listening line for staff who are having a hard time / coaching for colleagues / activities with respect for keeping the necessary distance / ...)
- **Mutual solidarity** (collaboration within the same network support each other / making mouth masks, e.g. for home nurses / intersectoral collaboration / exchanging good practices between facilities / exchange of material / support from local government).

Other actions are also organized :

- Page with good practices in response to the coronavirus on the website of the VAPH ;
- Together with the Red Cross, a broad campaign was set up to distribute mouth masks ;
- A webinar set up by the VAPH to raise awareness among local actors to set up targeted actions to reach low literate PwD, in order to ensure that they do not fall by the wayside ;
- An online platform called 'Care and industry together against corona' was set up to exchange information and good practices and material across the borders of the EU member states (<https://care-industry-together-against-corona.b2match.io/contact>)

2) **Measures has been taken regarding budget guarantee** for the recognised and licensed organisations and financial compensation for extra care costs in the home situation for individual budget holders, as well as for the additional costs concerning material and infrastructure for facilities. In the meantime, it is still being investigated whether and to what extent additional costs in the area of personnel (24/7 support during the period COVID-19) can be financially compensated.

3) **Specific actions for people with disabilities in various domains :**

- **Increasing accessibility of the digital public sector information** (the information on the coronavirus is bundled in simple Dutch, Flemish Sign Language, and other languages on three websites that are regularly updated). The news media VRT also launched a chatbot on Facebook Messenger - an automated chat partner - that people can consult at any time and receive checked information.<sup>1</sup>
- **Regarding the physical accessibility**, the Agency Accessible Flanders, Inter collects tips/suggestions/attention points about physical accessibility in the current corona measures by means of a user survey. The results will be widely disseminated in Flanders at a later stage.
- **Supporting entrepreneurship and employment :**
  - o **Self-employed persons** in main or secondary occupation with a recognised work-limiting disability can apply for a Flemish support premium (VOP) to compensate for any extra costs or lower productivity as a result of the work-limiting disability ;<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnews/nl/2020/04/21/vrt-nws-lanceert-corona-chatbot-op-facebook-met-juiste-informatie/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.vlaanderen.be/vlaamse-ondersteuningspremie-voor-zelfstandigen>

- **Additional investment in the social economy** (made-to-measure enterprises and enterprises in the local service economy) of €1.6 million for temporary reinforcement measures for staff ;
- **Measures to ensure safe return to work** (job coaching with a focus on psychosocial well-being within the counselling service for people with a health problem or occupational disability / launch of 'Na V(irus) komt W(erk)' call for coordination and new initiatives on the reintegration of persons with health problems / Flemish action plan 'Alle Hens aan Dek' with a focus on vulnerable groups including people on sickness benefit and health problems > “leave no one behind”);
- In the general **communication**, specific accents about a safe return to work are included for target groups with a disability or health problem (for example, telephone numbers of Teleonthaal and CAW are distributed in the training courses of VDAB). Within the VDAB services that guide people with a health problem or disability to work through mediation (Specialised Team Mediation (GTB)), a switch is made to an adapted contact strategy to reach clients with a disability: by telephone, e-mail or via walking coaching.
- **Actions for the youth :**
  - Action Plan for socially vulnerable children and adolescents during corona<sup>3</sup> is aimed at children and adolescents in socially vulnerable situations including children and adolescents with disabilities ;<sup>3</sup>
  - Roadmaps for exit strategy drawn up under the coordination of the centre of expertise for youth work, will be drawn up.
- **Measures in the domain of education :**
  - Redaction of a general roadmap Covid-19 to restart of education : [https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/draaiboek\\_heropstart.pdf](https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/draaiboek_heropstart.pdf). In this roadmap, a specific attention is also paid to special education<sup>4</sup> and For pupils with specific educational needs in mainstream education<sup>5</sup>.
  - Emergency decree to ease the regulation for student who who wish to enrol in an ordinary school there is a consideration of reasonable adjustments ;
  - Relaxation of the admission requirements for special education and an individually adapted curriculum (IAC) until 1 September 2020 ;
  - The possibility of attestation change during the school year is foreseen during the school year 2020-2021 for when the assessment of the necessary education/support offer for a pupil with a report of a certain type turns out to be inappropriate ;
  - Communication and inspiration through the educational magazine “Klasse” give also some support during the corona period. Through “Klasse” stories are

<sup>3</sup> This includes the following measures : distribution of packages of relaxation, information and digital material tailored to vulnerable children / restart, scaling up and strengthening of youth work in youth care facilities / reinforcing the anonymous chat line of the Child Abuse Trust Centre, Nupraatikerover.be / project call “Connecting vulnerable children and young people with the neighbourhood and society”

<sup>4</sup> In the guidelines for the restart of education in special needs schools and the determination of which of the pupils can return to school first, the following criteria are taken into account : taking into account the capacity that is available in addition to the reception, the learning need of pupils, the care need of pupils, and the support need of parents. More info : [https://www.onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/nl/draaiboek-heropstart-lessen-thema-veiligheid#Buitengewoon\\_onderrwijs](https://www.onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/nl/draaiboek-heropstart-lessen-thema-veiligheid#Buitengewoon_onderrwijs)

<sup>5</sup> Support is continued from a distance to support the pupil, the teacher and the parents during the pre-teaching phase. With the gradual restart of schools, support can also be provided on the classroom floor if remote support is not feasible or desirable. Supporters are regarded as essential third parties who gain access to the school to provide support. More info : [https://www.onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/nl/coronavirus-richtlijnen-voor-scholen-en-clubs#Ondersteuning\\_leerlingen\\_specifieke\\_onderrwijsbehoeften](https://www.onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/nl/coronavirus-richtlijnen-voor-scholen-en-clubs#Ondersteuning_leerlingen_specifieke_onderrwijsbehoeften)

shared to inspire schools, teachers, etc. and an attention is also paid to pupils with specific educational needs.<sup>6</sup>

### **In the French-speaking Community :**

Various measures were adopted in the areas of education, sport and inclusion :

- **Measures in the domain of compulsory education :**
  - o **"E-classroom" project** has carried out several actions aimed at equipping compulsory education teachers of all types to help them maintain contact at a distance with their pupils and parents, and to ensure the continuity of learning, such as the production (in collaboration with the public media RTBF) of new educational content that can be consulted by pupils at a distance and used by teachers according to the remediation-consolidation-improvement logic,<sup>7</sup> or the provision of directories of tools and content useful for distance learning.
  - o **Equipment plan to reduce the digital divide** and the risk of dropping out of school among confined pupils. The government has approved the purchase of 1,390 laptop PCs refurbished through a public procurement procedure, to which will be added 420 donated laptops. These PCs will be targeted to the students who need them most.
- **Measures in the domain of 'social promotion' education :**
  - o **Implementation of a pedagogical continuity solution** : the "My class" platform (based on the free and open source software Moodle). This tool can be grouped around four pedagogical actions (transmit, test, communicate and create) and to which are added resources - free and responsible - increasing the interactivity of multimedia content (e.g. augmented reality) and exchanges (e.g. videoconferencing). The accessibility of My Class complies with WCAC 2.0 standards.
  - o **New partnerships are emerging**, such as with the Charles Gheude Institute (Brussels), which takes in teenagers with mild mental disabilities and organises mainly technical training (e.g. mechanics). Within the framework of these accompaniments, the learning and use of sign language (LSF) occupies also a singular place. The Pedagogical Resource Centre was also able, during

<sup>6</sup> Here are some examples :

- In de nieuwsbrief van Klasse van 30/4 stonden er getuigenissen vanuit het buitengewoon onderwijs: [https://www.klasse.be/223067/leraren-werken-vanop-afstand-maar-nooit-afstandelijk/?utm\\_source=Klasse+-+Nieuwsbrieven&utm\\_campaign=3b83d18adf-Klasse\\_nieuwsbrief\\_2020\\_04\\_30&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_b661ff641f-3b83d18adf-417254969](https://www.klasse.be/223067/leraren-werken-vanop-afstand-maar-nooit-afstandelijk/?utm_source=Klasse+-+Nieuwsbrieven&utm_campaign=3b83d18adf-Klasse_nieuwsbrief_2020_04_30&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_b661ff641f-3b83d18adf-417254969)
- Inspiratie voor pre-teaching voor alle leerlingen, ook kwetsbare leerlingen: <https://www.klasse.be/221414/preteaching-afstandsonderwijs-aanpak/>
- Aanpak van een school om alle leerlingen mee te nemen in pre-teaching: <https://www.klasse.be/221864/preteaching-lagere-school-iedereen-mee/>
- Ondersteuning voor leerlingen met specifieke onderwijsbehoeften in het gewoon onderwijs tijdens de corona-periode: <https://www.klasse.be/224665/ondersteuners-onderwijs-coronatijd/>

<sup>7</sup> Created by the RTBF and broadcast every day since April 6 on Ouftivi, the program "Y'a pas école, on révise!" offers educational sequences for primary school students to revise French, mathematics and early learning. Available on Auvio, these sequences are also available on the "e-classroom" educational resource platform. In addition, pedagogical fact sheets produced by the General Inspection Service for teachers for the primary and secondary levels have also been written to address certain topics using videos made available on e-class and/or on RTBF's Auvio platform. Students can also access these videos by consulting the RTBF's Auvio platform.

- the context of pedagogical continuity initiated in March 2020, to propose resources and support teachers wishing to use French sign language.<sup>8</sup>
- **The dialogue established between the Pedagogical Resource Centre and the stakeholders of sign language teaching allows for long-term collaborations to be envisaged**, in order to seek solutions to emerging needs. For example, several tools could prove useful in the future, such as automatic subtitling or adjusting the speed of video playback. But much more than an experiment made necessary by the circumstances of the suspension of classes, it is a process of empowerment that has been initiated by bringing together different teachers and co-constructing pedagogical activities.
  - **Measures for universities and higher education level :**
    - Remote education : For students with disabilities, the legislation on inclusive higher education allows for the modification of Individualized Support Plans (ISPs) containing all the reasonable accommodations available to students with disabilities. Since the beginning of the crisis, the support services have been following the students from a distance, either simply to reassure them or to offer them psychological support or logistical help.
    - Special measures for students who would have "material" difficulties in taking an online exam.<sup>9</sup>
    - Material assistance for vulnerable groups (including PwD) : a budget of €2,285,000 to direct aid for students who find themselves in difficult conditions because of the current health crisis (this amount will be in addition to the social subsidies already granted).
  - **Prevention and communication :**
    - Creation of video capsules for professionals working with families with children with disabilities (e.g.: How to support families to welcome a child usually residing in an institution?).
    - FAQ on covid-19 on many public websites.
  - **Measures in the domain of sports :**
    - Since the early days of the health crisis, the high-performance athletes (HNS), including HNS with disability, were granted a dispensation to continue their training in the sports infrastructures during the confinement period. Other actions were also organized such as weekly contact with the athletes in order to assess their physical and moral state of health, or purchase of sports equipment allowing fitness training at home.
    - Launch of a communication operation for the general public based on motivation and good mood on our social networks, while encouraging people to move.
    - Implementation of a deconfinement plan for sports with specific indication for sports for PwD : <http://www.handisport.be/deconfinement-du-monde-sportif-2>.

#### **In Wallonia :**

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Various good practices can be highlighted at the level of the Walloon Region :

<sup>8</sup> In concrete terms, five learning spaces that could be customized by the teachers were created to accommodate their 36 learners.

<sup>9</sup> In the context of assessments organised at a distance, students with difficulties (including students with disabilities) had until 4 May to notify their institution that they did not have adequate material conditions to enable them to take these tests. The aim is for higher education institutions to offer them an adapted solution.

**1) Collaboration with NGOs:**

- Mobile teams from Médecins sans Frontières - MSF train teams of auditors in care institutions in order to intervene in institutions where clusters have been identified.
- The Federation of Medical Houses and Médecins du Monde make their medical and paramedical resources available to deal with critical situations where health professionals need to be brought in.
- The Red Cross provides support in terms of prevention and health promotion training.
- The specific collaboration with MSF and the Red Cross has also made it possible to create and put online a microlearning tool for field services, as well as for intern teams of the Agence pour une Vie de Qualité (AVIQ) in the business divisions and auditors. This dynamic tool provides access at any time to web tutorials that explain in pictures the recommendations related to the use of equipment and webinars.

**2) Case reporting mechanism:** All services in the 'disability' sector were invited, via a targeted communication, to report suspicions, confirmed cases of COVID-19 and deaths via an electronic platform created for this purpose.<sup>10</sup>

**3) The AVIQ developed a specific Coronavirus website**

(<https://www.aviq.be/coronavirus.html>) in order to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic in the Walloon Region. The web page is divided into two sections. The first one is dedicated to the citizen (it contains information related to campaigns and awareness raising on good practices to adopt in the face of the virus). The second section is specific to professionals (they can find the various recommendations and other circulars issued by the AVIQ to deal with the virus. On this web page, the structures and services can also have access to the 'Plateforme Solidaire Wallonne' as well as to contact tracing.

**4) The AVIQ has launched an application for aid and health professionals who want to help : the 'Plateforme Solidaire Wallonne'** (<https://solidaire.aviq.be/>). Educators, doctors, paramedical staff, psychologists, nurses, care assistants, kitchen and maintenance staff, social workers, etc. can register and communicate their availability to use their expertise to help services in need of personnel. Individuals who wish to help but who are not part of these profiles can also register under the "other" category, specifying their training or specialization. Available professionals are filtered according to geographic criteria, service preference (elderly, disabled or frail) and availability.

**5) Immunisation of the crisis period for calculating the subsidies granted to operators :**

Modification of the regulatory provisions (for the health sector schemes and for the disability sector schemes) so that operators subsidised by the AVIQ continue to receive their financing as if the crisis had not occurred. The objective is to "neutralise" the possible drop in activity of certain operators or the collateral impacts of the crisis management they are experiencing in order to maintain their usual level of financing. These decisions aim to safeguard the financial equilibrium of the operators in order to ensure the sustainability of these services during and after the crisis, but also to maintain the purchasing power of workers in these sectors.

**6) Financial help to cover the additional costs related to the management of the Covid-19 crisis:**

- **Additional budgets (in 2 waves) to certain social and health operators particularly exposed to the management of the health crisis.** These financial

<sup>10</sup> The tool provides a real-time status of the situation within the establishments and allows alerts to be generated for establishments with two or more confirmed cases. The accounting system also counts the number of oxyconcentrators available in the institutions. Identification thus makes it possible to target the supply of FFP2 masks to staff appropriately. Contagious persons receive surgical masks. The declaration collection platform is regularly updated in order to correspond as closely as possible to the various requests.

resources (around €73.5 million) are intended to cover the additional costs borne by services in managing this crisis (purchase of equipment, waste management, additional staff costs, etc.). The sectors that have benefited from these additional interventions are: general hospitals and psychiatric hospitals, residential and day care services for PwD, services to help people with daily living for PwD, rest homes and nursing homes. Additional financial support measures were also taken to support services offering residential-type care and which had not previously received financial assistance (functional revalidation centres and psychiatric care homes).

- **Lump-sum intervention of €5,000 to cover the loss of revenue crisis by certain operators in the context of their subsidized activities caused by the covid-19 crisis.** The sectors which benefited from this measure are the following: mental health services, specialised addiction services, drop-in centres, adult day-care centres, adapted work undertakings, family and elderly support services, family planning centres, community health promotion services, local health promotion centres and certain health promotion and prevention operators.
- **Complementary interventions aimed at recruiting additional staff to help people with disabilities who are isolated because of the Covid-19 crisis :** approximately €185,000 were release to enable the support services for the disabled to recruit additional staff, for a period of one month, to help people with disabilities who are isolated because of the health crisis.

#### In the German-speaking Community :

Measures taken by the '*Dienststelle für Selbstbestimmtes Leben*' (DSL) in response to the covid-19 crisis :

##### 1) Measures taken specifically in favour of PwD :

- **Maintenance of remote assistance** and the possibility of interventions to ensure support on site or in a support structure, if the person or his or her family is in a precarious situation or needs respite ;
- **Maintaining the DSL's telephone hotline** and systematically and proactively **contacting all persons** with a file at the Agency by telephone to assess their situation and the possible need for assistance ;
- **Coordinating offers of assistance** from individuals or organizations for persons with disabilities and seniors ;
- **Formation of a pool of staff from the DSL's staff and service providers.** This reserve makes it possible to replace service offers that are not available because of the COVID-19 crisis, to support services and providers under stress as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, but also to respond to specific requests from people in need of support and/or isolated in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, for example to be able to be accompanied for a walk ;
- The DSL issued documents so that caregivers close to persons in need of support could justify their movements during a police check ;
- **Translation and diffusion of 'Easy-to-Read' documents concerning covid-19 and the measures in force and to be applied** (in cooperation with organizations of persons with disabilities and the Ministry of the German-speaking Community) ;
- Financial measures for persons undergoing a vocational rehabilitation traineeship, an orientation traineeship and an in-company training course.

2) Measures taken in favour of providers and resources in accommodation recognized by the DSL in the disability sector:

- In order to ensure the quality of the accompaniment, staff of the Day Centers and the respite service **support the staff of the Residential Centers**. The DSL set up a framework that allows for temporary delegation of educational provision between the various service providers. This support is voluntary on the part of the staff members ;
- In order to prevent or rather stem the spread of COVID-19 in these centers, the DSL has developed a **prevention strategy in collaboration with the centers** and the Ministry, which includes the provision of protective equipment, the use of hygiene experts and a strategy of regular testing ;
- Day Centers, the Early Help Service, the Respite Service and the Come-Back Service have been providing a reduced level of support but maintain **regular contact with the people they accompany by telephone and/or digital means**. There is also **the possibility of case-by-case care and individual accompaniment**. The support and care of persons is based on an individualised risk assessment which takes into account both the risks linked to a coronavirus infection and the risks linked to the person not being cared for ;
- The DSL also **supports service providers in obtaining protective material** ;
- The subsidy for all providers has been guaranteed and an additional **financial intervention** is planned to partially compensate for the losses and additional costs related to the COVID-19 crisis. Salaries of staff members have been guaranteed by the DSL.
- The adapted work enterprises have continued to work with reduced staff and have followed the recommendations set out in the "Generic guide to combat the spread of COVID-19 at work".
- Organized transport arrangements were adapted to ensure social distancing and hygiene measures.
- In order to ensure that PwD are accompanied and that their contacts are kept to a minimum, the accommodation resources welcome on a voluntary basis the people who live with them throughout the period of the COVID-19 crisis. There is no possibility of short stays in the housing resources for the duration of the crisis. The DSL is in close and proactive contact with the housing resources in order to find a quick and short-term solution in the event of a crisis situation. An additional per diem subsidy has been granted to support the housing resources.

### (CY) Cyprus

Access to information: through the special website [www.pio.gov.cy/coronavirus](http://www.pio.gov.cy/coronavirus) of the Press and Information Office there is data and information for the general public but also in alternative forms of communication for persons with disabilities like sign language, easy-to-read information, TV films in audio/visual form. In addition NGO's of persons with disabilities were actively involved in providing continuous information on developments and measures against the pandemic crisis.

Institutional or supported living: responsible public services for the operation of institutions and homes in the community where persons with disabilities live on a 24hours basis monitor whether all guidance and information issued by the Ministry of Health is provided to all such institutions and homes, whether necessary hygiene measures are implemented effectively and whether coronavirus tests have been carried out in order to detect and isolate carriers among the staff or persons with disabilities.

Supported employment: the number of persons with disabilities in supported employment programmes in the open labour market is monitored during suspension of work, their inclusion in employees receiving special sickness benefit due to the crisis and their gradual return to their work when reopening. Job coaches were crucial in the monitoring and assisting persons with disabilities through the above.

Mobility: in the decrees issued by the Minister of Health, by virtue of the Law on Infectious Diseases, exceptions to the exceptional mobility of persons with disabilities and of those persons who offer treatment or other supporting services to the persons with disabilities have been included. NGO's employing social assistants monitor the provision of mobility assistance to persons with disabilities.

## **(DE) Denmark**

### Efforts to protect persons with disabilities against Covid-19

On March 18<sup>th</sup> 2020, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior issued an executive order allowing municipal councils and other public authorities to depart from the provisions of the current legislation within the social area when:

- 1) this is necessary in order to prevent or contain the spread of Covid-19,
- 2) derogation is required as a result of actions to prevent or contain the spread of Covid-19,
- 3) fulfilment of obligations or rights becomes impossible or disproportionately difficult as a result of measures necessary to prevent or contain the spread of Covid-19.

The possibility to depart from obligations only applies to non-critical functions and does e.g. not apply to the obligation of municipalities to provide the help and support, needed by the individual citizen. Thus, the municipality has to assess whether the help and support can be provided in a different way, reducing the risk of contamination. The municipality is still obligated to make a concrete and individual assessment of the individual citizen's need for help, care and support in the specific case.

On April 5<sup>th</sup> 2020, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior issued an executive order regulating temporary visitation restrictions in placements and special housing opportunities ect. within the social area. This as part of the effort made to reduce the spread of Covid-19. Thus, the visitation restrictions has been eased as of May 13<sup>th</sup>, exempting certain placements and special housings from the restrictions, generally allowing visits outside by 1-2 permanent visitors and making it possible to allow indoor visits by 1-2 permanent visitors in certain specific situations.

The latest guidelines from the health authorities gives the possibility for employers to have employees in critical functions tested in order to reduce the length of sick leaves. This means that persons who receives help and support e.g. through the personal assistance service scheme (Borgerstyret Personlig Assistance) can keep their usual assistants and maintain normal and safe daily routines. Furthermore, the municipalities are allowed dispensation from rules regulating working hours such that assistants can work more than 48 hours a week in order to make sure as few different assistants as possible are in close contact with the citizens, thereby reducing the contamination risk.

#### Efforts made to accommodate social vulnerability among persons with disabilities

On April 25<sup>th</sup>, all political parties in the government entered into an agreement on initiatives concerning vulnerable and exposed groups in relation to Covid-19. As part of the agreement, three partnerships has been created across public authorities, civil society organizations, private actors and the public sector in order to develop initiatives to accommodate loneliness, vulnerability and support socially exposed persons and persons with disabilities. The disability-partnership plays an important role in the planning of the reopening of the Danish society by assessing the current initiatives concerning people with disabilities, proposing changes to these as well as developing new initiatives to accommodate current and future challenges.

As part of the agreement, funds have been allocated to the largest umbrella organization within the disability area (Danske Handicaporganisationer) to start up outreach efforts, including phone or personal contact with information concerning contamination risk, social events, membership activities ect. This, in order to support that people with disabilities can return to their everyday life and the community.

Furthermore, funds have been allocated for culture and sports associations, so that relevant organizations can apply for funds to arrange activities helping to accommodate the effect of the shutdown of society and reintroduce the possibility for vulnerable groups to participate in cultural and sports activities.

#### Efforts made to accommodate economic vulnerability among persons with disabilities

Parents who are forced to take care of their disabled child in their home as a consequence of Covid-19 in order to make sure the child receives the necessary help and care and at the same time is protected from unnecessary contamination risk, can receive temporary financial support covering their loss of earnings during this extraordinary time. This, even though the child's need for care would under normal circumstances be accommodated in other ways.

#### Communication efforts for persons with disabilities during Covid-19

All press conferences held by public authorities are translated into sign language live.

A common hotline, covering all public authorities, anchored within the health authorities, has been set up in order to answer general questions about Covid-19. All citizens can call this hotline.

The health authorities have disseminated information material directed specifically to vulnerable groups, including advice to protect one self and others against contamination. Furthermore, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior continuously update information on Covid-19 in relation to the social area on the ministry's website. Common Q&As can also be found here.

VISO – a national counselling organization within The National Board of Social Services offers counselling through a hotline as well as direct phone counselling through a nation-wide supplier network which offers professional guidance on questions concerning specific citizens and specific groups.

Finally, the Disability Unit within the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior answers both written inquiries and inquiries by phone.

## (EE) Estonia

Due to the emergency situation caused by COVID-19, the disability status was automatically prolonged for persons, whose disability status would otherwise end from the beginning of the emergency situation until August, 31. The disability status and payment of social benefits was automatically prolonged for 6 months. Altogether, the disability status was prolonged for 6584 persons.

As a special crisis measure, Estonia introduced temporary financial support to parents of children with special needs. The aim of the financial benefit was to provide state supported income for parent, who temporarily has to leave the labour market (ie whose employment contract is suspended or who are on holiday without pay) due to the closure of kindergartens and schools, in order to guarantee the everyday surveillance, study support and personal hygiene procedures of their children. Parents of children with profound, severe or moderate disability, educational special needs and lack of immunity are granted 70% of their average income of the previous calendar year for each calendar day. The measure is applicable until the end of emergency, but no longer than 31.05.2020. The budget of the measure was 10 MEUR. More information is available on the Social Insurance Board website (not available in English): <https://www.sotsiaalkindlustusamet.ee/et/puue-ja-hoolekanne/erivajadusega-lapsevanema-erakorraline-toetus>

Due to an emergency situation the measure was introduced, which allows worker temporarily to apply on-line for a sick leave by his- or herself. The case may be opened by a person who is ill, has a child who is ill, needs care for a close family member, or has been exposed to COVID-19. Additional funding from the state budget was made available from March 13 till the end of the emergency situation to extend temporarily the sickness benefit to the first three days of sick leave which is normally not covered by Health Insurance Fund.

The food assistance was organised by local governments for persons in need. Many local governments started cooperation with local grocery stores and pharmacies to deliver food, other basic necessities, medicines and in some cases, technical advices, to persons who needed assistance or in COVID-19 risk groups. In many cases, the local government paid for the food and medicines delivery. A number of good examples of food delivery solutions for persons in need was emerged, with the perspective to find suitable model to the whole country.

The visiting hours in social welfare institutions (incl special care homes) and hospitals were prohibited. People in 24 hours special care services and in long-term care homes were not allowed to leave the territory of care home until the end of emergency. As communication with family members and friends for people at care institutions and hospitals was restricted, psychological, religious and emotional support is provided by pastoral counsellors through telephone-counselling in accordance with person's beliefs and needs. The Estonian Social Insurance Board delivered 30 tablets to the patients in hospital and long-term care homes in Saaremaa, the region most hit by COVID-19, to communicate with their families and friends.

Special crisis hotline 1247 of the Emergency Response Centre, providing all kind of information about the crisis, emergency situation and related support measures, also offers psychological first aid which is provided in cooperation with the specialists of the 116 006 victim support crisis hotline of the Social Insurance Board. Dementia helpline 644 6440 advices carers of people with dementia also in the COVID-19 related questions. Dementia Competence Centre has elaborated guidelines and recommendations to carers and family members living with people with dementia. Tallinn Children's Hospital crisis hotline 678

7422 advises workers at the front line of the COVID-19, such as health workers and police, who are worried about themselves and their children. Some women's support centres have been practising and communicating (especially through social media) about web-based solutions and chat options, as a possibility to get help if making a phone-call is not possible. The Cabinet of Ministers has allocated additional 550 000 EUR to the regular financing to victim support and psychosocial crisis assistance.

As the local governments' revenues have decreased, the government has adopted 130 MEUR financial support package as a crisis measure to support local governments. 30 MEUR of that financial support package is allocated to stabilise local governments' revenue, 30 MEUR to local road network and 70 MEUR to support investments. Finances from the local government stabilisation fund (ie 30MEUR) can be used, among others, for the provision of social welfare services. Investments into social welfare infrastructure and living environments are planned to accelerate the improvement of long-term care services. The social sector must also keep pace with technological and digital developments, increase its innovation capacity and support the uptake of technological solutions that also contribute to people's ability to cope independently.

The preconditions for funding of ongoing social welfare projects will be changed retroactively from the beginning of emergency (12.03.2020). In 2018 and 2109 the local governments had possibility to apply for funding for development and provision of welfare services, that support employment (for example, day care, home care and support person etc for people with disabilities). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the provision of number of services (for example day care) had to be cancelled while the need for other services (for example home care) has emerged. Local governments have the possibility to redesign their projects according to the current needs. In August 2020, a new round of applications with the total budget of 5 MEUR will be opened as a crisis alleviation measure for local governments. Local governments may apply for funding for the development and provision of social welfare services, including different counselling (for example debt counselling, psychological counselling etc) to support the employment of people with disabilities, people with care needs and their family members as well as people with coping difficulties occurred due to the COVID-19 crisis.

During the emergency situation in Estonia all the daily press conferences were translated into Estonian sign language. As a positive outcome now all the press releases on the Ministry of social affairs webpage are translated into sign language.

The Ministry of Social Affairs has been in regular contact with the Estonian organisations working with the rights of persons with disabilities to survey how they and the community is doing. During the lockdown, both organisations have extended their online services as well as at-home services and have also reported some increase in the demand for some services due to the crisis.

The state funding for these organisations has continued as before, but to take into account the possible economic effects of the COVID-19 health crisis, the Ministry of Social Affairs has put together a memorandum for the government to ask for additional funding. The aim of the memorandum is to ensure that the strategic partners of the ministry would not face financial difficulties because to the crisis and the organisations would survive economically.

Additionally, a wide scale campaign to tackle domestic violence was launched in May taking into account that people are required to stay at home, in self-isolation, and research has shown

that during the COVID-19 pandemic, violence against women and domestic violence needs focused attention. The campaign focuses on different forms of domestic violence.

### (EL) Greece

- Special leave for persons with disabilities (under certain preconditions) and for people who have a person with disability in their family, both in the private and the public sector.
- With a circular all the open care facilities for persons with disabilities were closed during the lock down. With a new circular the facilities re-opened, provided that they followed instructions and safety measures outlined in the circular and drafted in close cooperation with the National Committee for the Protection of Public Health as well as the National Confederation of Persons with Disabilities. For the closed care facilities, which couldn't be shut down, instructions were issued in order for them to adapt the way they provided their services to the new circumstances.
- During the lock down, the Disability Assessment Centers suspended their operation. As a result, persons with disabilities who were beneficiaries of disability allowances and had submitted a request for a new assessment in order to get an extension of their allowances could not have their disability assessed. For these persons an extension was decided until the 30<sup>th</sup> of June. The Disability Assessment Centers re-opened on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May.
- On the website of the Single Social Security Organization (EFKA) a new link was created which allows a person to make an appointment for a disability assessment from home. This is an important intervention because it will remain after the Covid-19 crisis is over.
- All the information regarding the Covid-19 crisis is accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Special schools were shut down during the lock down. They re-opened on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June.

### (ES) Spain

#### **GOOD PRACTICES FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIA IN SPAIN**

- Measures regarding confinement that recognizes exceptions to some rules for people with disabilities (not exclusively) in order to respect their rights or facilitate their assistance and care when necessary.
  - o Royal Decree 463/2020, 14<sup>th</sup> March, which declares COVID-19 state of alarm in Spain. Article 7.1. e) established for person with disabilities (as well as for other vulnerable groups like children, elderly, etc.) the authorization to circulate with someone else to do some allowed activities that included assistance and care for persons with disabilities.
  - o Order TMA/277/2020, 23<sup>rd</sup> March, declared some tourist accommodation as essential services and allowed them to accommodate people that needed to travel to assist or take care of, between others, people with disabilities.
  - o Instruction Ministry of Health, 19<sup>th</sup> March, included interpretation criteria to facilitate persons with disabilities related to autism spectrum whose situation was being aggravated because of the confinement, to circulate with another person in the public street taking necessary measures to avoid contagion.

- Specific measures for people with disabilities into transition to “new normal” included in Annex II of Action Plan for the Transition:
  - o (Phase 0) Special attention will be paid to the provision of spaces for people with disabilities at:
    - *Urban and peri-urban mobility*
    - *Medium and long distance land mobility (rail and bus)*
    - *Marine transport*
  - o (Phase I)
    - *Social services: Progressive reactivation based on health recommendations, with priority attention to most vulnerable groups. Specially, some therapies to attend people with disabilities: early care, occupational, rehabilitative and psychosocial therapies.*

Order SND/399/2020, 9<sup>th</sup> May, establishes the opening of all the centers of the Reference Catalog of social services for face-to-face attention to citizens who need it and includes therapy, rehabilitation, early care and day care services for people with disabilities.

This Order also authorizes the opening of high performance sports centers and outdoor sports facilities for training. Athletes with disabilities may be accompanied by another person, if needed.
  - o (Phase II)
    - *Social services: Visits by a family member to people with disabilities that live in residence or collective houses for persons with disabilities.*
- Other measures:
  - o New minimum income benefit (Royal Decree 20/2020, 29<sup>th</sup> May). It is a non-contributory benefit of the Social Security System approved to combat poverty and social exclusion. The situation created by COVID19 pandemic has accelerated its approval and it would be important for persons with disabilities that usually have to deal with higher rates of poverty and exclusion.
  - o Urgent and extraordinary measures to face economic and social impact of COVID-19 (Royal Decree 8/2020, 17<sup>th</sup> March):
    - Supplementary financing to attend basic benefits related to extraordinary situations derived of COVID-19 at social services in the Autonomous Regions and Municipalities. Article 1.2.a) mention the reinforcement of home-based proximity services to guarantee care, support, security and food for elderly people with disabilities or dependent.
    - Adaptation and/or reduction of working hours to attend people that need personal and direct care as a direct consequence of COVID-19 (article 1).
    - Ensure energy and water supply for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities.
    - Definition of economic vulnerability in relation to the mortgage moratorium. Special assumptions to establish the limit of incomes for families with members with disabilities as well as for mortgage debtor with disabilities.

- Rental help program in case tenant is a person in situation of social or economic vulnerability. It includes special conditions for families with, at least, one member with disability.
- Complementary measures in the workplace to mitigate effects of COVID-19 (Royal Decree 9/2020, 27<sup>th</sup> March). During the state of alarm, social services will be understood as essential services independently of their public or private ownership or management. Social centres for people with disabilities are included.
- Spanish Bioethic Committee *Report on bioethic aspects for the prioritization of health resources in the context of Coronavirus crisis*. Direction General on disability policies requested this report from the Committee because some administrative authorities and medical associations were publishing some criteria that was not respecting rights of people with disabilities. The report avoid any type of discrimination for people with disabilities in the prioritization of health resources during the COVID-19 crisis and also promote some criteria for positive discrimination measures (see document [here](#) –in Spanish).
- [Elaboration by the Ministry of Health of guides and materials for the general population in accessible format and in version easy-to-read, as well as specific recommendations for person with behavioural disturbances \(autism spectrum disorder, disruptive behaviors, etc\).](#)
  - [Action guide for people with chronic health conditions and elderly people in a confined situation \(only available in Spanish\). Annex V includes specific recommendations for persons with behavioural disturbances. Guía de actuación para personas con condiciones de salud crónicas y personas mayores en situación de confinamiento](#)
  - [How to wash hands \(only available in Spanish\) Cómo lavarse las manos](#)
- DG on disability policies has commissioned a study to identify and analyse main needs and difficulties faced by persons with disabilities, their families and environment due to the health crisis caused by COVID-19 as well as the impacts on them (under elaboration).
- [Autonomous Regions established also administrative and organizational rules related to social services for their territories. Here, some examples:](#)
  - Castilla-La Mancha: [Resolución de 25/03/2020, de la Consejería de Bienestar Social, por la que se acuerda la continuación de diversos procedimientos administrativos indispensables de la Dirección General de Discapacidad para el funcionamiento básico de los servicios sociales como consecuencia de la crisis sanitaria ocasionada por el COVID-19. \[2020/2486\]](#)
  - Cataluña: [RESOLUCIÓN TSF/758/2020, de 20 de marzo, por la que se concretan las medidas organizativas y de recursos humanos excepcionales en el ámbito de las residencias y centros diurnos de atención a personas mayores, personas con discapacidad y personas con enfermedad mental, así como en los servicios de ayuda a domicilio, en aplicación de la Resolución SLT/737/2020, de 13 de marzo, por la que se adoptan medidas](#)

- [complementarias para la prevención y el control de la infección por el SARS-CoV-2.](#)
- Extremadura: [RESOLUCIÓN de 13 de marzo de 2020, del Vicepresidente Segundo y Consejero, sobre medidas preventivas en materia de salud pública relativas a las personas usuarias de plazas públicas financiadas por la Junta de Extremadura en servicios sociales especializados de atención a la discapacidad y al trastorno mental grave en Extremadura.](#)
  - Madrid: [RESOLUCIÓN de 11 de marzo de 2020, de la Dirección General de Salud Pública de la Comunidad de Madrid, por la que se adoptan medidas en materia de salud pública en relación con la actividad de los centros ocupacionales que prestan atención a personas con discapacidad intelectual y los servicios sociales de atención temprana a menores.](#)
  - Navarra: [ORDEN FORAL 132/2020, de 17 de marzo, de la Consejera de Derechos Sociales, por la que se adoptan medidas preventivas y recomendaciones en el ámbito de las personas mayores, personas con discapacidad y ámbito de menores a aplicar durante el periodo de crisis sanitaria.](#)
- Good practices from organizations of people with disabilities: elaboration of guides for people with disabilities during the confinement. Examples:
- PLENA INCLUSION (March 2020) [Guía de apoyos en casa para familias y personas con discapacidad intelectual o del desarrollo ante el COVID-19](#), which is a guide that explain support systems for people with intellectual or development disabilities to them and their families during the confinement.
  - FEDACE (April 2020) [Guía práctica para la Cuarentena con Personas con Daño Cerebral ante la pandemia de Coronavirus Covid-19](#), which give guidelines for daily life to people with brain damage and their caregivers during the confinement.
  - FESPAU. Compilation of resources and support materials for families with children with autism spectrum disorder (only available in Spanish):
    - [Recursos para familias con hijos/as con TEA](#)
    - [Recopilación de materiales más útiles de la red durante el confinamiento](#)
  - RADIO TERRICOLA ([radioterricola.com](#)) is a radio station of ENVERA, occupational center for people with intellectual disabilities. During the Covid 19 pandemic, this mobile unit has made 57 special radio programs under the title "Together we are stronger" giving voice to people with intellectual disabilities and maintaining the union between confined Envera beneficiaries, combating isolation and putting in contact families, collaborating companies, shopping centers, authorities, artists, athletes, poets, etc.

## (FI) Finland

### *Introduction*

On 16 March 2020, the Government of Finland together with the President of the Republic declared a state of emergency referred to in the Emergency Powers Act (1552/2011). Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Government has decided to introduce measures under the Emergency Powers Act with the aim of securing the requisite treatment capacity and response to the pandemic as well as the provision of essential and necessary health and social services.

At its plenary session on 6 May, the Government of Finland issued a resolution describing its hybrid strategy to combat the coronavirus epidemic and detailing how the restrictive measures imposed to deal with the epidemic would be dismantled in a controlled and gradual manner.

As a rule, a disability or reduced functional capacity does not mean that the person is in the risk group for coronavirus. Like other people, persons with disabilities may also have an underlying health condition that increases their risk of developing a severe coronavirus infection. Providing them with accessible information about the situation is especially important.

However, many persons with disabilities are particularly vulnerable during the prevailing state of emergency. In emergency conditions, special attention must be paid to ensuring that the rights of vulnerable people and those in need of special support are realised.

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, public authorities must take all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk. The coronavirus epidemic also affects persons with disabilities, and the obligations of the Convention are taken into account in the management of the epidemic.

Every person has an inherent right to life and all the necessary measures must be taken to ensure that persons with disabilities can enjoy this right on an equal basis with others. Persons with disabilities have the same right to receive services without discrimination on the basis of disability as everyone else. The same equal right also applies to intensive care. In a situation where his or her life is temporarily in danger, everyone has an equal right to be assessed for the need for intensive care. A disability in itself does not in any way justify deprivation of liberty or other restrictive measures.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is responsible for the general planning, guidance and monitoring of the prevention of infectious diseases. Municipalities, joint municipal authorities, hospital districts and Regional State Administrative Agencies have received instructions on how to prepare for the coronavirus epidemic.

[Link to the Government's website: Information and advice on the coronavirus](#)

[Link to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health website: Preparedness for the novel coronavirus disease - A state of emergency in Finland](#)

[Link to press release: People have equal access to services in the coronavirus situation - everyone has access to the help and care they need](#)

#### *Securing social and health care services*

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has instructed municipalities regarding how to secure the provision of services during the state of emergency. Although the situation is exceptional, municipalities must safeguard clients' right to receive social welfare and healthcare services that meet their individual needs, apart from certain exceptional arrangements required by the situation. In emergency conditions, attention must be paid especially to vulnerable clients and those in need of special support.

The Contagious Diseases Act does not entitle a municipality to discontinue the provision of any health and social service entirely. Each person's individual service needs must be assessed individually, ensuring that no one's right to last-resort means of subsistence and care is jeopardised.

Special attention should always be paid to the realisation of the interests of clients in need of special support when delivering healthcare and social welfare services. This need is emphasised in emergency conditions. As the need for assistance increases, the provision of easily accessible guidance and counselling services must be stepped up, taking into account the groups that cannot use remote or telephone counselling.

Protecting the clients and ensuring the continuity of their other treatment and care, wellbeing and functional capacity are part of the normal implementation of home care and other services provided at home, and this must be continued even in emergency conditions. In services provided at home, efforts are made to ensure that the same employee(s) take care of the same clients to minimise the risk of infection. Municipalities must ensure that the care and assistance provided to persons depending on informal care and personal assistance continues even if the informal carer, the person in informal care, the person assisted or the person providing the assistance contracts a coronavirus infection.

Efforts are made to arrange interpreters for disabled clients of interpretation services in spite of the emergency conditions and remote interpretation services can be used. The remote service of the Centre for Interpreting Services for the Disabled provides the client with remote interpretation for service needs of a short duration in the Finnish sign language.

[Link to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health website: Official instructions and decisions issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health](#)

*Information package on the impact of the coronavirus epidemic in services for person with disabilities*

Instructions issued for different parties on how the coronavirus should be taken into account in the services for people with disabilities has been compiled in the Handbook on Disability Services maintained by the National Institute for Health and Welfare. The Handbook is aimed at supporting the work of professionals working in the field of disability services. The page is updated when new instructions are issued. Instructions issued by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare and other actors such as municipalities, organisations and the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela) have been compiled on the website. The website also contains accessible material and material in different languages.

*Funding of social and health care sector organisations*

The Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (STEA) is an independent state aid authority operating in connection with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. STEA manages grants targeted at social welfare and health care organisations' non-profit activities promoting health and wellbeing.

STEA will open an additional call for grant applications for 2020 because of the coronavirus epidemic. The total amount of the additional STEA grants to be awarded in 2020 is approximately EUR 5 million. Grants will be targeted at two new project packages: 1. Expanding and increasing the volume of psychosocial support and the digital services provided by public service info 2. Helping and providing psychosocial support for persons and families in a challenging life situation and at risk of social exclusion.

STEA has also instructed organisations to draw on their special expertise and continue to target their activities and resources at promoting everyone's wellbeing and health. If the coronavirus epidemic so requires, the activities funded by the aid can be adapted to the changed situation and alternative operating models can be considered to support the target groups of the activities.

[Link to the website of the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations \(STEA\)](#)

#### *Improving the realisation of the rights of persons with disabilities*

The Advisory Board for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities VANE is the national coordination mechanism referred to in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Its function is to facilitate the national implementation of the Convention.

VANE has drawn up a statement to the authorities in local and central government and a press release about the need to take into account the obligations of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities during the state of emergency. In them, it has emphasised the key obligations to be taken into account during the coronavirus epidemic, such as the right to get information that is accessible, the right to health services on an equal basis with others, and the right to participate in decision-making in emergency conditions.

VANE has organised two meetings where the Finnish Disability Forum (the umbrella organisation of disability organisations), the public servants of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the political management can discuss the situation. The meeting decided that the practice will be continued so that a close dialogue between the Ministry and the disability organisations can be maintained and the participation of the organisations will also be realised during the state of emergency.

VANE is currently working on the second National Action Plan on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in cooperation with various ministries. In this work, the key issues concerning the rights of persons with disabilities that have been brought up as a result of the coronavirus epidemic will also be taken into consideration.

#### [Advisory Board for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities VANE](#)

##### *Communication and advice during the coronavirus epidemic*

The communications material published by the Government and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health on the coronavirus epidemic has been prepared in compliance with instructions on accessibility. Information is available in several languages, including plain language and sign language. The website of the National Institute for Health and Welfare contains instructions related to coronavirus COVID-19 in 20 different languages. The website is updated when new material becomes available.

A letter about coronavirus has been sent to every home in Finland. The purpose of the letter is to ensure that everyone receives information about the coronavirus and preparedness for it. All of the material in the letter is in both Finnish and Swedish. In the letter distributed to the Sámi-speaking areas, the instructions are also available in the Sámi languages. In addition to Finnish and Swedish, the letter to citizens is available on the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare website in 16 different languages, as audio recordings and as videos in the Finnish and Finnish-Swedish sign languages. The letter to citizens is also available in Braille.

##### *General advice*

During the coronavirus epidemic, general advice is available through a telephone service and a chat. The service is primarily available in Finnish and, where possible, also in Swedish and English. You can also send questions in a text message to the telephone number. The SMS service is intended for persons who are unable to speak over the telephone because of a hearing impairment or some other reason.

The advisory service is based on the content of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare website. The advice is primarily intended for persons who are unable to search information online. The service will be developed according to the situation in the coronavirus epidemic.

#### *Health advice or guidance*

Health centres provide general health advice. Patient with acute symptoms are guided to contact a health care emergency clinic. In life-threatening emergency situations, the emergency number 112 should be called. If necessary, an emergency message can be sent as an SMS to the emergency number 112. The use of emergency SMSs is primarily intended for people who cannot hear or produce speech.

### **(HR) Croatia**

#### **PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC - concerning persons with disabilities**

Regarding your inquiry about the initiatives that are being taken by the Republic of Croatia in protecting the rights and interests of persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, on behalf of the Ministry for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy we can state that this Ministry, from the first recorded case of the disease, on February 25, 2020, is in constant cooperation with service providers in the social welfare system, to whom it forwards instructions and recommendations by e-mail. All instructions and recommendations are also publicly available on the Ministry's website: <https://mdomsp.gov.hr> and at the official site for all information on the coronavirus of the Government of the Republic of Croatia: [www.koronavirus.hr](http://www.koronavirus.hr).

The Republic of Croatia is currently in the third phase of mitigation of the measures due to the favourable epidemiological situation. On the day of May 20, there are 2,234 patients, of which 1,978 were cured, and unfortunately 96 people died.

Bearing in mind the fact that persons with disabilities are at higher risk of developing severe case of COVID-19 disease and possible complications, compared to the general population, as well as the fact that the risk of infection in any form of organized accommodation is extremely high, the Ministry for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy started timely activities of informing and instructing service providers on how to act in the current conditions of the epidemiological situation.

In regard to above mentioned, on 27 February 2020, all service providers were sent an instruction from the Ministry of Health on the justification of banning visits to institutions in the social welfare system as well as a "Recommendation on treatment in social welfare institutions according to specific protection measures related to nCoV disease (COVID-19)" given by the Croatian Institute of Public Health (HZJZ).

A call center 113 has been introduced, for all questions related to coronavirus, along with other

telephone numbers for informing citizens of the current situation. Epidemiologists and other experts respond to the questions.

The social welfare system has provided telephone lines for psychosocial assistance and counseling in crisis situations, which are answered by experts from Family Centers, and the lines are available every day from 8 am to 8 pm (099/5270 126 and 099/5270 127). In case of the need to involve mental health experts, contact with the Crisis Center is also provided.

With continuous reminders for all social service providers about the need for regular monitoring and compliance with recommendations published on the websites of the Croatian Institute of Public Health, the Ministry of Health, Directorate of Civil Protection and relevant regional and local crisis headquarters of civil protection, the Ministry for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy publishes daily updates and information as well as prevention and precautionary measures regarding coronavirus. A crisis headquarters has been formed in the Ministry, and an e-mail address: [5.1.2e@mdomsp.hr](mailto:5.1.2e@mdomsp.hr) has been created and published, through which a number of questions and answers from the Ministry's domain are communicated on a daily basis.

For the purpose of prevention of the COVID-19 epidemic and protection of users and employees in the social welfare system, the Ministry has developed a number of recommendations, instructions and decisions on actions in terms of work organization and provision of social services:

- Recommendation for the purpose of preventing the COVID-19 epidemic (March 13, 2020)
- Notice to civil society organizations (NGOs) - COVID-19 (March 16, 2020)
- Recommendation on action to prevent an epidemic of disease caused by COVID-19 in the provision of social services of home assistance (March 18, 2020)
- Decision on the organization of the work of Centers for Social Welfare and social care providers during the epidemic of the COVID-19 caused by the SARS-CoV2 virus (March 19, 2020)

The directors, or the responsible persons of the service provider make decisions on the organization of working hours and the work schedule of employees in two shifts.

- Instructions to social welfare institutions (Centers for Social Welfare, Social care homes, other social service providers) on how to act in cases of need for accommodation in crisis situations during the current epidemiological situation (March 20, 2020)
- Pursuant to the Decision of the Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia on the introduction of the necessary measure of special organization of social welfare institutions and other social service providers during the declared epidemic of COVID-19 (March 25, 2020) (Official Gazette, No. 32/20) data on the possibilities of redistribution of workers were collected from the service providers, and the necessary information, recommendations and instructions on how to proceed were prepared and forwarded in this regard.

Through the e-mail address, [5.1.2e@mdomsp.hr](mailto:5.1.2e@mdomsp.hr), daily reports of social service providers on the procedure regarding the admission of new users and difficulties encountered in the field are received and monitored.

In cooperation with the Croatian Institute of Public Health, instructions were prepared:

- Guidelines for the prevention and suppression of the COVID-19 epidemic in homes for the elderly and other institutions in the social welfare system (March 27, 2020)

- Instructions for the prevention and suppression of the COVID-19 epidemic in homes for the elderly and other institutions in the social welfare system (April 10, 2020)
- Instructions for the prevention and suppression of the COVID-19 epidemic in homes for the elderly and other institutions in the social welfare system (April 11, 2020)
- Instructions for the prevention and suppression of the COVID-19 epidemic in homes for the elderly and other institutions in the social welfare system (April 14, 2020)
- Decision on the necessary measure of enhanced control of the implementation of the instruction for prevention and suppression of the COVID-19 epidemic for social service providers in the social welfare system (April 17, 2020)
- Instructions to accommodation providers in the Social welfare system in order to prevent and control the COVID-19 epidemic (May 8, 2020)
- Guidelines for the prevention and control of the COVID-19 epidemic for providers of non-institutional social services in the social welfare system (May 8, 2020)
- Guidelines for the prevention and suppression of the Coronavirus epidemic (COVID-19) for Social Welfare Centers and the Special Care Center (May 8, 2020)

Clinic for Psychiatry Vrapče, Reference Center of the Ministry of Health for psychosocial methods, Croatian Society for Clinical Psychiatry of the Croatian Medical Association, Mental Health and Addiction Prevention Service (Teaching Institute of Public Health) „Dr. Andrija Štampar”, the Croatian Institute of Public Health issued a package of recommendations entitled „Mental health preservation program by combating the negative effects of anxiety and stress”. The materials are available on the websites of the institutions whose experts participated in their development: [www.bolnica-vrapce.hr](http://www.bolnica-vrapce.hr), [www.stampar.hr](http://www.stampar.hr), [www.hzjz.hr](http://www.hzjz.hr).

Teaching Institute for Public Health "Dr. Andrija Štampar" introduced eight telephone lines where citizens can get psychological help. Interviews with experts are possible daily from 8.00 to 22.00. Phone numbers are intended for all people who feel the need for psychological help in this new situation.

Expert advice on how to deal with this situation and how to reduce the level of anxiety is provided daily by psychologists, psychotherapists and psychiatrists of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Prevention of the Teaching Institute for Public Health "Dr. Andrija Štampar".

More information can be found at: <https://www.instagram.com/mentalisti.stampar/>, <https://www.facebook.com/mentalisti.nzzjz/>. The Croatian Psychological Chamber, the Croatian Red Cross, as well as numerous civil society organizations (NGOs), have also introduced telephone numbers to provide psychological assistance by counties.

As for providing protective equipment and disinfectants, they are regularly procured in accordance with the possibilities (funds of the Ministry, donations, the Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia, cooperation - UNICEF) and regularly distributed in accordance with the stated needs. Namely, on several occasions from the e-mail address [5.1.2e@mdomsp.hr](mailto:5.1.2e@mdomsp.hr), service providers were invited to express the need for protective equipment such as protective masks, gloves, hand sanitizers, disinfectants for surfaces and work surfaces, alcohol 75% and equipment. In case of need for isolation of users in the space of the service provider - surgical caps, disposable suits, disposable galoshes, goggles, beds.

In order to ensure the effectiveness of epidemiological surveillance of all social service providers, on April 13, 2020 the Croatian Institute of Public Health prepared a questionnaire

and all social service providers were instructed to enter data on the situation with social service providers in the link: Social service providers:

<http://survey.hzjz.hr/limesurvey/index.php?r=survey/index&sid=497845&lang=hr>.

Also, providers of social services who are not able to fill in the relevant data in the above link submit them according to the table to the e-mail addresses: [5.1.2e@hzjz.hr](mailto:5.1.2e@hzjz.hr) and [5.1.2e@hzjz.hr](mailto:5.1.2e@hzjz.hr). The processed data in question are exchanged daily and monitored by the Croatian Institute of Public Health and this Ministry.

In accordance with the agreement with the Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia, on April 14, 2020 the address book of all social service providers (institutions, family homes and other founders) and the same protective equipment will be provided by the Civil Protection Headquarters of the regional self-government units, and the City of Zagreb.

More frequent and longer telephone calls are provided to mitigate the consequences of restricting visits to users of social welfare services. Upon admission in social welfare facilities, mandatory isolation of the user for 14 days is performed and prior taking of swabs for testing for SARS-CoV2. Individual work with users and psychosocial support are being intensified in order to alleviate the consequences of restricted visits and make life easier for service providers and users during the epidemic. All activities with the service provider are organized in a way that respects physical distance.

The latest Instructions to service providers in the social welfare system for the prevention and suppression of the COVID-19 epidemic, dated May 8, 2020, state the mitigation of measures due to the more favourable epidemiological situation.

From May 11, 2020 the following is allowed:

- delivery of hygienic supplies, groceries and other supplies by family members and friends packed in the original packaging, with an appropriate shelf life. After receipt, they are stored in a separate storage space for at least 3 days until delivery to the user. Packages are handed over at the entrance to the service provider, and they are received by the persons in charge named by the director and / or the person responsible for the work of the social service provider who is not in direct contact with the accommodation users,
- provision of physical therapy by a physiotherapist provided by the user himself if he provides health care only with that social service provider,
- it is still possible to admit users to temporary accommodation in crisis situations with the obligation to keep at least one room for the needs of isolation of users under suspicion of COVID-19 and mandatory testing of new users on SARS-CoV-2 immediately before accommodation and self-isolation of new users for 14 days.

From May 18, 2020 the following is possible:

- admission of new users according to the waiting list with the obligation to keep at least two rooms for the needs of isolation of users with suspected COVID-19 and mandatory testing of new users on SARS-CoV-2 immediately before accommodation and self-isolation of new users for 14 days.

Visits to elderly users and users with disabilities with strict adherence to epidemiological measures:

- entry of visitors into the premises of the service provider - visits should be allowed only for the users who are not able to use the outdoor space and at most one visitor in the user's room with strict adherence to measures (mandatory hand disinfection,

- protective mask), with prior hand disinfection, body temperature measurement and signing statements that the visitor has no symptoms of COVID-19, that he is not in self-isolation and that his family members do not have respiratory symptoms,
- limiting the number of simultaneous visits according to the spatial conditions and possibilities of the home, and in order to ensure compliance with the measures,
  - it is recommended to organize visits to the outdoor space (garden) of the service provider for more mobile users or users who can use the outdoor space,
  - in case it is not possible to organize visits in the outdoor space, the users need to be provided visits in a separate room in compliance with protection measures,
  - mandatory registration of all visitors on arrival and departure.

It is recommended to enable the elderly and people with disabilities to go outside the premises where the accommodation service is provided, accompanied by employees of the home and in compliance with protection measures and physical distance. County civil protection headquarters are obliged to organize the establishment of mobile urological teams, mobile teams for changing the nasogastric tube and tracheal cannula from the existing health care system, and to ensure continuous provision of all health care procedures at the primary health care level and availability of a competent family doctor and health care specialist that can be provided outside the hospital, according to all prevention measures.

After long-term hospital treatment, testing for SARS-CoV-2 is performed and the user is discharged into 14-day self-isolation in the accommodation, after receiving a negative test for SARS-CoV-2.

The Ministry is in continuous contact with the Civil Protection Headquarters of the Republic of Croatia, follows the recommendations of the Croatian Institute of Public Health, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of the Interior Affairs and other services. The Ministry is engaged in instructing social service providers to apply and adhere to all measures to maintain health and safety of all beneficiaries and employees in the social welfare system.

### **(IT) Italy**

The *Office for Policies for People with Disabilities* has been operational since 1 January 2020. The Office responds to the President of the Council of Ministers and represents the support structure used by the President of the Council of Ministers for the **promotion** and **coordination** of government action on disability matters.

The task is to coordinate, to give impulse and act as facilitator, of the action of specific competence of the other central Administrations and of creating an effective link with the functions of the territorial Administrations. The new configuration of competences is consistent with a new approach that the Government wants to follow, of a **mainstreaming** type, which makes the issue of disability an element of constant attention in the elaboration of general policies.

#### **This coordination role has developed also during the emergency Covid health system 19.**

Since the Council of Ministers' resolution declaring the state of emergency because of the health risk associated with the onset and spread of the Covid-19 virus on the national territory, the Government has adopted measures, which, with the different degrees of intensity, involve people with disabilities and their rights.

The most important in terms of disability concerned first, with the Decree-Law 14/2020 concerning the urgent provisions for the strengthening of the National Health Service in

relation to the emergency COVID-19, the assistance to pupils with disabilities through the provision of services aimed at supporting distance learning.

Furthermore, always in the same provision, the faculty for the Regions and the autonomous provinces of Trento and Bolzano was established to set up special units designed to guarantee the delivery of home health and social-health services in favor of people with disabilities who present conditions of fragility or comorbidity.

With the Decree-Law 18/2020, the so-called "*Cura Italia*", the economic measures necessary for the protection of the health and work of people with disabilities were then implemented as the category of citizens most exposed to the risk of contagion. These include:

- the provision of extraordinary leave, both in the public sector and in the private sector, for the parents of people with disabilities regardless of the registry criterion;
- the extension of the days of leave pursuant to law 104/92 up to a total of 18 days of paid leave covered by notional contributions;
- forms of protection of the period of active surveillance of workers, equating the condition of "active surveillance" (quarantine) with hospitalization, also for remuneration;
- the provision of priority criteria in accessing the "agile work" tool, guaranteeing employees with serious disabilities or who have a person with serious disabilities in their family, the right to carry out work in an agile way. In addition, priority is given to workers in the private sector affected by serious and proven pathologies with reduced working capacity, in accepting requests to carry out work in an agile way;
- the closure of the semi-residential centers of a socio-welfare, socio-educational, multifunctional, socio-occupational, health and social-health care nature, with the exception of those in which indifferent health services are carried out and on condition that compliance with the envisaged measures can be guaranteed containment of the virus;
- the provision of home benefits for people with disabilities, provided that the indications provided for the containment of the infection are respected.

The measures adopted with the Legislative Decree "Cura Italia" for the March-April period, were subsequently extended and strengthened with the "Relaunch Decree". (*Decreto-Legge 19 maggio 2020, n.34*)

The most relevant provisions, adopted with the aforementioned provision, concern:

- the extension for a further two months of the regime of permits law 104/92, of extraordinary leave, of the protections for "active surveillance", as provided for by Legislative Decree "Cura Italia";
- the 90-day extension for therapeutic plans expiring in the period of declaration of the state of emergency, which include the supply of products related to home hospitalizations;
- renewal of the provisions to guarantee individual home services;
- the provision of school resources specifically intended for students with disabilities, with specific learning disabilities and other special educational needs;

- in the context of emergency income, the provision of simplified mechanisms for access to households in which there are people with disabilities.

In addition to these interventions, the government has allocated € 150 million for further interventions:

- increase in the Fund for non self-sufficient persons (F.N.A.) of 90 million for the year 2020, also providing for a specific destination of 20 million for the realization of independent life projects; the total budget becomes a total of € 661 million;
- increase in the Fund for assistance to people with serious disabilities without family support, the so-called "After us" fund, of 20 million euros, for a total amount of over 78 million euros;
- establishment of the "Fund for semi-residential structures for people with disabilities", providing for a budget of 40 million euros. The Fund is aimed at supporting the "safe" re-opening of CDDs, so that specific security protocols for fragile users can be envisaged.

The increase in the FNA and the "After us" fund represents a highly anticipated goal of considerable importance for two reasons:

- for the first time, there has been a marked increase in funds, towards endowments desired by professionals and sector associations;
- secondly, and not least, the aforementioned Funds have a minimum common denominator in the desire to implement measures aimed at the deinstitutionalization of people with disabilities, an even more important goal if assessed in view of the consequences deriving from contagion in residential structures.

All in implementation of the principles established by the Constitution, by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and, above all, by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the UN Convention, in particular Article 19.

In addition to the economic interventions already listed, in which the Office supported the Government in the conception and implementation of the same, a varied number of institutional interventions were put in place, so that the institutions and public opinion could become aware of the centrality of the issue of protection of people with disabilities.

Among these works proposed by the Office for policies for people with disabilities are, among others:

- the predisposition of LIS interpreters for the communications of the Civil Protection and for the press conferences of the Prime Minister;
- the activation of mailboxes dedicated to requests for information for deaf or hearing impaired people;
- the request to the Civil Protection, the Regional Health Departments and the Commissioner Arcuri, to pay attention to people with disabilities for the distribution of PPE;
- proposals and reminders to INPS, to the Min. Health and Min. Work, on the implementation of the provisions of Legislative Decree "Cura Italia";
- collaboration with the CEI for the establishment of a home care service;
- the awareness of large retailers on the need to provide preferential lanes and to encourage home shopping services for people with disabilities;

Finally, ample space was given to communication, providing for the preparation of FAQs

constantly updated in the light of the numerous provisions issued and the numerous requests received by the Office, both by email and through the use of the official page on Facebook.

### **(LT) Lithuania**

The virus was confirmed to have reached Lithuania in February 2020. On 18 March 2020, the first domestic case was confirmed, the first infected being an immediate family member of a known case.

The Seimas approved special aid and support measures for employees, the self-employed, people who lost their jobs and employers after quarantine. Most of these measures will be applied temporarily, until the country succeeds in recovering from the shock of the coronavirus pandemic. All these decisions will contribute to the retention of employees in the labour market, will help companies to retain employees, will increase support for the poor, unemployed, elderly, disabled or families whose incomes have fallen sharply.

1. One-off benefit for the elderly and disabled. It is intended to grant one-off benefit of 200 euros to the elderly, disabled, widows and orphans. This benefit belongs to people who is or will be granted at least one of the following benefits paid by Sodra until 31 December 2020: old-age, invalidity pension, widow's, orphan's or survivor's pension, retirement pension, reimbursement for special working conditions, social assistance benefit or reimbursement, as well as pension, designated under international agreements or European regulations. One-off benefit would be paid without an individual application in August 2020. The only condition is that the person must have declared a place of residence in Lithuania or be included in the list of persons who have not declared a place of residence. If a person starts receiving any of these benefits in September and later, he or she will receive one-off benefit in the same month as the awarded pension or social assistance benefit.

2. All decisions on disability, working capacity and special needs that expire during quarantine will be automatically renewed throughout the quarantine period and for a further 3 months after the end of quarantine. The same would apply if the decision expires shortly after quarantine. This means that a decision on disability has been made for 3 months from the date of the end of the quarantine.

3. A COVID-19 response strategy has been drawn up to contain, over the short term, the risk of the spread of the coronavirus and to equip for an effective response to a potential outbreak of the virus in the future. It has been approved on 6 May by the Cabinet of the Ministers. The strategy aims to pool the efforts and initiatives of all the central and local authorities, medical professionals, socio-economic partners and of all the people, with a view to containing the spread of the virus and to mitigating the risk of adverse effects. As the information on the new virus is still scarce globally, the strategy in question should be regarded as an evolving document subject to regular adjustments and updates. The implementation of the strategy will rest on the following five fundamental principles: 1) protection of vulnerable people; 2) proactive pinpointing of infection cases and immediate response; 3) prompt and objective public information; 4) evidence and facts-based decision-making; 5) international cooperation, particularly at the level of the European Union. The strategy should be implemented over two years. There will be an action plan with priorities and practical measures, and with the achievable and responsible authorities.

4. Ministry of Health of The Republic of Lithuania in each area of health, education and social services has approved recommendations for the provision of these services, which are changed taking into account the situation of COVID 19 in Lithuania.

## **(LU) Luxembourg**

The Government offers a paid special, the “congé pour soutien familial”, to help employees and self-employed workers to take care of an adult with a disability or an elderly person with a particularly severe loss of autonomy while a facility for persons with a disability ( for instance a training facility or a day centre) or for elderly people is closed in the context of the "Covid-19" pandemic. This leave will be granted throughout the crisis.

## **(MT) Malta**

The following are measures carried out by different entities and institutions in Malta to safeguard the needs of persons with disability during the COVID-19 outbreak.

### **SCSA – Social Care Standards Authority**

The monitoring of institutions and group homes is carried out by the Social Care Standards Authority (SCSA). The Social Care Standards Authority in Malta is a regulatory body set up by law that aims to improve quality and standards in social welfare services to protect and enhance the dignity, safety and welfare of all service users. This is achieved by licensing social welfare providers, establishing social regulatory standards and inspecting services.

The Health Authorities and the Social Care Standards Authority in Malta have worked closely together to implement various measures and issued various Circulars to licensed service providers intended to protect people living in institutions and residential homes.

As from the beginning of March 2020, the Licensing Office within SCSA has issued a number of circulars with the aim of guiding and instructing licensed service providers on matters relating to COVID-19. Furthermore, follow up of the circulars is being done by the Inspectorate Office whereby licensed service providers are contacted to ensure that the circulars have been noted and necessary action taken.

### **CRPD – Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability**

<https://crpd.org/mt/covid-19/>

The Deaf People Association in Malta and CRPD have forwarded a number of suggestions and worked with the Health Authorities in order to make the health services more accessible to people who are Deaf or hard of hearing, including an easy-to-read chart with basic questions asked in hospital as a symptom checker for COVID-19 and also sign language interpretation available through a video call, therefore providing the sign language interpretation service virtually.

### ***Further General Measures Involving CRPD:***

1. There are parents working in the private sector who can telework but, since their children under 16 years of age are statemented, have to switch to no pay to take care of them, including their schooling. An exception will be made in the case of these parents in the sense that, although they can telework, if they can't do this to take care of their children and switch to no pay, their applications should be accepted.

2. There are parents of persons with disability over the age of 16 who receive the Increased Severe Disability Assistance and who, since the adult centres and therapy sessions are currently closed, are in the same situation as above. In this case, applications of parents working in the private sector should be accepted (even through their children are over 16 years of age), as long as these receive the Increased Severe Disability Assistance.

3. CRPD together with the Malta Deaf Association and Aġenzija Support Sign Language Interpreters had worked on having every press briefing signed through sign language as to maximize accessibility.
4. CRPD worked on several easy read documents with information on COVID-19, apart from translating EU surveys about COVID-19 into Maltese language to render them accessible to the Maltese population.
5. A task force was created as to tackle the concurrent issues related to disability and COVID-19. This task force meets weekly and tackles current issues.
6. Research is being undertaken between CRPD and UoM in the form of a longitudinal study as to prepare as much as possible ourselves for what's next and reducing knee jerk reactions as much as possible.
7. CRPD is continually liaising with other authorities as to seek ways of providing support to disabled people and their families, kicking off physical therapies and making up for the barrier being faced in education and employment.

#### **Ministry for Health**

1. Provision of Teleworking
2. Maintained full access to persons with disability for the services offered during the COVID-19 situation in all the health centres.
3. Furthermore, the Primary HealthCare's (PHC) Client Support Centre's operating hours were extended to offer support on a 24/7 basis. A Telemedicine Centre was also set up on a 24/7 basis to facilitate accessibility at all times; indeed, one of the prime functions of these Centres is to offer support to vulnerable clients and clients with disability. This service was further enhanced by domiciliary visits when required.
4. The Directorate responsible for the Organ Donor register included a video for persons with hearing disabilities.

It is to be noted that some entities/departments did not find the need to carry out different practices during the COVID-19

#### **JobsPlus**

##### **Medical assessment of applications from individuals to register themselves as disabled**

Jobsplus face to face meetings with the medical officer have been suspended; however, clients are being referred to apply for the CRPD registration as their assessment is desk based. CRPD special ID card is being used temporary in lieu of Jobsplus disability registration for clients to be able access LSF services.

##### **Occupational Therapists assessments and interviews**

- Occupational Therapy Reviews are being done by telephone calls or Zoom meetings;
- Support to LSF staff and Jobsplus Vulnerable Unit EAs is ongoing.

##### **Msidra Sheltered Employment Training (1 year programme);**

- Clients are being reached out by Job coaches on a weekly basis, whenever possible they are given weekly plans and activities, whenever possible these are printed and sent by post. Clients are then sending photos or videos of the tasks. In some cases the job coaches are doing video calls with the clients to work together on certain tasks.

- Communication with parents/guardians is still ongoing over the phone.

#### **Lino Spiteri Foundation (LSF)**

- LSF is still providing registration services to registered disabled persons through phone/ email and virtual meetings.
- Job coaching services, these are now being delivered through virtual meetings, or on the phone if the client does not have computer access.
- Disabled persons who have currently stopped working due to the current situation are also receiving support at maintaining a routine, retaining learned skills and acquiring new ones, such as the use of telecommunication devices.
- Pre-employment support is also being offered; mainly through CV support sessions, Mock interview sessions, and virtual group sessions tackling different themes; such as maintaining boundaries at work.
- Our Corporate Relations Unit is still in continuous liaison with employers, especially in those companies where clients are still attending work. We are collaborating with employers on which ways they can best support their employees during this time. LSF is also assisting employers with queries with regards to benefits. This is being done through virtual meetings instead of CRs visiting companies.
- The CRs' priority has currently shifted from outreaching companies to focus mainly on relationship maintenance, however, companies interested in recruiting PwDs are still being supported. CRs are liaising with these companies via phone calls/zoom meetings and referring clients. Virtual interviews are set up whenever this is possible.

Jobsplus financial support to employers in relation to the employment of disabled persons such as Access to Employment Scheme (wage subsidies); Employers' NI exemption and Fiscal Incentive

The processing of applications for Jobsplus benefits to employers such as the Access to Employment Scheme (wage subsidies), employer's National Insurance exemption of disabled employees and claims for fiscal incentive are still processed electronically i.e. request and approval by email and scanned copies of required documents.

Regular staff meetings are being held through MS teams or Zoom between the different units within Jobsplus Inclusive Employment Services Division as well as with LSF management to continue providing efficient and effective services to disabled persons and employers.

### **Ministry for Education & Employment**

- A helpline +356 2598 1000 related to the educational sector has also been set up; and is offering a number of services, including professional support. All those having any kind of difficulty pertaining to the educational sector can call this dedicated landline and at the other end will be supported by professionals in all sectors to guide and discuss. This is open for students in need of psychological counselling, special educational needs and disadvantaged backgrounds;
- some students with disabilities are following the online lessons / activities as their peers with support from their parents/ guardians; some teachers / Learning Support Educators (LSEs) are sending adapted work to the parents.
- The National School Support Services within the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE) are sending resources to Heads of Department [HoD] (Inclusion) so that they can share with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and LSEs in their respective schools.
- The National School Support Services is also sending resources (mainly related to socio-emotional literacy) to Nurture Classes / Learning Support Zone teams every week to share with the students of their respective schools.
- Resource centres are communicating with parents through online resources on various strategies to continue with their children at home;
- Online support is provided for parents for inclusion and special education (calls and emails);
- The Autism Spectrum Support Team are providing support to families of children with autism (online calls /online meetings)

### **Social Security**

As in several Member States, Malta declared a state of emergency and in this respect introduced emergency measures.

Such measures are strictly proportionate, necessary for the current situation and should be considered as limited in time and in line with European and international standards.

In this respect, as part of the broad financial aid package brought into fruition for various sectors, the Government also introduced financial social support to persons with disabilities amongst other related benefits to categories of our society.

Persons with disability employed in the private sector, who after the 8th March 2020, due to the impact of COVID-19 cannot go to work on medical advice and are not able to work from home, are entitled to an €800 gross monthly payment if working full-time and a €500 gross monthly payment if working part-time.

The following link also provides an extensive explanation of eligibility conditions: <https://socialsecurity.gov.mt/covid19/Documents/INF%20%20Covid19DisabilityBenefitEN.pdf>; and

The following link refers to the online application:

<https://socialsecurity.gov.mt/onlineforms/Pages/COVID19DisabilityBenefitEN.aspx>

### **ST Vincent De Paul Residence**

ST Vincent De Paul COVID-19 Contingency was finalised and activated on the 7<sup>th</sup> March 2020. The Contingency Plan can be reviewed in attachment.

The main measures resulting and supporting this plan are as follows:

**Ruzar Briffa Isolation Area**

Measures to upgrade services in three wards in this specialised area with a capacity of 110 beds and convert it to treat COVID-19 positive residents have been undertaken as follows

1. Upgrade of airflow system in all bedrooms in isolation wards
2. Creation of Ante-rooms to all bedrooms in the three isolation wards
3. Designation of a Quarantine Ward to take up in coming residents to SVP for 14 days of observation before integrating them into the general wards. This operation include
  - a. New admissions
  - b. SVP residents returning from MDH
  - c. Increase in bed capacity with conversion of dining area into a 10 bedded ward

**Protective Wear and Equipment**

MFIN approved the urgent procurement of additional medical equipment and provisions required in the management of the pandemic in SVP.

1. Portable X-ray machine that will be located at Ruzar Briffa (€65 000)
2. 100 electric beds (€154 000)
3. 100 Oxygen concentrators (€77 000)
4. 20 000 N95 mask (€175 000)
5. 25 000 FFP3 masks (€135 000)
6. Fumigation Machine (€60 000)

**Measures affecting Staff**

1. Accommodation with 100 beds secured and full logistic arrangements in place for staff on quarantine if in contact with covid at place of work
2. Most administrative meetings being done through video conferencing. Regular meetings everyday are undertaken to keep all wards updated and motivate staff.
3. New measures as authorised by the Public Health Authorities and Maltese Government to safeguard vulnerable persons have been fully adopted
4. SVP in consultation with MfH has set up a Board to review several requests by healthcare workers to avail themselves from unpaid leave. Guidelines including eligibility criteria were provided by HR Unit to be adopted when reviewing applications. All cases at hand were addressed.

**Clinical Measures**

1. Specific SVP teams for doctors, nurses, carers and allied healthcare professionals established.
2. Refresher training on Infection Control practices for all 1800 employees
3. Specialised donning and doffing training for the COVID-Teams

4. Training sessions on SVP Contingency Plan
5. Staff working at SVP have been strictly prohibited to perform work in other caring setting.
6. Covid and Non-covid teams within SVP for doctors and allied healthcare professionals identified
7. Visors have been distributed to all healthcare workers.
8. Following inter-ministerial meeting with MfH agreement was reached to admit an average of 20 cases every 2 weeks after being quarantined in MFH facilities..
9. All healthcare workers with flu symptoms are to be swapped for COVID-19 testing. Compulsory.
10. Evening ambulation service had to be curtailed. This service involved relievers that assist residents into bed late in the afternoon or evening. This measure is important to reduce contacts for residents.
11. Allocation of staff strictly adhered to with residents and staff to remain in designated areas. This will help reduce contact and facilitate traceability should a positive case emerge
12. Complete cessation of visitors.
13. Skype Calls service introduced to mitigate the isolation measures for the residents and their families
14. **Limited Visiting Rights for** critically ill resident imminent of death ONLY. Consultants and Senior Residents are to decide on the list of candidates.

#### **Operational Measures**

1. A number of policies and SOPs to organise better operations during the COVID-19 situation have been introduced
  - a. Algorithm for the management of positive cases
  - b. COVID-19 Frailty and Medical Comorbidity Information SVP
  - c. Health Care Worker's Contact Tracing SVP
  - d. SOP 3\_2020 Visiting rights AoS
  - e. SOP Religious Assistance for COVID Patients
2. **Contact Tracing Team:** A group of 2 doctors and a Senior Nursing Manager who are currently on telework have assumed the responsibility as SVP Contact Tracing Team. These healthcare professionals follow on cases being swabbed for COVID-19 both residents and staff. This team is tasked to perform full contact tracing for positive cases at SVP. SOP attached.
3. The SOP adopted for contact tracing stipulate the criteria of staff for swabbing and subsequent their eligibility for support services provided by the entity including quarantine accommodation free of charge. These criteria must be rigorously followed by the Contact Tracing Team to ensure that all potential officers at risk are identified while safeguarding against unnecessary depletion of the workforce.

4. Designated lifts for dirty utilities including laundry and cleaners have been identified and notices set on lift.
5. All wards have ensured one entrance to avoid traffic of carers between wards
6. Restricting the number of healthcare officers visiting wards as well as avoiding crowding in staff areas and offices. Even though these employees are directly involved in the provision of care it is now necessary to ensure safety by reducing contacts and focusing on essential care. It was decided that all units namely Physio, Occupational therapy, Speech and Podiatry are to
  - a. provide a list of essential services
  - b. list of emergency services
  - c. allocation of wards per therapist
  - d. wards visiting scheduled of each therapist

Referrals are now done through online generic emails for each speciality using an electronic template. Therapists will ensure emergency services to be provided on same day while they will be visiting wards once a week to address other referrals.

7. MMMU and Pharmacy will also be reviewing their ordering system to go online.
8. Daily swabbing in view of the close clinical monitoring of residents is ongoing.

#### **Communication and Information**

- **Ward Teams**. Third serious of video conferencing meetings took place on the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> with the Charge Nurses of all wards. The SOPs and measures related to COVID-19 contingency plan reviewed for clarifications to ensure their standard implementation in all wards. Issues arising by Charge Nurses were noted and action taken accordingly as per document attached.
- Contingency Plan circulated with all staff
- **Media Communication**. During this week SVP participated in several TV and Radio programs to reach the public. Reassurance that elderly in SVP are being well cared for and safe was the main message conveyed. Administration took the opportunity to express gratitude towards our workers who on daily basis leave their families to face this challenging situation in our wards.
- **Communication with Next of Kin**. A SOP has been adopted clearly identifying the officers that will communicate delicate information to the relatives of residents who require COVID swabbing.
- Management procured tablets for ward teams who on voluntary basis assumed this task for their residents. This measure was very important to alleviate workload from the Active Ageing Unit but more importantly, it continues to minimise personnel in wards.

#### **Other important measures**

The Authorities have directed the elderly and vulnerable people to stay at home in order to minimise social contact. The Health Authorities in Malta have also sent an official letter to people who are considered as vulnerable and also those who are over 65 years to stay at home and only go out if it is absolutely necessary or for medical appointments.

Employers have been directed to assist employees to telework as much as possible, with the Government also assisting businesses in costs incurred to make this possible.

A helpline has been created aimed for elderly and vulnerable people to provide them with support regarding food and medicines, which will be coordinated and delivered to their home. Persons with disability may also receive such help with a specific email dedicated for the Deaf community.

## (NL) The Netherlands

- Accessible and easy to read information about the COVID-19 response.
- The involvement of representative organizations of people with disabilities in the COVID-19 mitigation strategy on issues that have a specific and significant impact on these groups.
- Specific examples of activities in the Dutch society directed at safeguarding the participation and wellbeing of people with disabilities during the COVID-19 crisis.

### *Accessible and easy to read information*

- There is a specific easy to read [website](#) (in Dutch) on COVID-19 online.
- There are easy to read [information packages](#) (in Dutch) available on COVID-19 in general, visitation rights, health care referrals and specific issues concerning hospitalization and the intensive care unit in hospitals.
- There are specific [information videos](#) about COVID-19 in Dutch sign language.
- [Press conferences](#) of the Dutch government on the COVID-19 response are organized with a sign language interpreter. After the press conference, an [easy to read summary](#) (in Dutch) and [audiodescription](#) on the conference itself is made available.
- Numerous societal organizations provide additional easy to read information on specific COVID-19 related subjects on their websites.

### *Involvement of people with disabilities in the COVID-19 response*

- During the COVID-19 crisis the Dutch Department of Health, Wellbeing and Sports organizes frequent (online) round tables with representative organizations about the issues that concern people with disabilities the most. There is a specific round table about accessible and easy to read information.
- Recently, a specific [roadmap](#) for high-risk groups has been established by the Dutch Government in close contact with representative organizations. This roadmap pays specific attention to issues concerning the position of people with disabilities and makes a reference to the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

### *Societal examples concerning the participation and wellbeing of people with disabilities*

- VGN, an organization aimed at representing and supporting the disability sector, has made an overview of [good practices](#) (in Dutch)
- Ieder(in), an organization aimed at promoting the rights of people with disabilities, also provides information and has organized a [helpdesk](#) for people with disabilities that encounter problems.

## (PL) Poland

Most of the solutions for supporting disabled people in connection with the current situation of the spread of coronavirus, the Polish Government has included in the provisions of the *Act of 31 March 2020 amending the Act on specific solutions related to the prevention and combating COVID and other infectious diseases and crises they caused and some other acts (Journal of Laws item 568)*. Hereinafter referred to as the **COVID Act**. In addition, to improve the situation of people with disabilities during a coronavirus pandemic, Poland has updated and introduced adaptations to other legal provisions, including the system of disability assessment as well as issuing a disabled person's ID card. Initiatives of Polish NGOs were also considerable support for the government in adjusting the right of disabled people to the current emergency.

In order to create a substantive and clear document, the most important solutions from the point of view of Poland's membership in DHLG regarding support for people with disabilities in connection with coronavirus are listed below:

- 1) labour market:
  - increasing the monthly co-financing for the salaries of disabled employees;
  - the possibility of compensation of remuneration paid to disabled persons, employed in Vocational Activity Establishments;
  - introduction of provisions enabling the provision of public aid to economic entities in a difficult economic situation, that employ disabled people;
  - possibility of allocating the resources of the company's rehabilitation or activity fund to maintain jobs at risk of liquidation, as well as for remuneration payments and crisis financial assistance for disabled workers regardless of the legal basis of their employment – this possibility is open for employers with the status of a Vocational Activity Establishments or Sheltered Workshops.
- 2) disability ID card and disability parking card:
  - the possibility of issuing disability certificates (disability ID cards) without a direct examination, only on the basis of the documentation held;
  - extension of the period of validity of disability assessments (up to 60 days from the date of the appeal of an epidemic emergency) if the disability assessment decision for a specified period of time expired up to 90 days before the date of entry into force of the **COVID Act**;
  - the catalog of disabled persons entitled to apply for a parking card has been expanded.
- 3) accessibility of current information related to COVID-19:
  - from the 24th of March this year an on-line sign-language interpreter service has been launched on the websites of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Digital Affairs and also the government website dedicated to coronavirus - gov.pl/koronavirus. This service will be soon available to all ministries. In addition, a videofoline was launched for hearing-impaired persons in need of information in connection with the COVID-19 epidemic that has been launched and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week;
  - in the provisions of the *Act of 26 April 2007 on crisis management (Journal of Laws of 2007, No. 89, item 590)* introduced that in crisis situations the mayor of the city

(or its equivalent in the commune and powiat) informs residents about the conditions for using the help included in the list of specific forms of providing assistance to the local community also in sign language;

- in the *Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 19 April 2020 on establishing certain restrictions, orders and prohibition in connection with the occurrence of the epidemic in connection with the occurrence of the epidemic (Journal of Laws item 697)* introduced a provision exempting disabled persons from the order to maintain distance between persons during movement and obligation to cover the mouth and nose.

4) State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled People:

- has been proposed to periodically introduce a solution regarding the possibility of administering (20%) funds from the company's rehabilitation fund for the disabled or the company activity fund for the purposes of counteracting COVID-19. Thanks to this, it is possible to continue and adapt existing programs and also introduce new programs and activities for the disabled to the current extraordinary situation;
- on the website of the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled People videos with help in completing applications for disabled entrepreneurs have been published;
- co-financing of the "Telewizja Glusi TV" (TV for the hearing impaired persons) project in the amount of PLN 300 000 (approx. EUR 66 000).
- launching the program "Assistance to disabled persons affected by an element or crisis caused by infectious diseases". As part of this program, there is a possibility of obtaining financial assistance in the amount of PLN 500 (approx. EUR 110) per month for one disabled person due to epidemic situation and loss of the possibility of using care provided in a rehabilitation facility.

## (PT) Portugal

The National Institute for Rehabilitation has on its website a specific area where are all information for people with disabilities about COVID-19.

It has 6 areas:

- Measures for lifting confinement rules;
- Questions and answers;
- Protection and surveillance measures;
- Specific information;
- Important contacts;
- COVID-19 in easy reading.

### Families and Workers

i) where there is a need to apply a period of prophylactic isolation of 14 days, private and public sectors workers are guaranteed the payment of sickness benefits, allowing 100% of the monthly remuneration. This scheme applies regardless of the guarantee period. After the isolation period, the rules of the general sickness benefit scheme apply. It also applies to self-employed

ii) Subsidy for child assistance in cases to cover situations of prophylactic 14-day isolation;

iii) Extension of subsidy of child or grandchild assistance in cases of sickness to cover situations of prophylactic 14-day isolation regardless of the guarantee period. It also applies to self-employed.

iv) Due to closure of schools, one of the parents can stay at home to take care of their children under 12 years or any age in case of children that suffer from chronic disease or incapacity with a guaranteed income of 2/3 of his/her average wage (in minimum of 635,00 euros). Social Security pays 1/3 and the employer the other 1/3. It is not applied to teleworking situations.

In case of self-employed and if there are no other ways of providing the activity, namely by teleworking and if the other parent is not absent for the same reason or is unable to provide assistance, there is a guaranteed income from social security of 1/3 of the average remuneration declared in the first quarter of 2020 (min. 438,81 euros, max. 1.097,03 euros).

On the 9th of April, the Portuguese government defined the procedures for pre-schooling, basic and secondary education. Pre-schooling and basic education (primary and lower secondary education) students will not return to face-to-face classes in the current school year, classes will be via digital and television. The previous social security support will continue to be guaranteed as above described.

For domestic workers, entitlement to financial support: 2/3 of the registered remuneration in January 2020, up to 3 times National Minimum Wage, where Social Security ensures the payment of 1/3 and the other 1/3 is ensured by the employer. The employer is also responsible for the correspondent social contributions.

v) Where applicable, public and private sectors should encourage tele working; From 16 March and during the state of emergency teleworking is mandatory given that the job function is compatible with working at home.

vi) For self-employed workers, managing partners of companies, members of statutory bodies of foundations, associations or cooperatives without employees was created an extraordinary measure to compensate the reduction (40% in the 30 days before demanding the support) or total stoppage of economic activity, entitlement to financial support from social security (one month up to a maximum of 6 months):

- ✓ the value of the registered remuneration with a maximum limit of € 438,81, in situations in which the value of the registered remuneration is less than 658,21€;
- ✓ up to 2/3 of the value of the registered remuneration with the maximum limit of the national minimum wage, in situations where the value of the registered remuneration is equal or higher than 658,21€;
- ✓ possibility to defer social contributions during this period.

In case of the managing partners and members of the statutory bodies it is necessary that they are exclusively covered by social security system and that in the year of 2019 they had a turnover of less than 60 thousand euros.

vii) Extraordinary automatic extension of unemployment benefit and minimum social benefits.

viii) 100% monthly remuneration to workers over 70 years of age, who are unable to work.

ix) Guarantee of social protection for trainees and trainers and beneficiaries engaged in active employment policies who are prevented from attending actions.

- x) kindergardens and schools are made available for children of workers of essential services
- xi) Suspended cessation of house rental contracts due to end of business in the following three months
- xii) Since the 2nd of April, reinforcement of the functions of the General Labour Inspection enabling to act in the reinforcement of the workers' rights and guarantees, namely by giving the possibility to suspend dismissals with illegal evidence. It was launched a campaign to reinforce inspective actions aiming to ensure that due to COVID 19 enterprises keep respecting the rights of workers and specific health and safety rules.

#### **Social sector measures**

- i) All elderly day care services were closed, and the support is provided at home;
- ii) Establishment of a credit line – global amount 165M€ - for the support of social economy sector treasury; each operation will have a limit of € 500,000.00, with a grace period of 12 months and amortization up to 4 years, with the interest rate being fixed or variable, determined by agreement between the Bank and the beneficiary, plus a spread with a maximum of 1.5%;
- iii) Outstanding support for the maintenance of employment contracts (in cases of stoppage of work or break of 40% in 30 days): simplified lay off in the amount of 2/3 of the wage, up to 3 times National Minimum Wage. Social Security ensures the payment of 70% and the other 30% is ensured by the employer. One month up to 6 months; Temporary exemption of employer's Social Security contributions payments during the lay off period;
- iv) Flexibility on human resources management;
- v) Possibility to use voluntary actions to ensure functions that cannot be guaranteed otherwise; It was launched an awareness campaign that can be seen at;
- vi) Suspension of social security lien foreclosures;
- vii) Postponement of 2/3 of the tax and contributory obligations for 3 months;
- viii) Licence exemption for new responses to start activity;
- ix) Flexibility on the given social responses with guarantee of co-participation;
- x) Strengthening of the Emergency Line.

Deaf or hearing or speech impaired people have a health line available via Chat SNS 24 (requires prior registration), by written message.

By calling 1400 it is possible to order any medicines and pharmacy products. The 1400 is free and is especially recommended for people who, due to their age or health condition, should refrain from going out during the COVID-19 pandemic. The call center will give priority to satisfying requests from chronically ill, disabled and people over 60 years old. There are several types of home delivery guaranteed throughout the country.

- xi) Reinforcement of State Cooperation Agreements;
- xii) Cooperative António Sérgio for Social Economy (CASES), created 3 tools that makes available voluntary initiatives from all over the country, including movements and platforms created to respond to people who need more support. The set of the 3 platforms provide more

than 3,500 volunteers to respond to pandemic needs, of which 25% are available to help Covid-19 patients:

- i) <https://www.cases.pt/voluntariado/covid-19/> - A platform that has information about various volunteering and solidarity initiatives all over the country and that allows who wants to help to identify the initiatives that best suit their profile and availability, also allowing those who need help to identify the initiatives that best meet their needs.
- ii) [www.portugalvoluntario.pt](http://www.portugalvoluntario.pt) - A platform that makes the matching between those who want to volunteer and the organisations that promote volunteering. Here you can find information on the legal framework and existing insurance products.
- iii) [www.cuidadetodos.com](http://www.cuidadetodos.com) - A specific portal to identify volunteers to support responses for the elderly. This Portal was launched with a national public awareness campaign that can be seen here.

CASES periodically send information on available volunteers, by district, to Civil Protection Commissions, through Social Security, and also to Autonomous Regions. Information on the volunteers, by region, is also made available to entities representing organisations with social responses

xiii) Specific Support measures to nursing home or institutions:

The Government, in cooperation with Portuguese Red Cross, health, social security services and municipalities launched a national plan for testing all the elderly persons in nursing home, people with disabilities in institutions and their staff. Those who are infected will be separated and moved to another building, normally provided by the municipalities.

Extraordinary support for the Reinforcement of Workers of Social and Health Facilities from Private Institutions of Social Solidarity (3 months with possibility of extension) by integrating:

- Unemployed (regardless of whether or not they are registered in the Public Employment Service);
- Workers with a suspended contract or reduced working hours;
- Workers with part-time employment contracts;
- People that are receiving the social allowance minimum guaranteed income;
- Students and trainees aged 18 or over.

These workers cannot be over 60 years old.

Those who will work under this measure will receive a monthly financial contribution as complement to any allowance they already receive, plus food, transportation and mandatory occupational accident insurance. 90% of the monthly contribution will be paid by the Public Employment Service and 10% by the Institutions.

xv) Protection of the homeless (in cooperation with the municipalities and NGOs): since the declaration of the Emergency State all available emergency shelters, including those envisaged only for temporary use during the winter, are opened during emergency state. In addition to these, 18 new shelters were created all over the country. The shelters provide all kind of care by supplying namely health care, hygiene care, food, and clothes.

xvi) With the amendments to the Regulation for the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) it is being developed a strategy allowing it to reach more persons and using

alternative forms of distribution since under this contingency more people will be exposed to vulnerability.

In the social responses, the Residential Home, the Autonomous Residence and the home support services for people with disabilities continue to function. In exceptional cases, services may be provided by the Occupational Activity Centers, as well as by the specialized units, integrated in the learning support centers.

Residential responses can only be closed if the Public Health Authority determines. Residential responses are critical, as they develop response to accommodation and activities of daily living for people who have no other alternatives. The necessary procedures must be followed to maintain their normal functioning, in order to avoid the closure of establishments and services. No visits are allowed. The admission of new users to the functioning social responses is guaranteed.

Disability institutions that respond to Occupational Activity Centers must guarantee the provision of meals to users, making the service available, in the ways considered safest and most appropriate, through home service or take away, according each situation.

General Assemblies of disability associations, cooperatives and NGO meetings for the approval of accounts, is given the possibility of its realization until June 30, 2020, and so also the subsequent acts were established. The deadline for submitting the accounts for the year 2019 to the services of the Social Security Institute, I.P. is also extended until July 31, 2020.

Portugal has an Independent Living Pilot-Project and the measures taken due to COVID-19 are the Support Centers for Independent Living (CAVI) must have their own contingency plan and procedures before COVID-19. This is an exceptional situation, whenever it is found that it is obviously not possible to maintain personal assistance or if the beneficiary wishes to suspend, personal assistants should not be harmed by this situation with regard to guaranteeing remuneration. The CAVI technical teams can perform teleworking functions if compatible with their functions.

For any doubt or or question by people with disabilities could contact the “Balcão de Inclusão” of the National Institute for Rehabilitation, I.P. or at the Inclusion Counters, located in the District Social Security Centers, for information purposes only, provided exclusively by telephone and online. Services that cannot be provided electronically and/or urgent matters presencial service is provided through pre-scheduling, by phone or e-mail.

### **Enterprises**

i) Outstanding support for the maintenance of employment contracts in companies in a situation of business crisis (in cases of stoppage of the activity, suspension or cancellation of orders or break in billing):

- ✓ Extraordinary support for the maintenance of employment contracts in situations of business crisis in the amount of 2/3 of the wage, up to 3 times National Minimum Wage. Social Security ensures the payment of 70% and the other 30% is ensured by the employer. One month up to 6 months; Temporary exemption of employer's Social Security contributions payments during the lay off period, as well as on the first month after the resumption activity - the employer using this measure cannot dismiss the workers during the period of application of the measures as well as in the following 60 days;

- ✓ Extraordinary financial incentive to support the resumption of the company's activity (1 national minimum wage per worker) - Temporary exemption of employer's Social Security contributions payments during this period.

ii) For Business that continue to work, the payment of social security contributions for the months of March, April and May was delayed, until the end of the year. Conditions: Business up to 50 workers; between 50 and 249 workers with a break of at least 20% of turnover; with more than 250 workers, billing losses are bigger than 20%.

iii) 2/3 of tax obligations for all SMEs and for all aviation and tourism enterprises was delayed

iv) Suspension of tax and social security lien foreclosures

v) Credit lines with State guarantees for companies

vi) Extraordinary support for vocational training (50% of worker's remuneration up to national minimum wage, including training costs), for non-employed in productive activities for a considerable period.

## **(RO) Romania**

National Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Children and Adoptions (ANPDCA) is a specialized body of the central public administration, with legal personality, subordinated to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection (MLSP). ANPDCA monitors how the rights of persons with disabilities and the rights of the child, as well as compliance with legislation in the field are respected and promoted, by individuals or legal entities. Moreover, ANPDCA is entitled with ability to coordinate from the methodological point of view the social services for vulnerable social groups at national level.

By law, ANPDCA coordinates the social services dedicated to the children and adults with disabilities as well as the child protection system at national level through the General Directorates for Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPCs -47) at county level. However, during the COVID-19 epidemic, ANPDCA was given through a Ministry of Labor Order the attribute of coordinating also the prevention measures for elderly persons in nursing homes.

In this context, ANPDCA elaborated a strategic prevention and combating plan for COVID-19 epidemic, which will be briefly presented thereafter.

### ***The situation of COVID-19 spreading within the social assistance system***

National Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Children and Adoption (ANPDCA) presents the situation on the Covid-19 spreading within the social assistance and child protection system at the end of the emergency period, based on the data collected at national level and the structural diagnosis realized for this very purpose.

Following the measures adopted, since 10.03.2020, ANPDCA on preventing the spreading of Covid-19 virus, the situation of the epidemic spreading at the level of social services and those of child protection is the following:

- **0,2% out of the total number of beneficiaries have died following their infection with the Covid-19 virus, namely 144 elderly and adults with disabilities.**

- 0,9% out of the total number of beneficiaries within the system are infected with the Covid-19 virus, namely 503 persons, out of which 31 are children.
- There were no deaths among the children within the special protection system.
- There are 220 employees infected and there 2 deaths were registered.
- There are 736 cured beneficiaries.
- The main counties of Romania affected by the Covid-19 epidemic are: Neamț, Suceava, Galați, București, Ilfov, Cluj și Bacău.

Romania registered approximately 11% out of the total number of deaths caused by the Covid-19 virus, within the persons residing in the facilities for elderly and adults with disabilities.

The exceptional measures adopted by the Romanian authorities (ex: *early measures of prevention and isolation within the working place of the employees from all the residential centers for 14 days shifts*) made possible for our country to register significantly low numbers of deaths within the beneficiaries of the residential services.

#### *Challenges and vulnerabilities*

Although a number of prevention measures for fighting the spreading of the Covid-19 virus were adopted at the level of the social assistance and child protection system, a number of factors made possible the infection and death of some of the beneficiaries. From the analysis made by ANDPDCA, based on the data and information collected through the national coordination system put in place, the following problematic aspects must be underlined:

1. **The existence of some large residential centers favored the spreading of the virus at a larger scale.**

At Sasca Mică Rehabilitation Center for Adults with Disabilities in Suceava County, where 242 infected persons were registered is a relevant example in this respect, which underlines the need for a correct and efficient implementation of the deinstitutionalization process. These measures will be resumed and intensified once the epidemiological situation will allow it, **starting with a reevaluation of all the measures adopted so far and the general approach of this matter.**

2. **Dysfunctionalities in the process of testing the employees and the beneficiaries, as carried out by the County Public Health Departments (PHDs).**

During the entire state of emergency period, including after the entering to force of the **Military Ordinance no. 8/2020**, which imposed within the residential centers **the measure of the preventive isolation at the working place for 14 days shifts**, the cooperation with a number of Public Health Departments (PHD) was difficult and lead to testing delays, fact which was an objective obstacle in the process of coordination and organization. For a better understanding, we can exemplify some relevant challenges:

- **There were cases when the managers of the residential centers found out from the media the results of the tests taken from the beneficiaries and the subordinated staff – ex. Vrancea County.**
- **PHDs refused to test the educators isolated within the residential centers with the beneficiaries**, only because in the Code of Professions they are not registered as "carers", even if by the nature of their current activity they are performing daily activities with the beneficiaries and were isolated with them within the centers– ex. Bucharest.

- **Late testing and late test results releasing**, despite the fact the managements of the General Departments for Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPCs) have repeatedly asked in writing for these procedures to be carried out in due time, no answer was registered. This lack of communication consequently generated two types of consequences: either the employees from the initial period of preventive isolation have stayed an extra number of days over the 14 days compulsory shift, until the results of the testing have arrived, (Covasna, Alba, Arad, Buzău counties), or **they have entered the new shift without the testing results** (Argeş, Dolj, Hunedoara, Galaţi, Olt, Vaslui), **leading to the infection of the beneficiaries** (Neamţ).

Part of the situations mentioned above were solved based on the efforts carried out by the ANDPDCA and its coordination with the DGASPCs.

### 3. The unequal treatment applied to the beneficiaries, compared to the employees

In the counties of Suceava and Hunedoara, there are two centers (Sasca Mică and Paclişa) where the infected beneficiaries were treated **within the residential institutions**, while the employees were admitted in the hospitals. The explanation offered by the local authorities was based on a presumably high number of the beneficiaries (patients -Sasca Mică) or by their disruptive behavior (Hunedoara). ANDPDCA has immediately notified the institution of the Prefect with the lack of equal treatment with regard to the free access to medical services. In this context, based on the information provided by the DGASPC, there were initiated concrete actions aimed at providing the necessary specialized medical staff and the setting up of special circuits within the centers, in order to provide adequate care to the beneficiaries. However, the beneficiaries remained in the centers.

### 4. Partial lack off protection equipment in the first phase of the emergency period

At the beginning of Covid-119 pandemic due to the insufficient stocks of protection equipment at national level, the social services were confronted with the problem of not having enough protection equipment.

As a result, MLSP and ANDPDCA have initiated a number of concrete actions in order to answer the urgent need of the residential social services. In this context with the support of the Emergency Situation Department, there were allocated and distributed a number of **1,240,000 masks for the residential social services.**

Besides, ANDPDCA has initiated a partnership with UNICEF Romania, based on which **150,000 masks and gloves** were made available for the residential social services.

At the same time, in order to support the financial effort made by the local DGASPCs in order to face the situations generated by the epidemic, ANDPDCA has concluded a partnership with a private corporation, which donated **1,128,000 lei for hygienic and sanitary equipment and food supplies.**

As well, in order to ensure **the respect for human rights and need of psycho-emotional support of the beneficiaries and staff of the residential social services**, ANDPDCA created a mechanism similar to a toll free line, aimed at offering real time counselling and support, with the help of specialist from the civil society and UNICEF Romania.

*Measures of support adopted for the public and private social services suppliers during the emergency period*

In order to prevent the difficulties encountered by the social services providers, MLSP and ANDPDCA have designed and implemented several policy measures in order to offer a proper regulation during the emergency period:

- **The centers for social services which were beneficiaries of the subvention offered based on the provisions of the Law no. 34/1998**, which have closed their activities as a result of the pandemic, have continued to benefit of the subventions offered by the MLSP, if they were performing support activities for the local public administration authorities in the context of the Covid-19
- **The subvention should be used for the payment of the salaries for the social services centers' staff**<sup>11</sup>.
- **The suspension of control activities for the verification of the social services providers and the verification of the way the subventions are used, during the emergency period.**
- **The payment of all costs encumbered by food and lodging expenses** for the employees of social services, who were in preventive isolation at their working place<sup>12</sup>
- **In all sanitary units as well as in the social assistance ones**, was allowed to hire medical staff, auxiliary staff, pharmacists, lab personnel and other categories of contractual staff, for a period of 6 months, without organizing de administrative hiring procedure established within the law.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Support measures for the community*

Another important dimension addressed by the MLSP and ANDPDCA during the pandemic of COVID-19 was the establishment of concrete immediate support for the vulnerable categories within the communities. For a better understanding the following measures should be mentioned:

1. **Extending the validity period for the handicap certificates for children and adults with disabilities** during the emergency period and for another 90 days after its ceasing. **Such a measure made possible to maintain the financial rights for approximately 800.000 beneficiaries.**
2. **The parents of children with severe disabilities who were not attending school and those of the adults with disabilities with a severe handicap and without a personal assistant have benefited of free days during the whole emergency period**, in accordance with the legal provisions in place.
3. The validity of the foster parents' certificates were extended during the emergency period, together with their corresponding rights and **after that, for another 90 days**, when the emergency period will end.
4. The accreditation and licensing Certificates of the social services providers which were **about to expire during the emergency period were extended until its end** and for another 90 days after this date.
5. The administrative procedures related to the issuing of the Handicap Certificates and the different social benefits granted for these persons **were moved in the online area.**

<sup>11</sup> (art. XVI din O.U.G. nr.32/2020)

<sup>12</sup> According to the provision of the MO 8/2020.

<sup>13</sup> (art.16 Annex.1 to the Presidential Decree no. 195/2020 regarding the establishment of emergency situation on the territory of Romania).

6. **The allowance for raising the children with severe handicap up to the age of 7 years old was extended** during the emergency period, if they were to expire, which also made possible the continuity of payment of these rights within this period.

7. **The allowance for the accommodation leave granted to the adoptive families was extended** during the emergency period, including the rights attached to it.

***Organization and Management of the coordination process at the level of the NARPDCA***

Starting with the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, 2020, at the level of the ANDPDCA a **National Coordination Unit for COVID-19** was set up, which ensured the coordination and management of the crisis situations, generated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

New mechanisms of communication, coordination and real time data collection were set up, while specific recommendations and methodological dispositions were sent to the local DGASPCs in order to support the management and prevention of the Covid-19 spreading within the residential social services and the community social services. More details may be found at: <http://andpdca.gov.ro/w/info-covid-19-2/>. ANDPDCA was asked by UNICEF to share a part of the ANDPDCA Recommendations<sup>14</sup> to be disseminated in the UN system in order to be implemented in other regions/states of the world, including a **Prevention Guide in Easy-to-Read/Understand format**.

**The Coordination Unit ensured:**

- A continuous flow of public information in regard to the Covid-19 pandemic situation at the level of social assistance and child protection system,
- Facilitation of the inter-institutional cooperation at local level, in order to solve different situation identified in the field,
- Real time data and information collecting or identification of systemic level measures, wherever the situation made it necessary,
- 24/24 hours, 7 out of 7 days direct communication with all the DGASPCs and centers' management
- Constant communication with the representatives of the local authorities, unions, employees, beneficiaries and other relevant actors in the social field.

*Conclusions*

ANDPDCA recommends to strictly respect the recommendations issued by the Ministry of Health referring to the testing of the employees from the residential system as a PRIORITY.

ANDPDCA underlines the fact that the social assistance system in Romania has assumed the most drastic and restrictive measures of combatting the spreading of COVID-19, both at country level and also at European level. We consider that the efforts of the employees should be supported by an adequate reaction to the situation and by proper legal provisions from all the institutions and decision makers for the sole benefit of the beneficiaries, the employees, the families and communities to whom they belong.

<sup>14</sup> <http://andpdca.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Recomand%C4%83ri-privind-prevenirea-%C8%99i-managementul-situa%C8%99Biei-generate-de-Epidemie-de-Covid.pdf>

ANDPDCA currently, elaborated the measures addressed to the exit from the emergency period and for the release of isolation, within the working places for the centers' staff. The measures are focused on part of the aspects related to the prevention of Covid-19 spreading at the level of the residential social services, and on several recommendations regarding the community social services.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

##### *General presentation of the social assistance and child protection system*

Within the system of social assistance and child protection system there is a total number of **57.029 beneficiaries**: children, adults with disabilities and elderly, as follows:

<b>ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES</b>
DGASPCs – PUBLIC PROVIDERS - 17.619 – adults with disabilities in 443 centers
PRIVATE PROVIDERS – 1.462 adults with disabilities in 110 residential services
<b>CHILDREN IN RESIDENTIAL CENTERS</b>
DGASOCs – PUBLIC PROVIDERS - 12.371 children in different types of social services (family type homes, apartments, centers)
PRIVATE PROVIDERS – 3.201 children
<b>ELDERLY</b>
Public elderly centers - 4.103
Private elderly centers - 18.278

### **(SE) Sweden**

Different Ministries have held several meetings with civil society organisations in order to discuss the impact of COVID- 19. The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs has for example organised a meeting with representatives from the disability organisations in order to discuss the impact for persons with disabilities.

Identifying particularly vulnerable risk groups: The Government has instructed the National Board of Health and Welfare to identify those groups that are at the greatest risk of becoming seriously ill should they contract COVID-19 since these groups may have a particular need for protection against infection.

The Government has also instructed the Health and Social Care Inspectorate (IVO) to particularly analyse the implications of COVID-19 for quality and safety in health and social care.

#### **Information and communication activities**

Information to social services personnel: the Government decided to instruct the National Board of Health and Welfare to disseminate information on SARS-CoV-2 to all social services personnel: support and service for persons with disabilities (persons entitled to measures within the Swedish Act concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments), personal assistance and elderly care.

Information material for children and young people particularly susceptible to infection: The Public Health Agency of Sweden has been commissioned to produce and spread information material for health care and school health services. It will deal with targeted action for

children and young people who are particularly susceptible to infection. The purpose of the information material will be to serve as support for the profession in connection with assessment and advice about preventive measures to reduce the risk of infection for children and young people who are particularly susceptible to infection. The National Board of Health and Welfare will assist the Agency with its knowledge, and experience and the Board will also spread the information material to professions in the relevant services.

The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) has been commissioned to carry out a major information campaign in order to provide coordinated information on the new coronavirus. The awareness action is carried out in cooperation with the Public Health Agency and the National Board of Health and Welfare. The assignment specifies the importance to reach all in society and has to be accessible, available in different languages and in easy to read Swedish.

Expanded digital contact channels to safeguard mental health: The Government wants to support effective communication among care services, patients and relatives in cases where physical visits are not possible as a result of the spread of COVID-19. The Government has therefore instructed the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency to provide SEK 24 million to the regions to develop and strengthen digital contact channels to activities that receive patients with mental health issues.

#### **Benefits and subsidiaries**

Sick pay standard deduction discontinued and medical certificate requirement suspended: The Government has decided to temporarily discontinue the sickness benefit standard deduction. This means that sick pay is paid from the first day at home. The purpose of this change is to encourage people to stay at home even when they have mild symptoms.

Preventive sickness benefit for risk groups: The Government's ordinance means a right to compensation of up to SEK 804 per day for people who belong to risk groups and for family members of people who belong to risk groups. The benefits are paid for the period when the person refrains from work to avoid being infected by the COVID-19 disease or infecting family members with that disease. The ordinance entered into force on 1 July 2020.

Expanded opportunities for temporary parental benefit: The opportunities to receive temporary parental benefit have been expanded in a new ordinance. If it's necessary to close e.g. preschools and schools to limit the spread of the virus, parents who have to stay home from work to care for children will be eligible for temporary parental benefit. In such situations, parents will receive approximately 90 per cent of the daily allowance they would normally receive in temporary parental benefit. Parents to children who are 12 years or older can be eligible to temporary parental benefit in certain cases. Children who are 16 -23 years entitled to measures according to the Swedish Act concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (LSS) are also included.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has resulted that persons entitled to measures according to LSS could be hindered to participate in daily activities due to disease among participants or personnel or because the Municipality no longer could offer activities due to the risk of infection. The Municipalities receive a Government grant to stimulate participation in daily activities. The National Board of Health and Welfare have been commissioned to clarify that the closure of daily activities due to COVID-19 does not hinder Municipalities to receive the

Government fund or for Municipalities to pay out the compensation (habiliteringsersättning) to participants.

### **Violence**

The coronavirus crisis threatens to exacerbate the vulnerability of children and young people at risk in their home environment. The same applies to victims of domestic violence and 'honour'-based violence and oppression, including women, children, young women, older people, LGBTI people and persons with disabilities. Greater isolation can increase the incidence of violence and control. Those who are vulnerable might also find it more difficult to receive information and seek support. The Government has therefore decided on two assignments:

- an assignment to the Swedish Gender Equality Agency to reach victims of violence. The agency has been tasked with identifying and developing effective working methods that municipalities can use to spread information about domestic violence and 'honour'-based violence and oppression, and to establish contact with victims of violence. The work will be based on the specific circumstances and conditions resulting from the outbreak of COVID-19.
- a new ordinance on government grants that will enable the National Board of Health and Welfare to allocate SEK 100 million to non-profit organisations addressing increased vulnerability resulting from the outbreak of COVID-19.

### **(SI) Slovenia**

Special attention has been given to persons with disabilities. Companies and employment centres for persons with disabilities, which employ over 6.000 persons with disabilities, are entitled to a special monthly crisis bonus for their employees. Parents of children with special needs and permanently unemployed persons with disabilities will receive a solidarity supplement in the amount of 130 € to 300 €. New crisis measures for persons with disabilities were recently suggested in relation to part-time work and full payment. Greater activity regarding improvement of competitive advantage by enterprises employing persons with disabilities and employment centers for persons with disabilities was also proposed. Another new measure to offer to persons with disabilities is psychosocial assistance.

### **(SK) Slovakia**

As of 12 March 2020, the Government of the Slovak Republic has declared an emergency situation due to the risk of spreading COVID-19. Since March 16, 2020, the Government of the Slovak Republic has declared a state of emergency for 22 state hospitals. Since March 19, 2020, the state of emergency has been extended to other entities in the health sector. As of March 28, 2020, the state of emergency has been extended to residential nursing social service facilities such as facilities for seniors and children.

The Government of the Slovak Republic has adopted the "Plan for the Solution of Reducing the Risk of the Occurrence and Spread of the COVID-19 among Homeless People and in the Admission of Natural Persons to Selected Public or Non-public Social Services Facilities and Centres for Children and Families".

**Labour Code and Employment Support Measures**  
**Legislative measures in force from April 23, 2020**

1. The employer is entitled to order the employee to work from home, if the agreed type of work allows for such an arrangement. An employee has the right to work from home when the agreed type of work so permits and if there are no serious operational reasons on the employer's side which do not allow the work to be performed from home.
2. Where there is no possibility to work from home, the employer must take all **preventive measures** at the workplace to avoid the spread of COVID-19. This mainly concerns provision of protective masks, gloves, protective clothing, disinfectant soaps and regular workplace disinfection. This obligation stems from the general obligation of the employer to secure health and safety at work.
3. **Easier application for an annual leave.** The employer is obliged to inform the employee about designating the use of leave at least 7 days in advance and if it is an unused leave from the previous year at least two days in advance. This period may be shortened with the consent of the employee.
4. **Using compensatory time-off for work previously acquired by the employee, e. g. due to the performance of the overtime work or work during public holidays. The employee may use such a time-off from work, if they have not used it yet.**
5. **Easier modification of work schedule.** The employer is obliged to notify the employee of the working time schedule at least 2 days in advance, unless the employer and the employees agree on a shorter period of time. The working time schedule has to be valid for at least a week.
6. The employer may grant the employee additional **time off from work (the excused absence of the employee from work) with wage compensation**, which the employee shall work later. This situation constitutes an obstacle to work on the part of the employee.
7. **Non-assignment of work to an employee.** This is an obstacle to work on the part of the employer. In a special case, such as preventing the spread of COVID-19, the employer is not obliged to assign work to workers at risk within the premises of the workplace. In this case, the employee is entitled to a wage compensation amounting to their average wage. This is a situation when the employer has planned work shifts for employees and informs them that they will not be assigned for work.
8. **Excused absence from work (time-off from work) - personal obstacles to work on the part of the employee.** The employer shall excuse the absence of an employee at work during their temporary incapacity for work due to illness or accident, maternity leave and parental leave, quarantine, nursing a family member under a special regulation, childcare under a special regulation, and during a period when a person who provides care for a child younger than 10 years of age, has undergone an examination or treatment in a medical facility that could not be provided outside the

employee's working hours. During this time, the employee is not entitled to wage compensation, unless a special regulation provides otherwise. But the employee may be entitled to social security benefits – see below. The employer may excuse an absence from work for other reasons, for example, due to the risk of spreading COVID-19, and may provide the employee with wage compensation during such absence.

9. Due to the state of emergency during which the employer is forced to limit his activity, wage compensation is reduced to at least 80% of the employee's average monthly earnings, but not less than the statutory minimum wage. This provision is linked to the financial measures of the State and does not apply to employees of economic mobilization entities within which an obligation to work has been imposed.
10. An employee who has been taking care of a sick family member or a child in relation to the adopted quarantine measures and isolation obligations is now protected against the termination of the employment relationship.
11. The employers' deadlines for providing their employees with information in the field of occupational safety and health are suspended.

Legislative changes in the Labour Code related to the COVID 19 emergency situation shall be applied even for the period of two months after its end.

12. Simplifying the conditions for obtaining the status of a registered social enterprise and introducing alternative ways for fulfilling certain obligations of a social enterprise, such as the extension of deadlines or postponement of an advisory committee meeting.

#### **Financial support from the state (in force from 31 March 2020)**

1. The range of active labour market measures is extended to include **projects to support the sustainability of employees and jobs, including jobs where self-employment is applied**, in the context of a state of emergency. These measures are a part of a new COVID 19 legislative framework. The estimated total funding for these projects for the expected duration of the state emergency (March - May 2020) is **1382,5 mil. EUR. The Slovak Republic shall reallocate 197 mil. EUR from the Operational Program Human Resources.**
  - A. **Financial support is provided to an employer** who had to close down or temporarily terminate operations during the state of emergency. The amount of **financial support is 80% of an employee's average wage with a limit amounting to 1 100 EUR.**
  - B. **Financial support is provided to a self-employed person**, who has to close down or temporarily terminate operations and whose turnover decreased by more than 10% in March and more than 20% in April and May during the state emergency. The amount of financial support is based on the percentage decrease in turnover.

- C. Salary support scheme for employers affected by the COVID crisis.** The employer may choose to either apply for support up to 80% of the employee's average salary (up to 880 EUR) or allowance for employees' salaries depending on the decrease of income.
- D. Financial support of selected groups of natural persons,** who, at the time of the announcement of the emergency situation, have no other income e. g. **self-employed persons** who have interrupted, restricted or suspended their activities. This is the amount of compensation for the loss of earnings of EUR 105 for the month of March 2020 and EUR 210 for the month of April and May 2020.

**Fundamental conditions:**

- to provide an employee with a wage compensation of 80% of his average earnings;
- the employer shall not terminate the employment relationship with the employee within two months following the month for which the contribution is requested.

Only an entity that was established and started to operate on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2020 at the latest, is eligible for this financial support.

**Decrease of administrative burden** - The fulfilment of the conditions for the financial support is based on the employer's declaration to ensure fast processing of the payment. In the event that it is subsequently found that the conditions are not met, the employer will be obliged to return the contribution.

2. **The deadline for fulfilling certain obligations of natural and legal persons arising from the Employment Services Act is postponed** and it is also proposed to allow citizens to file an application for registration in the jobseekers register by electronic means without a qualified electronic signature.
3. Further financial assistance for small and medium-sized enterprises is provided through the Export-Import Bank of the Slovak Republic and the Slovak Guarantee and Development Bank, JSC.
4. The creditor shall, on application by the debtor, grant a deferral of repayment of the loan for a maximum period of nine months. This measure also applies to consumers and also to a small employer and natural persons who are entrepreneurs.
5. **State financial support - humanitarian aid** (clothing, household equipment) provided for natural persons in crisis, such as in the event of redundancy (and without entitlement to unemployment benefit) due to closures based on measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the crisis, the maximum support for a natural person is 1 600 EUR annually with a monthly maximum of 210 EUR. Conditions for the entitlement to this benefit is based on declaration.

This support can also be provided to a legal entity to support its humanitarian activities, with an annual maximum of 15 000 EUR but for the creation of spaces for people without a home who require quarantine or are infected the maximum is 30,000 EUR.

6. **Parental allowance** – If the period for entitlement of the parental allowance has expired during the crisis, the entitlement will continue until the end of the crisis at the same amount. This does not apply for a person who has income or is entitled to other benefits with a higher amount than the parental allowance.
7. The financial support towards a child's diet for nurseries and primary schools which provide food during the crisis no longer requires proof of a child's attendance
8. Protection allowance has been extended to a larger range of recipients.
9. During the crisis, the entitlement conditions for various state social allowances have been relaxed to allow for greater accessibility. These include; the activation allowance, assessing financial situation for people in material need, housing allowance and entitlement to child support.
10. The reassessment of income for cash benefits for the compensation of the social consequences of severe disability has been suspended during the crisis. Also, a child's health reassessment for the purpose of establishing the entitlement to parental allowance or other financial support is not being performed.
11. The carer's allowance is granted for the entire calendar month, even if the conditions for entitlement have been met for only part of the calendar month.
12. Increase of the financial contribution provided by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic for the provision of social services in a dormitory from € 120 to € 150 per month/person.
13. In the field of state social benefits, social and legal protection of children and social guardianship and social services, conditions have been created for a faster reaction to simplify the adjustment of deadlines and procedures for claiming those benefits that cannot be fulfilled due to the current situation.

## Social Security Measures

### 1. Social insurance contributions

- Exemption from paying social insurance contributions for insured persons during the entire period of personal and daylong nursing or care.
- **Deferrals of compulsory social insurance contributions**, health insurance contributions, old-age pension savings and compulsory supplementary pension savings contributions for employers and self-employed persons with a net turnover decrease of 40% or more has been introduced. These contributions which were due in March 2020 are now due by 31 July 2020.
- Social insurance, old-age pension savings and compulsory supplementary pension savings - **contribution payments for the employer or compulsory insured self-employed persons are waived for April 2020**, providing they had to close their operations for at least 15 days in April 2020. The government is empowered to decide on the further extension of the period for waiving the obligation. The closure of the

operation shall be proved by the employer or compulsory self-employed declaration to ensure a fast procedure.

## **2. Pension insurance**

- Temporary modification of the possibility to apply for a pension electronically without the need to visit Social Insurance Agency in person.
- Pensioners living abroad and those who, due to the coronavirus pandemic, have not been able to present a proof of living within the statutory deadline, shall be paid their pensions by the Social Insurance Agency even without this confirmation. Pensioners living abroad have to reply to an urgent request for confirmation by sending a self-signed confirmation of living without having to certify the signature by the competent authority.

## **3. Sickness insurance**

- Sickness benefit - is granted to an employee who has been acknowledged as temporarily incapable of work during an emergency because of a quarantine measure or isolation. Entitlement to the benefit arises from day 1, amounting to 55% of the assessment base, which financially relieves employers from paying wage compensation during the first 10 days of temporary incapacity for work. These same conditions of entitlement also apply to an insured self-employed person.
- The duration of nursing benefit (the so-called pandemic nursing) has now been extended from 10 days to the entire crisis period. The insured person is entitled to the nursing benefit if they personally
  - nurses a child aged eleven or less, or until the age of 18 if the child has a long-term adverse health condition,
  - care for a child until the age of sixteen, whose medical condition necessarily requires treatment by another natural person, as certified by the competent physician, or
  - care for a close relative, a sibling, a spouse or a parent of a spouse if a social service facility providing these persons with an outpatient or residential welfare service has been closed or quarantined by a decision of the competent authorities.

In these cases, the compulsory social insurance will not be interrupted for these persons. The possibility for parents to take over their child's care has also been adjusted, e.g. having regard to the need to resume employment of the given parent.

A natural person is entitled to the nursing benefit also if some of the conditions for its usual entitlement have expired for the given person, e.g. the person's child has reached the age of three during the emergency situation.

## **4. Unemployment insurance (newly adopted measures in force from April 3, 2020)**

- The duration of the unemployment benefit has now been extended by one month (extended again by a further month - at the latest it will expire one month after the end of the emergency situation) but only in case where it should have expired during

the crisis situation. This measure applies to an insured person whose duration of unemployment benefit has expired during the crisis period, also applies retroactively.

- Changes in the conditions of entitlement, payment, length and amount of the unemployment benefit can now be adopted faster during this crisis.
- The Social Insurance Agency will not increase the amounts due by interest on late payment if the instalments of the outstanding amounts of premiums are authorized.
- Medical assessment activities will not be carried out in person.

#### **General measures**

The Social Insurance Agency and offices of labour, social affairs and family have introduced mostly electronic, e-mail, telephone, mail and personal communication in the designated mailboxes. For preventive reasons, the Social Insurance Agency has also introduced an obligation to enter its offices only with protective face masks, while also banning the entry of parents with children. It also recommends using non-cash payments.

### **(NO) Norway**

The Norwegian Government has implemented a range of measures to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Covid-19 has particularly negative effects for parts of the population and the Government is aware of this, and is working with measures for this not to have long-lasting, negative consequences for those concerned.

The pandemic in Norway, as in many other countries, has contributed to a challenging situation both for those who provide services and for those who receive services. The considerations of infection protection must be taken care of, while providing proper services to those in need. The fear the epidemic creates in the population goes especially to vulnerable groups. At the same time, the epidemic in itself, and the measures taken, are affecting the vulnerable groups.

The measures have led to significant changes in the services for people with disabilities. Under the UN Convention on Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Article 11, Norway is required to take the necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in risk situations. In addition, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the municipalities have a duty to look after the best interests of the child even if the situation is demanding.

Based on an initiative from the Nordic Welfare Centre, the The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs has made an information brochure/mapping where it is

- shown what national measures and recommendations the authorities have given to balance considerations for infection control and proper services during the pandemic
- provided an overview of perceived challenges and consequences for services for people with disabilities as a result of the coronavirus outbreak
- highlighted economic and social challenges
- referred to information and communication work aimed at people with disabilities that are done in connection with coronavirus outbreaks

The brochure/mapping is made in cooperation with disability peoples organizations

Some general information given from the authorities:

**Health Norway** [Helsenorge.no](https://www.helsenorge.no)

- Information and advice in English on a number of topics such as quarantine and isolation, infection, incubation time and testing, risk groups, measures to prevent spread etc.

**Norwegian Institute of Public Health:**

- [Coronavirus](#) English theme page that contains information and advice on a variety of topics, as well as news and updated numbers
- [Brochure and video](#) with general information about coronavirus in several languages
- [Brochure and video](#) with information on home quarantine and isolation in different languages

**The Norwegian Directorate of Health:**

- [Information for health professionals](#) and other professional actors (English)
- [Quarantine rules](#) information in German, French, Spanish, Russian, Polish and Chinese.
- [Posters in different languages](#), e.g. habits that prevent infection and campaign posters with a request to prevent the spread of infection

**Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV)** has websites in English for users who are laid off and are seeking unemployment benefits.

**Norwegian Institute of Public Health:**

- [Coronavirus](#) General information about Covid-19
- [Information about home quarantine and home isolation](#)
- [Distancing](#)

**The Norwegian Directorate of Health:**

- [Posters in different languages](#), e.g. habits that prevent infection and campaign posters