



COVID-19 and people with disabilities

Assessing the impact of the crisis and informing disability-inclusive next steps

Iceland

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1 Executive summary

Disability inclusivity of disaster and recovery planning

Two relevant plans were introduced in Iceland in regard to disaster and recovery planning due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March and November of 2020. However, the November plan focused more explicitly on vulnerable populations. In addition, a handbook (repeatedly updated) was produced by the Icelandic government and which provided information specifically targeted at disabled people with independent living arrangements and their support workers.

1. Viðspyrna fyrir Ísland / Pushback for Iceland (March 2020)¹

Summary: In March 2020, a pushback plan was announced by the Icelandic government focusing on keeping people employed by paying 75 % of salaries for businesses, and helping households and businesses deal with the temporary income loss. In addition, people received payments when quarantined due to being exposed to COVID-19.² Included within this plan were some limited disability relevant measures concerning income security pertaining to childcare benefits.

2. Viðspyrna fyrir Ísland / Pushback for Iceland (November 2020)³

Summary: In November 2020, a second pushback plan was announced to support jobseekers, pensioners/beneficiaries, families with children, socially vulnerable groups and businesses. The plan is threefold focusing on: 1) general social policies 2) pushback actions for businesses and 3) special social measures. Unlike the earlier plan, the November plan included, among other things, a one-time payment for disability pensioners and an increase in the pension levels. Further details are discussed later in this report.

3. Guidelines for welfare service users

A number of guidelines were published in 2020 in collaboration with various branches of the national Icelandic government such as the Directorate of Health and the Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management, as well as the Icelandic municipalities, aimed at those who used municipals social services, but also with a particular emphases placed on those defined as vulnerable populations (e.g. disabled people, elderly people and those with chronic illnesses). These guidelines cover a broad range of issues, ranging from COVID related sanitation and practices, to issues of quarantine and service provision. These were updated regularly⁴ as more

¹ Government of Iceland. Viðspyrna fyrir Ísland / Pushback for Iceland (March 2020). [https://www.stjornarradid.is/library/01--Frettatengt---myndir-og-skrar/FOR/Fylgiskjol-i-frett/200321%20Efnahagsa%c3%b0ger%c3%b0ir%20v10%20NET_loka_leidrett%20\(002\).pdf](https://www.stjornarradid.is/library/01--Frettatengt---myndir-og-skrar/FOR/Fylgiskjol-i-frett/200321%20Efnahagsa%c3%b0ger%c3%b0ir%20v10%20NET_loka_leidrett%20(002).pdf).

² Government of Iceland. Viðspyrna fyrir Ísland - efnahagsaðgerðir stjórnvalda vegna COVID-19 (March 2020). <https://www.stjornarradid.is/efst-a-baugi/frettir/stok-frett/2020/03/21/Vidspyrna-fyrir-Island-efnahagsadgerdir-stjornvalda-vegna-COVID-19/>.

³ Government of Iceland. Viðspyrna fyrir Ísland / Pushback for Iceland (November 2020). https://www.stjornarradid.is/library/01--Frettatengt---myndir-og-skrar/FOR/Fylgiskjol-i-frett/VidspyrnafyrirIsland_November2020_01.pdf.

⁴ Almannavarnanefnd Höfuðborgarsvæðisins. Velferðarsvið: Leiðbeiningar og upplýsingar sem almannavarnanefnd höfuðborgarsvæðisins hefur sent á velferðasvið vegna COVID-19 <https://www.ahs.is/velferdasvid/>.

knowledge about COVID and its impacts were acquired (e.g. 2 April 2020;⁵ 6 May 2020;⁶ 26 May⁷ and 6 October 2020.⁸ An easy-to-read version was published in May of 2020).⁹

Impact of the virus on mortality among people with disabilities

Iceland has a small population (total population was 364 000 on 1. January 2020). As of the time of writing, 29 people have died from COVID-19.¹⁰ It is unknown of any of them were people with disabilities. As such, the number is far too small to provide any evidence of a mortality rate about any group, disabled people or otherwise.

Outline of key concerns about a disproportionately negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis on people with disabilities

The following points reflect the collective input of the collaborators of this report, drawn from their own personal experiences, contacts with disabled people and their organisations and/or media reports in Iceland. Links and documentation have been provided where possible.

1. Lack of co-ordination of COVID measures concerning disabled people living in their own homes

Over the course of 2020, a series of guidelines were published and revised which focused on COVID related issues pertaining to disabled people with independent living arrangements and their support workers (as reported in the Executive summary of this report). However, limited information from practices on the ground suggest that there was a lack of coordination in the response of various agencies at the outset of the pandemic, but better collaboration was later established between the municipalities, the emergency and healthcare authorities and some disabled people's organisations. As was reported in the Icelandic media in April 2020,¹¹ in the early days of the

⁵ Government of Iceland. *Sýkingar af völdum nýrrar kórónaveiru (COVID-19): Leiðbeiningar til notenda og aðstoðarfólks í NPA*. 02.04.2020 <https://www.samband.is/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/covid-19-leidbeiningar-npa-2-april-2020.pdf>.

⁶ Government of Iceland. *Sýkingar af völdum nýrrar kórónaveiru (COVID-19): Leiðbeiningar til fatlaðs fólks með NPA, aðra notendasamninga og aðstoðarfólks þeirra* (May 06, 2020) https://www.stjornarradid.is/library/03-Verkefni/Felags--og-fjolskyldumal/NPA/COVID-Lei%C3%B0beiningar_NPA%20og%20notendasamningar_loka06052020.pdf.

⁷ Government of Iceland. *Sýkingar af völdum nýrrar kórónaveiru (COVID-19): Leiðbeiningar til fatlaðs fólks með NPA, aðra notendasamninga og aðstoðarfólks þeirra* 26.05.2020 https://www.landlaeknir.is/servlet/file/store93/item40927/Lei%C3%B0beiningar_NPA%20og%20notendasamningar_2605.pdf.

⁸ Government of Iceland. *Leiðbeiningar til fatlaðs fólks með NPA, aðra notendasamninga og aðstoðarfólks þeirra: Sóttvarnarráðstafanir vegna COVID-19 sem taka gildi 5. og 7. október 2020* 06.10.2020 https://www.samband.is/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/leidbeiningar_npa-og-notendasamningar_06102020.pdf.

⁹ Government of Iceland. *Kóróna-veiran / COVID-19 Leiðbeiningar fyrir NPA notendur og aðstoðarfólk: Auðlesin útgáfa*. (May 2020). https://www.stjornarradid.is/library/03-Verkefni/Felags--og-fjolskyldumal/NPA/Lei%C3%B0beiningar-NPA_audlesid_26052020.pdf.

¹⁰ COVID-19 á Íslandi – tölfræði (COVID-19 in Iceland – statistics). <https://www.covid.is/tolulegar-upplýsingar>.

¹¹ *Fréttablaðið*. “Enginn til-búinn að rétta fötludu fólki hjálpar-hönd í kórónaveirufaraldri” (No one ready to lend a helping hand to people with disabilities in the coronavirus epidemic). 02.04.2020. <https://www.frettabladid.is/frettir/enginn-tilbúinn-ad-retta-fotludu-folki-hjalparhond-i-koronaveirufaraldri/>.

pandemic a disabled person with independent living arrangements recounted her experiences of seeking COVID related information. The main issue at hand was the steps that needed to be done when fears arose about the possibility of infection due to the presence of personal assistants coming into the home. A phone call to the municipal healthcare information agency (læknavaktin) suggested that this individual contact her community nurse, who in turn suggested a call to the National Hospital as they could not spare protective equipment. The COVID ward at the hospital said they were not able to do anything and told her to contact Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management which was closed during the weekend.

2. Disparity in access to vaccines

According to our sources and media reports, some disabled people appear to have difficulties in receiving the vaccine. In one account from January 2021,¹² a disabled woman reported that due to having a direct payment agreement (Is. *beingreiðslusamningur*), rather than an independent living arrangement (NPA), that she was not placed on the list provided to healthcare authorities for priority vaccinations. The Centre for Independent Living in Iceland (NPA miðstöðin) has the ability to provide a list of their members, but this does not cover those with direct payment agreements who have no comparable organization to liaison with the healthcare authorities (See Section 4.9 of this report).

3. Reliance upon IT/access to technology

One of the main ways in which to access COVID related information, alerts and supports is through smartphones and the internet. While the use of smartphones and internet usage throughout Icelandic society is high, these measures are not always accessible in terms of the required technology, let alone the formats in which this information is provided. By way of example, the Icelandic government announced that anyone with a legal address in Iceland and born before 2002 is eligible for a travel stipend¹³ (ISK 5 000) intended to, among other things, support the struggling Icelandic tourist industry as the result of the pandemic. Access to this depended upon both an electronic identity number input through a website and an app used on an iPhone or Android phone.

Examples of good practice

- Close and active cooperation and flow of information between the welfare departments of municipalities in the capital region and disabled people's organisations after the onset of the pandemic. However, it must be noted that the situation within the capital region is not necessarily the case in other municipalities.
- Priority was given to people with disabilities in terms of protection against COVID-19, especially the most vulnerable people living in municipal residential housing and care facilities. This group, and the people who work with them, were also given priority in vaccination. People with disabilities living in residential homes

¹² *Vísir*. "Óttast að fleiri hafi gleymst við boðun í bólusetningu" (Fear that more have been forgotten in the announcements of vaccinations). 23.01.2021 <https://www.visir.is/g/20212064559d/ottast-ad-fleiri-hafi-gleymst-vid-bodun-i-bolusetningu>.

¹³ Government of Iceland. *Ferðagjöf til einstaklinga* <https://island.is/ferdagjof>.

and care facilities were vaccinated with the first shipments to arrive in the country in December 2020 and people working in these services are prioritised at the same level as health care workers.

- Flexible and accessible testing for disabled people with the possibility of being tested at home, both those living in group homes as well as independent homes. Testing sites have also been made accessible.

Recommendations and opportunities for change

- The process of writing Section 8 of this report (Violence, exploitation, or abuse) highlighted how poorly violence is registered within the police in reference to disability and the lack of initiatives to educate people within the justice system about violence against disabled people. There is a notable lack of support to disabled women who experience violence and want to report it, and limited access to appropriate victim support services. As such, information about violence against disabled people in Iceland is very difficult to acquire, and rates about such violence in the specific context of COVID impossible to assess.
- COVID measures regarding people with disabilities to prioritise the group for protection and vaccination and should be formalised and written into the national disaster and recovery plans. Such efforts should include disabled people living in their own homes as well as those living in supported living environments. We recommend that people with disabilities be more closely involved in disaster and emergency planning and recovery. The heavy reliance on the internet and smartphones in the delivery of emergency information and notifications, as seen with the COVID pandemic in Iceland, is understandable but also needs to take into consideration those without access to this technology or find its use difficult.
- More support, particularly economic but other forms as well, is needed for families with children and young people with disabilities living at home.

2 Disability-inclusive disaster and recovery planning

Article 11 – Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies & Article 4(3) – involvement of persons with disabilities

2.1 Commitments to disability in disaster management and recovery strategies

General disaster planning

In evacuation guidelines, as seen in the Civil Defence Act overseen by the Icelandic National Police, disabled people are referenced only to when asking people to check on elderly, disabled and immigrant neighbours.¹⁴ In regard to aid centres, accessibility or assistance disability is not mentioned. The evacuation plan for the capital region (*Rýmingaráætlun fyrir höfuðborgarsvæðið*)¹⁵ includes disability through focusing on vulnerable groups when evacuating buildings, and on people unable to transport themselves, naming especially disabled people, elderly people, and blind people. We are unaware of any policy commitments made concerning the disability inclusivity of future disaster or recovery planning and processes.

COVID specific disaster planning

As the pandemic took hold in Iceland over the course of 2020, disability was not referenced in the updated plans published by the Civil Protection and Emergency Management (Almannavarnadeild), under the governance of the National Police. For example, in the document 'Intake of patients during the COVID-19 pandemic' (*Móttaka sjúklinga í heimsfaraldri COVID-19*)¹⁶ disability is not mentioned, only nursing homes and home nursing services. In the national plan for the pandemic (Heimsfaraldur – landsáætlun),¹⁷ disability receives no attention either. However, as disability matters are primarily a municipal responsibility in Iceland this could explain the lack of a disability focus in national disaster plans. The only reference to disability we could locate in COVID specific disaster planning is a brief reference to a policy paper published by the UN in May 2020 which focused on the inclusion of disabled people in COVID related plans such as access to information, services, protection and the consultation of disabled people throughout the process. The UN paper was only briefly summarized in the Icelandic Civil Protection Status report later the same month,¹⁸ and which provides no details as to how this is to be implemented in Iceland. However,

¹⁴ Ríkislögreglustjórinn – Almannavarnadeild (Civil Protection and Emergency Management). Rýmingar (Evacuations) <https://www.almannavarnir.is/almannavarnarstig/rymingar/>.

¹⁵ Ríkislögreglustjórinn – Almannavarnadeild (Civil Protection and Emergency Management). "Rýmingaráætlun fyrir höfuðborgarsvæðið Útgáfa 1.0 – 0.6.12.2019." <https://www.almannavarnir.is/utgefid-efni/rymingaraetlun-fyrir-hofudborgarsvaedid-utgafa1-0-0-6-12-2019/>.

¹⁶ Ríkislögreglustjórinn – Almannavarnadeild (Civil Protection and Emergency Management). *Móttaka sjúklinga í heimsfaraldri COVID-19*. 03.11.2020 <https://www.almannavarnir.is/utgefid-efni/vidbragdsaaetlun-mottaka-sjuklinga-i-heimsfaraldri-utgafa-2-1/?wpdmdl=25579>.

¹⁷ Ríkislögreglustjórinn – Almannavarnadeild (Civil Protection and Emergency Management). Heimsfaraldur – landsáætlun. 25.05.2020. https://www.landlaeknir.is/servlet/file/store93/item29596/2016_%C3%A1%C3%A6tlun%20vegna%20heimsfaraldurs%20infl%C3%BAensu-%20%C3%BAtg%C3%A1fa%202.pdf.

¹⁸ Ríkislögreglustjórinn – Almannavarnadeild (Civil Protection and Emergency Management). *Stöðuskýrsla almannavarna* <https://www.almannavarnir.is/utgefid-efni/stoduskysrsla-koronaveira-covid-19-14052020/?wpdmdl=25017> 14.05.2020.

despite the lack of a formal mention in national disaster plans in specific, disabled people have been prioritised in pandemic actions.

COVID specific recovery plans

Two relevant plans were introduced in Iceland in regard to recovery planning due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March and November 2020. However, the November plan focused more explicitly on vulnerable populations.

1. Viðspyrna fyrir Ísland / Pushback for Iceland, March 2020.¹⁹

Summary: In March 2020, a pushback plan was announced by the Icelandic government focusing on keeping people employed by paying 75 % of salaries for businesses, and helping households and businesses deal with the temporary income loss. In addition, people received payments when quarantined due to being exposed to COVID-19.²⁰

Included within this plan were some limited disability relevant measures concerning income security pertaining to childcare benefits. Disability pensions in Iceland contain a means-tested income cut-off point (Is. *tekjuskurðing*) after which payments are reduced. Higher childcare benefits are paid to those whose incomes were below this cut-off point.

- Additional childcare benefits, ISK 40 000 for each child of parents, below the income reduction point and ISK 20 000 for each child of parents above the income reduction point. (p. 30).

2. Viðspyrna fyrir Ísland / Pushback for Iceland, November 2020.²¹

Summary: In November 2020, a second pushback plan was announced to support jobseekers, pensioners/beneficiaries, families with children, socially vulnerable groups and businesses. The plan is threefold focusing on: 1) general social policies 2) pushback actions for businesses and 3) special social measures.

Disability specific policies in the pushback plan include:

- ISK 50 000 one-time payment to disability pensioners and persons in rehabilitation (p. 4).
- Permanent changes in the benefit system which leads to 3.6 % increase in disability / chronically ill beneficiaries in 2021.
- Disability pensions in Iceland are means-tested. After an income ceiling is reached, pension reductions are enacted which correspond to? income level, either from wages or other pensions and benefits. In the second pushback plan,

¹⁹ Government of Iceland. *Viðspyrna fyrir Ísland / Pushback for Iceland* (March 2020). [https://www.stjornarradid.is/library/01--Frettatengt---myndir-og-skrar/FOR/Fylgiskjol-i-frett/200321%20Efnahagsa%c3%b0ger%c3%b0ir%20v10%20NET_loka_leidrett%20\(002\).pdf](https://www.stjornarradid.is/library/01--Frettatengt---myndir-og-skrar/FOR/Fylgiskjol-i-frett/200321%20Efnahagsa%c3%b0ger%c3%b0ir%20v10%20NET_loka_leidrett%20(002).pdf).

²⁰ Government of Iceland. *Viðspyrna fyrir Ísland - efnahagsaðgerðir stjórnvalda vegna COVID-19* (March 2020). <https://www.stjornarradid.is/efst-a-baugi/frettir/stok-frett/2020/03/21/Vidspyrna-fyrir-Island-efnahagsadgerdir-stjornvalda-vegna-COVID-19/>.

²¹ Government of Iceland. *Viðspyrna fyrir Ísland / Pushback for Iceland* (November 2020). https://www.stjornarradid.is/library/01--Frettatengt---myndir-og-skrar/FOR/Fylgiskjol-i-frett/VidspyrnafyrirIsland_November2020_01.pdf.

this ceiling was raised for earning from childcare benefits. The income ceiling raised from ISK 325 000 to ISK 350 000 a month for single parents and from ISK 650 000 to ISK 700 000 for couples (p. 4). No changes in the special childcare benefits for disability / chronically ill beneficiaries.

- Special sports and leisure grants for children in low-income homes, announced in April 2020 and extended to 2021 (p. 4). This also included an easy-to-read version of a website about sports and leisure grant for children from lower income homes.²²
- Payments to parents/guardians of disabled and chronically ill children and youth with official care assessment, due to increased care because of schools and facilities being closed during the first COVID-19 wave in Iceland (16 April to 4 May 2020).²³
- Educational videos for disabled people for social media platforms in response to increased loneliness and isolation of disabled people. The videos are meant to teach disabled people to use technology to communicate with others. A reference is also made to the CRPD (pp. 7-8).
- Increased support for social measures for adults with disabilities (p. 8), though specific details are lacking.
- Increased social support for families of disabled and chronically ill children due to increased care because of self-isolation (p. 8). Specific measures include additional hours at Reykjadalur summer camp for disabled children and youth with disabilities aged 8-21 and weekend get-aways for families of disabled and chronically ill children, along with other measures such as strengthening or extending existing programmes.
- Support for Greiningar- og ráðgjafastöðvar ríkisins (State Diagnostic and Counselling Centre) to work on waiting lists from 340 to 200 children in the year 2020 (p. 9). Diagnoses play an important role for children to receive necessary supports and entitlements.
- Grants for NGOs. (pp. 11-12). A number of NGOs and charities work with groups that are likely to be socially isolated and suffer from mental strain due to COVID. For example, disability pensioners are the largest group of recipients for material aid in Iceland, such as food donations.²⁴ As such financial assistance to these charities will in turn strengthen this form of assistance.
- The creation of a 'Welfare Calculator' to help people get information and guidance about their rights and to understand the intersection of various pensions and supports (pp. 12-13).

²² Island.is. Styrkur til íþrótta- og tómstundastarfs: Auðlesið efni. <https://island.is/styrkur-til-ithrotta-og-tomstundastarfs/styrkur-audlesid-efni>.

²³ Note: Landssamtökin Þroskahjálp (National Association of Intellectual Disabilities) estimates that this group numbers approximately 50-60 parents whereas the number of parents receiving care benefits are approximately 3 000. (<https://www.facebook.com/throskahjalp/posts/1486548908220522>.)

²⁴ Social Science Research Institute, University of Iceland. *Úttekt á fyrirkomulagi úthlutana og ráðgjafar hjálparsamtaka: Hvaða hópar leita aðstoðar?* (2021). https://www.stjornarradid.is/library/04-Raduneytin/Felagsmalaraduneytid/%c3%9attekt%20%c3%a1%20hj%c3%a1parstofnunum%20lokask%c3%bdrsla%20_15.01.2021.X.pdf.

2.2 Involvement of people with disabilities in disaster management and recovery strategies

There is no evidence we are aware of pertaining to the involvement of persons with disabilities in regard to national level disaster and recovery planning in general. For example, Neyðarstjórn Reykjavíkurborgar (Reykjavík City Emergency Management) has no representatives from disabled people's organizations, though the Welfare Division at the City of Reykjavík had regular weekly information exchange and collaboration meetings with DPOs and rights protection officers focusing on the rights of people with disabilities. However, there is some evidence of efforts in this area in regard to COVID-19. A welfare service response team (*Bakvarðasveit velferðarþjónustu*)²⁵ was established on 17 March 2020 by the ministry of social affairs and the ministry of transportation and local governments. Appointed were staff from the two ministries, the city of Reykjavík, Care Quality Inspectorate for Social Services and Child Protection (GEF) in close collaboration with special interest groups and two NGOs, specifically the national umbrella organizations ÖBÍ (National Disability Alliance) and Landsamtökin Þroskahjálp (National Association of Intellectual Disabilities). This response team began issuing weekly reports from April until December 2020, including chapters with information and input from NGOs and special interest groups. There is also a rights watch for disabled people (Réttindavakt fyrir fatlað fólk),²⁶ comprised of members of the government, academics with a focus on disability issues from the University of Iceland, and representatives from disabled people's organizations, including the national umbrella organizations ÖBÍ (National Disability Alliance) and Landsamtökin Þroskahjálp (National Association of Intellectual Disabilities). The activities of the rights watch for disabled people have been reported on in the regular briefings published online during the pandemic by the Civil Protection and Emergency Management. For example, the Civil Protection and Emergency Management reported on an April 2020 meeting of the rights watch group which discussed, among other things, how to ensure the flow of information about COVID is disseminated into the community.²⁷

2.3 Disability impact assessments and research to inform disaster management and recovery planning

To our knowledge no such evidence or research exists on this in Iceland.

2.4 Use of disaster management and recovery planning funds

The Government of Iceland maintains a website which lists the general economic recovery measures employed during the pandemic (Efnahagsaðgerðir vegna COVID-19).²⁸ In a sub-heading of this section is a brief paragraph which mentions economic

²⁵ Government of Iceland. "Bakvarðasveit velferðarþjónustu – óskað eftir starfsfólki á útkallslista." 17.03.2020. <https://www.stjornarradid.is/efst-a-baugi/frettir/stok-frett/2020/03/17/Bakvardasveit-velferdarþjonustu-oskad-efir-starfsfolki-a-utkallslista/>.

²⁶ Government of Iceland. Réttindavakt fyrir fatlað fólk. <https://www.stjornarradid.is/raduneyti/nefndir/nanar-um-nefnd/?itemid=f423a569-4214-11e7-941a-005056bc530c>.

²⁷ Ríkislögreglustjórnin – Almannavarnadeild (Civil Protection and Emergency Management). Stöðuskýrsla 07.04.2020. <https://www.almannavarnir.is/utgefid-efni/stoduskysrsla-koronaveira-covid-19-07042020/?wpdmdl=24919>.

²⁸ Government of Iceland. Efnahagsaðgerðir vegna COVID-19 (Economic measures due to COVID-19) <https://www.stjornarradid.is/rikisstjorn/covid-19>.

measures taken in regard to children with disabilities and long-term illnesses (Sértækur stuðningur – styrkir vegna umönnunar fatlaðra og langveikra barna), focusing mainly on lump-sum payments for caregivers in the home if children are unable to attend school due to the pandemic, which are exempt from taxation and do not affect other benefits. Another measure focuses on expanding mental health care services, including specialised teams all over the country addressing and educational materials for the staff of healthcare and educational institutions. Other funds have been directed toward enhancing support measures for vulnerable populations during the pandemic, such as the 112-emergency number, the 1717 helpline and the 1717.is help online chat.

In the November 2020 recovery plan (Viðspyrna fyrir Ísland / Pushback for Iceland) there were a number of disability specific recovery measures discussed in detail in Section 2.1 of this report. In May 2020,²⁹ the Ministry of Social Affairs announced a measure to spend ISK 190 million on an initiative to increase the number of temporary resources for disabled people. These are a variety of measures aimed at increasing services for both chronically ill and disabled children, as well as adults with disabilities. This included, among other things, increased funding for day camps and recreational activities for disabled and chronically ill children, day services for adults intended to address the consequences of COVID-19.

There were also a number of smaller measures in which resources were directed toward addressing the effects of the pandemic, some of benefitted disabled people or the parents of disabled children. For example, payments to parents/guardians of disabled and chronically ill children and youth with official care assessment were made due to increased care because of schools and facilities being closed in the first COVID-19 wave in Iceland (16 April to 4 May 2020). Landssamtökin Þroskahjálp (National Association of Intellectual Disabilities) estimates that this group who received payments consists of 50-60 parents of disabled children out of an estimated 3 000 who received these payments.³⁰

²⁹ Government of Iceland. “Fjölpættar aðgerðir fyrir fatlaða einstaklinga” (Diverse measures for disabled individuals). 19.05.2020 <https://www.stjornarradid.is/efst-a-baugi/frettir/stok-frett/2020/05/19/Fjolthaettar-adgerdir-fyrir-fatlada-einstaklinga>.

³⁰ Landssamtökin Þroskahjálp. 07.12.2020 <https://www.facebook.com/throskahjalp/posts/1486548908220522>.

3 Mortality connected to COVID-19 among people with disabilities

Article 10 – The right to life

3.1 Are official statistics available concerning the overall mortality rate of people with disabilities?

Iceland has a small population (364 000 on 1 January 2020).³¹ As of the time of writing, 29 people have died from COVID-19.³² A parliamentary document provided by the Minister of Health states that of the 29 deaths, 14 deaths resulted from a cluster COVID infection in a nursing home for elderly people in Reykjavík, and that additional 3 older individual had died in nursing homes in other parts of the country, other deaths occurred in hospitals.³³ It is unknown of any of the deceased were people with disabilities. As such, the number is far too small to provide any evidence of a mortality rate about any group, disabled people or otherwise.

3.2 Are official statistics available concerning the mortality rate of people with disabilities who have died from complications connected to COVID-19?

Iceland has a small population (total population was 364 000 on 1 January 2020). As of the time of writing, 29 people have died from COVID-19.³⁴ It is unknown of any of them were people with disabilities. As such, the number is far too small to provide any evidence of a mortality rate about any group, disabled people or otherwise.

³¹ Statistics Iceland. [Mannfjöldabróun 2019 - Hagstofa Íslands](#).

³² COVID-19 á Íslandi – tölfræði (COVID-19 in Iceland – statistics). <https://www.covid.is/tolulegar-upplýsingar>.

³³ Alþingi. Government of Iceland. *Svar heilbrigðisráðherra við fyrirspurn frá Gunnari Braga Sveinssyni um fjölda sýkinga og andláta af völdum kórónuveirunnar*. 151. löggjafarþing 2020–2021. Þingskjal 753 — 410. mál. <https://www.althingi.is/altext/151/s/0753.html>.

³⁴ COVID-19 á Íslandi – tölfræði (COVID-19 in Iceland – statistics). <https://www.covid.is/tolulegar-upplýsingar>.

4 Access to health

[Article 25 – Health](#)

4.1 Emergency measures

In the Parliamentary resolution on ethical values and priorities in health care (*Þingsályktun um siðferðileg gildi og forgangsörðun í heilbrigðisþjónustu*),³⁵ disability is not mentioned specifically, but includes language that places an emphasis upon protecting the rights of vulnerable groups which includes people with disabilities. In 2019,³⁶ the Government of Iceland issued a report on health policies and services until the year 2030. The policy plan prohibits discrimination in access to healthcare (but prioritises access to healthcare on the basis of medical and professional criteria). The plan acknowledges that in some regard access to healthcare is unequal, and as such notes that special measures need to be implemented to ensure that people with mental and physical disabilities, and severe mental health issues, among others, can take advantages of the services on offer. What these ‘special measures’ entail is not explained.

In regard to COVID-19 measures in specific, the prioritization of vaccinations against COVID-19 has been detailed in a government regulation published in November of 2020.³⁷ The primary emphasis has been placed upon healthcare workers, people living in nursing homes and residential homes, people with chronic illnesses, older people, those working in schools and then the general public. The inclusion of people with disabilities is somewhat vague, but at the time of writing we have confirmed information that people with disabilities living in residential or group homes, supported living arrangements such as apartment clusters, and the people working in these services were prioritised and were among those vaccinated the very first round of vaccinations. Some other people with disabilities have been vaccinated and some have not. The key factors underlying this appear to be if the individuals reside within a residential or group home or receive assistance in the home through personal assistance or other measures, and whether or not the impairment is considered to be, or produces, a chronic illness.

The Directorate of Health (*Embætti landlæknis*) has issued a number of bans or requests for restrictions, and subsequent relaxations, on visits to nursing and residential homes or apartment clusters for people with disabilities and the elderly during the course of the pandemic, though the situations faced by young disabled people living in these residential homes or those within group homes for disabled people are not mentioned. The National Hospital’s COVID-19 handbook³⁸ for their staff makes no mention of disability. The Directorate of Health’s guidelines for people in

³⁵ Alþingi. *Þingsályktun um siðferðileg gildi og forgangsörðun í heilbrigðisþjónustu nr. 38/150*. 2020 <https://www.althingi.is/altext/150/s/1659.html>.

³⁶ Government of Iceland. *Heilbrigðisstefna Stefna fyrir íslenska heilbrigðisþjónustu til ársins 2030*. 2019 <https://www.stjornarradid.is/lisalib/getfile.aspx?itemid=879dd726-9e80-11e9-9443-005056bc4d74>.

³⁷ Government of Iceland. *Reglugerð um (3.) breytingu á reglugerð nr. 221/2001, um bólusetningar á Íslandi* <https://www.stjornartidindi.is/Advert.aspx?RecordID=2d345aa4-3215-420e-9d6a-4e4956214033>.

³⁸ Landspítali. *COVID-19 – handbók: Útgáfa 7.0* <https://traveler.lsh.is/focal/gaedahandbaekur/gnhskurda.nsf/0/E22BEBFC9E936AF40025852700059D02>.

isolation in the home due to COVID-19³⁹ also mentions no specific issues related to disability. At the same time specific Guidelines⁴⁰ for Welfare Services Provided by the Municipalities were issued by the Civil Protection and Emergency Management, the Directorate of Health and the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities, on 25 May 2020, directed in particular at protecting people with disabilities in various disability services including residential, leisure, employment, day services.

4.2 Access to hospital treatment for COVID-19

A request has been made by our team to Landspítali, the National Hospital, for this information. As of the time of writing this information has not been provided to us, and it is not publicly available to the best of our knowledge. To our knowledge no person with disability has been denied access to hospital treatment for COVID-19.

4.3 Treatment for COVID-19 in congregate settings

A request has been made by our team to Landspítali, the National Hospital, for this information. As of the time of writing this information has not been provided to us, and it is not publicly available to the best of our knowledge. However, based upon information obtained from the Department of Welfare in the City of Reykjavík we learned that people with disabilities living in residential apartments received treatment for COVID-19 in their own home as that was judged to be in their best interest.

4.4 Public health promotion and testing during the pandemic

The governmental website www.COVID.is is fairly easy to use and there has been an emphasis on calling 1770 for any questions. The Directorate of Health has issued guidelines for people more vulnerable to COVID-19.⁴¹ Many disabled people's organizations, such as the National Association of Intellectual Disabilities,⁴² as well as organizations that serve disabled populations, such as Fjölmennt adult education centre,⁴³ have been publishing the COVID measure and announcements on their websites, including easy to read versions, some of which were made in collaboration between DPOs and government agencies.⁴⁴ English and Polish versions of some of these COVID health promotion guides have also been made. Some DPOs, such as the National Association of Intellectual Disabilities, have extended their messaging into social media, such as Facebook in pictorial, easy to read formats, explaining the

³⁹ Embætti landlæknis. *Leiðbeiningar fyrir almenning varðandi einangrun í heimahúsi*. 19.10.2020 (last updated 09.11.2020). <https://www.landlaeknir.is/um-embættid/greinar/grein/item43366/Leiðbeiningar-fyrir-almenning-varðandi-einangrun-i-heimahusi>.

⁴⁰ Ríkislögreglustjórn – Almannavarnadeild. *Leiðbeiningar fyrir velferðarþjónustu sveitarfélaga Gilda frá 25. maí 2020*. https://eldri.samband.is/media/covid-19/Leiðbeiningar_velferðarþjónusta-25052020.pdf.

⁴¹ Embætti landlæknis. *Leiðbeiningar fyrir einstaklinga með áhættuþætti fyrir alvarlegri COVID-19 sýkingu*. 30.11.2020. <https://www.landlaeknir.is/servlet/file/store93/item39475/Lei%C3%B0beiningar%20fyrir%20%C3%A1h%C3%A6ttu%C3%B3pa%2005.05.2020b.pdf>.

⁴² Landsamtökin Þroskahjál. *Auðlesid: breyttar reglur vegna COVID*. <https://www.throskahjalp.is/is/samtokin/frettir/audlesid-breyttar-reglur-vegna-covid>.

⁴³ Fjölmennt. *Upplýsingar um Covid 19 á auðskildu máli með myndum*. <https://www.fjolmennt.is/static/extras/images/covid-baeklingur283.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Landsamtökin Þroskahjál, Government of Iceland, and Directorate of Health. *Kóróna-veiran COVID-19: Upplýsingar á auðlesnu máli um kóróna-veiruna*. <https://www.throskahjalp.is/static/files/ko-ro-na-veiran-a-audlesnu-ma-li.pdf>.

measures to take⁴⁵ and why it is important to stay home.⁴⁶ According to information collected by a team member, a call to the information hotline about home testing (1770) revealed that people who cannot drive are offered transportation through 112, the emergency hotline. If they are unable or find it difficult to leave the home, testing will be provided at their home. This information is not advertised. It should be highlighted that COVID-19 testing has been made easily accessible, is free of charge and carried out in accessible venues. Anyone showing symptoms can be tested upon request and results are provided within 24 hours.

4.5 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on access to health services for general or pre-existing physical or mental health conditions

Information is not available.

4.6 Vaccination programmes

In regard to COVID-19 measures in specific, the prioritization of vaccinations against COVID-19 has been detailed in a government regulation published in November 2020.⁴⁷ The primary emphasis has been placed upon healthcare workers, people living in nursing homes and residential homes, people with chronic illnesses, older people, those working in schools and then the general public.

The inclusion of people with disabilities was somewhat unclear in the early days of the pandemic, but at the time of writing we have confirmed information that people with disabilities living in residential or group homes, supported living arrangements such as apartment clusters, and the people working in these services were prioritised and were among those vaccinated the very first round of vaccinations. Some other people with disabilities have been vaccinated and some have not. The key factors underlying this appear to be if the individuals reside within a residential or group home or receive assistance in the home through personal assistance or other measures, and whether or not the impairment is considered to be, or produces, a chronic illness.

According to our sources and media reports, some disabled people appear to have difficulties in receiving the vaccine. In one account from the media in January 2021,⁴⁸ a disabled woman reported that due to having a direct payment agreement (Is. *beingreiðslusamningur*), rather than an independent living arrangement (NPA), that she was not placed on the list provided to healthcare authorities for priority vaccinations. The Centre for Independent Living in Iceland (NPA miðstöðin) has the ability to provide a list of their members, but this does not cover those with direct payment agreements who have no comparable organisation to liaison with the healthcare authorities.

⁴⁵ Landsamtökin Þroskahjálþ. *Samfélagssáttmáli í okkar höndum*.
<https://www.facebook.com/throskahjalp/photos/1284605198414895>.

⁴⁶ Landsamtökin Þroskahjálþ. *Verum heima!*
<https://m.facebook.com/throskahjalp/photos/1250883711787044>.

⁴⁷ Government of Iceland. *Reglugerð um (3.) breytingu á reglugerð nr. 221/2001, um bólusetningar á Íslandi*. <https://www.stjornartidindi.is/Advert.aspx?RecordID=2d345aa4-3215-420e-9d6a-4e4956214033>.

⁴⁸ *Vísir*. “Óttast að fleiri hafi gleymst við boðun í bólusetningu” (Fear that more have been forgotten in the announcements of vaccinations). 23.01.2021. <https://www.visir.is/g/20212064559d/ottast-ad-fleiri-hafi-gleymst-vid-bodun-i-bolusetningu>.

5 Income and access to food and essential items

Article 28 – Adequate standard of living and social protection

5.1 Emergency measures

The situation of people living in isolation is an issue that has been discussed in public discourse. The Directorate of Health noted that people in isolation can contact the Icelandic Red Cross for assistance.⁴⁹ Þuríður Harpa Sigurðardóttir, chairperson of ÖBÍ (Iceland's disability umbrella organization) noted in one of the reports published in April 2020 by the Civil Protection and Emergency Management that a large group of the 20 000 disabled and chronically ill people in Iceland are self-isolating. ÖBÍ made a poll within their organization and the results showed that 30 % were having trouble getting basic necessities and 70 % experienced loneliness.⁵⁰ Almost all municipalities in Iceland have a call-services for elderly and isolated individuals (einstæðinga) with advice, counselling and follow-ups. It has been reported that a number of municipalities have assisted isolated people with hot meals and other necessities.⁵¹

5.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

At the time of writing, we have no evidence-based research on the impact of COVID-19 on income, poverty and access to food pertaining to disabled people. In January 2021, the Social Science Research Institute published a report on charities which noted that disability pensioners (*öryrkjar*) are the largest recipient of food and material aid assistance in Iceland.⁵² However, the extent to which this is COVID-19 related is questionable. Disability pensioners have long been the largest group which sought food and material aid from charities in Iceland, as demonstrated in older research conducted by one of the authors of this report which took place in 2004-2006.⁵³

⁴⁹ Embætti landlæknis. *Leiðbeiningar fyrir almenning varðandi einangrun í heimahúsi*. 19.10.2020 (last updated 09.11.2020) <https://www.landlaeknir.is/um-embættid/greinar/grein/item43366/Leiðbeiningar-fyrir-almenning-varðandi-einangrun-i-heimahusi>.

⁵⁰ Ríkislögreglustjórnin – Almannavarnadeild (Civil Protection and Emergency Management). *Stöðuskýrsla almannavarna*. 24.04.2020 <https://www.almannavarnir.is/utgefing-efni/stoduskysrsla-koronaveira-covid-19-24042020/?wpdmdl=24973>.

⁵¹ Ríkislögreglustjórnin – Almannavarnadeild (Civil Protection and Emergency Management). *Stöðuskýrsla almannavarna*. 08.04.2020 <https://www.almannavarnir.is/utgefing-efni/stoduskysrsla-koronaveira-covid-19-08042020/?wpdmdl=24923>.

⁵² Social Science Research Institute, University of Iceland. *Úttekt á fyrirkomulagi úthlutana og ráðgjafar hjálparsamtaka: Hvaða hópar leita aðstoðar?* (2021) https://www.stjornarradid.is/library/04-Raduneytin/Felagsmalaraduneytid/%c3%9attekt%20%c3%a1%20hj%c3%a1parstofnunum%20lokask%c3%bdrsla%20_15.01.2021.X.pdf.

⁵³ James Gordon Rice. 2007. Ph.D. dissertation. *The Charity Complex: An Ethnography of a Material Aid Agency in Reykjavík, Iceland*. St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Department of Anthropology and Archaeology.

6 Access to transportation and the public spaces

Article 9 – Accessibility

6.1 Emergency measures

The 112-emergency line will arrange to transport people sick or in isolation.⁵⁴ According to information collected by a team member, a call to the information hotline about home testing (1770) revealed that people who cannot drive are offered transportation through 112, the emergency hotline. If they are unable to leave the home, a doctor will be provided at their home. An app for Deaf people was also developed for 112 in collaboration with the Association for Deaf People. In a report from the Civil Protection and Emergency Management in March 2020, a manager with the public transit system reported that the shuttle-services for disabled people (*akstursþjónusta fyrir fatlað fólk*) were undergoing additional cleaning procedures due to COVID but there is no indication of a reduction of services.⁵⁵

6.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

We have been unable to find any evidence about a link between COVID-19 and disabled people in Iceland accessing transportation in the public realm. In a report from the Civil Protection and Emergency Management in March 2020, a manager with the public transit system reported that the shuttle-services for disabled people (*akstursþjónusta fyrir fatlað fólk*) were undergoing additional cleaning procedures due to COVID but there is no indication of a reduction of services.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Embætti landlæknis. *Leiðbeiningar fyrir almenning varðandi einangrun í heimahúsi*. 19.10.2020 (last updated 09.11.2020) <https://www.landlaeknir.is/um-embættid/greinar/grein/item43366/Leiðbeiningar-fyrir-almenning-varðandi-einangrun-i-heimahusi>.

⁵⁵ Ríkislögreglustjórinn – Almannavarnadeild (Civil Protection and Emergency Management). *Stöðuskýrsla almannavarna*. 16.03.2020 <https://www.almannavarnir.is/utgefid-efni/stoduskysrsla-koronaveira-covid-19-16032020/?wpdmdl=24740>.

⁵⁶ Ríkislögreglustjórinn – Almannavarnadeild (Civil Protection and Emergency Management). *Stöðuskýrsla almannavarna*. 16.03.2020 <https://www.almannavarnir.is/utgefid-efni/stoduskysrsla-koronaveira-covid-19-16032020/?wpdmdl=24740>.

7 Involuntary detention or treatment

[Article 14 – Liberty and security of person](#)

[Article 15 – Freedom of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment](#)

[Article 16 – Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse](#)

[Article 17 – Protecting the integrity of the person](#)

7.1 Emergency measures

We are unaware of any reduction in the procedural requirements and safeguards in these matters pertaining to disabled people linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.

7.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

We are unaware of any publicly available evidence that there is any increase or decrease in institutional living or compulsory detentions or restraints due to COVID-19 in Iceland. A member of our team reached out to an individual who sits on a committee concerned with some of these matters (Nefnd um undanpágu frá banni við beitingu nauðungar - Committee on Exemptions from the Prohibition of Coercion) who reported that their committee only dealt with one case over the course of 2020. However, this committee member fears that the bending of rules when it comes to involuntary detention may be common, but we have no documented evidence. A member of our team has also reached out to a specialist in this area, but as the time of writing we received no information.

8 Violence, exploitation or abuse

Article 16 – Freedom from violence, exploitation and abuse

8.1 Emergency measures

We are unaware of any emergency laws regarding violence or abuse that were implemented as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The National Police raised concerns about violence against disabled people and issues a report about this in August 2020,⁵⁷ but has no reference to COVID in particular. The police note a systematic weakness in the recording of disability status when police matters are recorded and urge more to be done in this area, but again these findings are not COVID specific. The Icelandic government has also raised concerns about violence and abuse against children during the pandemic, especially those in vulnerable positions. A specific Action team was formed in May 2020 as a collaboration of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and the National Police Commissioner, to establish and fund training, awareness raising and monitoring. The Action team is tasked to focus on the groups most vulnerable for violence during COVID-19, including children, people and in particular women with disabilities and immigrant women. The Action team has collaborated with disability organisations and other interest groups related to disability. The Action team has launched an emergency web portal connected to the 112 national emergency number. The web portal (112.is) offers easy access to report violence and information on support services. Efforts have been made to make this web portal accessible for disabled people. In October 2020 it announced that the work of the team would continue.⁵⁸

8.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

The National Police Commissioner announced in October 2020 that during the course of the pandemic there was a 14 % increase in reports of violence to the police.⁵⁹ We have no information about disability status in this regard. It is most likely that this information does not exist. In a 2020 report made by the National Police Commissioner about violence against disabled people⁶⁰ it was confirmed that disability status is not registered in the LÖKE (lögregluakerfi) system of the police, so data about disability status and reports about violence is not available in general, let alone during the period of the pandemic in specific.

⁵⁷ Ríkislögreglustjóri. 2020. *Ofbeldi gegn fötluðum á Íslandi*. <https://www.logreglan.is/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Ofbeldi-gegn-fotludum-2020.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Government of Iceland. 14.10.2020. *Aðgerðarteymi gegn ofbeldi skilar annarri áfangaskýrslunni* (Action team against violence submits second interim report). <https://www.stjornarradid.is/efst-a-baugi/frettir/stok-frett/2020/10/14/Aðgerðarteymi-gegn-ofbeldi-skilar-annarri-afangaskýrslunni/>. e

⁵⁹ RÚV. 15.10.2020. "Ofbeldi algengara á Íslandi í veirufaraldrinum" (Violence more common in Iceland during the pandemic). <https://www.ruv.is/frett/2020/10/15/ofbeldi-algengara-a-islandi-i-veirufaraldrinum>.

⁶⁰ Ríkislögreglustjóri. 2020. *Ofbeldi gegn fötluðum á Íslandi*. <https://www.logreglan.is/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Ofbeldi-gegn-fotludum-2020.pdf>.

9 Independent living

Article 19 – Living independently and being included in the community

9.1 Emergency measures

The Civil Protection and Emergency Management reported on 4 April 2020, that additional staffing was required in order to assist disabled people living at home.⁶¹ Later the same month, the welfare service response team (*Bakvarðasveit velferðarþjónustu*) reported that 10 municipalities in Iceland requested support for assisting disabled people living at home as well as in nursing homes due to outbreaks that had occurred in various places around the country.⁶²

A number of financial institutions in Iceland have discouraged face-to-face banking during the pandemic and have promoted online banking, including tutorials and live online assistance.⁶³ Some grocery chains offer home delivery, though this may be limited to the capital area and the difficulties in getting groceries during the pandemic has been noted in some municipalities.⁶⁴

9.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

We are unaware of an evidence-based research about the impact of COVID-19 on access to support for independent living. A member of our team has contacted the city of Reykjavík as well as specialists in this area, but as of the time of writing we received no information. However, one of the main ways in which to access COVID related information, alerts and supports is through smartphones and the internet. While the use of smartphones and internet usage throughout Icelandic society is high, these measures are not always accessible in terms of the required technology, let alone the formats in which this information is provided. By way of example, the Icelandic government announced that anyone with a legal address in Iceland and born before 2002 is eligible for a travel stipend⁶⁵ (ISK 5 000) intended to, among other things, support the struggling Icelandic tourist industry as the result of the pandemic. Access to this depended upon both an electronic identity number input through a website and an app used on an iPhone or Android phone.

⁶¹ Ríkislögreglustjórnin – Almannavarnadeild (Civil Protection and Emergency Management). *Stöðuskýrsla almannavarna*. 04.04.2020. Unpublished Report.

⁶² Ríkislögreglustjórnin – Almannavarnadeild (Civil Protection and Emergency Management). *Stöðuskýrsla almannavarna*. 08.04.2020. <https://www.almannavarnir.is/utgefid-efni/stoduskysrsla-koronaveira-covid-19-08042020/?wpdmdl=24923>.

⁶³ Arion banki. Fjarþjónusta í ljósi aðstæðna. <https://www.arionbanki.is/einstaklingar/fleira/tokumst-a-vid-thetta-saman/>.

⁶⁴ Ríkislögreglustjórnin – Almannavarnadeild (Civil Protection and Emergency Management). *Stöðuskýrsla almannavarna*. 01.04.2020. <https://www.almannavarnir.is/utgefid-efni/stoduskysrsla-koronaveira-covid-19-01042020/?wpdmdl=24888>.

⁶⁵ Government of Iceland. *Ferðagjöf til einstaklinga*. <https://island.is/ferdagjof>.

10 Access to habilitation and rehabilitation

[Article 26 – Habilitation and rehabilitation](#)

10.1 Emergency measures

We are unaware of any evidence about the existence of emergency measures concerning access by people with disabilities to habilitation and rehabilitation support.

10.2 Impact of COVID-19 and/or emergency measures adopted

While we have no information about specific services, many services in general, including rehabilitation and those that serve disabled people have been periodically closed or restricted accessed during the pandemic.

11 Access to justice

Article 13 - Access to justice

11.1 Emergency measures

In April 2020 a law was implemented which allowed for the electronic processing of court cases.⁶⁶ However, this law contained no explicit disability dimension nor are we aware of such. As mentioned in section 8.1 above, a specific Action team was formed in May 2020 as a collaboration of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and the National Police Commissioner, to establish and fund training, awareness raising and monitoring. The Action team is tasked to focus on the groups most vulnerable to violence during COVID-19, including children, people and in particular women with disabilities and immigrant women. The Action team has collaborated with disability organisations and other interest groups related to disability. The Action team has launched an emergency web portal connected to the 112 national emergency number. The web portal (112.is) offers easy access to report violence and information on support services. Efforts have been made to make this web portal accessible for disabled people. In October 2020, it announced that the work of the team would continue.⁶⁷

11.2 Impact of COVID-19 crisis

We have no information on any evidence about the impact of COVID-19 and access to justice concerning people with disabilities.

⁶⁶ *Lög um breytingu á ýmsum lögum til að heimila framlengingu fresta og rafræna meðferð mála hjá sýslumönnum og dómstólum o.fl. nr. 32/2020.*

<https://www.stjornartidindi.is/Advert.aspx?RecordID=68d4a28d-2550-4aa2-9bbf-61cd63fed53d>.

⁶⁷ Government of Iceland. 14.10.2020. *Aðgerðarteymi gegn ofbeldi skilar annarri áfangaskýrslunni* (Action team against violence submits second interim report). <https://www.stjornarradid.is/efst-a-baugi/frettir/stok-frett/2020/10/14/Adgerdarteymi-gegn-ofbeldi-skilar-annarri-afangaskyrslunni/>.

12 Access to education

[Article 24 – Education](#)

12.1 Emergency measures

We are unaware of any emergency measures that were implemented in Iceland pertaining to education that have an explicit disability dimension. Fjölmennt, an adult education centre that serves the disabled population, published some guidelines explaining the pandemic and the measures that students can take to protect themselves in an easy-to-read format.⁶⁸

12.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

Our knowledge pertaining to the impact of COVID-19 on education matters pertaining to disabled people are mainly anecdotal and based on a collection of media reports over the duration of 2020. A number of reports concerned an outbreak at Klettaskóli, a special school for disabled pupils, in March 2020, which was subsequently closed for a length of time.⁶⁹ According to a mother of a disabled boy in Klettaskóli, the school was closed down for 2 weeks and all day-time services were also closed. The boy was in quarantine and could not receive a number of services. Online teaching was not made available.⁷⁰ Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir, the president of the National Association on Intellectual Disabilities, made a plea for schools to open for disabled students in August 2020, citing in particular that distance learning is unsuitable for many, including students with developmental disabilities and related disabilities.⁷¹ We are also aware of varied accounts of parents who suffered a loss of income due to having to remain home as the result of school closings and a lack of services for their disabled children, including older children. Post-secondary education in Iceland has remained for the most part online since the early spring 2020 and remains so as of the time of writing. We have no information on the extent to which this negatively affects disabled students in particular, though we know of some examples where online learning options are challenging for students with visual impairments.

⁶⁸ Fjölmennt. *Upplýsingar um Covid 19 á auðskildu máli með myndum.* <https://www.fjolmennt.is/static/extras/images/covid-baeklingur283.pdf>.

⁶⁹ Klettaskóli. 17.03.2020. “Ekkert skólahald um óákveðinn tíma.” <https://klettaskoli.is/2020/03/17/ekkert-skolahald-um-oakvedinn-tima/>.

⁷⁰ RÚV. 14.05.2020. “Heldur samfélagið að við séum ódrepanði?” <https://www.ruv.is/frett/2020/05/14/heldur-samfelagid-ad-vid-seum-odrepandi/>.

⁷¹ Kjarninn. 20.08.2020. “Nei, ekki aftur!” <https://kjarninn.is/skodun/2020-08-20-nei-ekki-aftur/>.

13 Working and employment

[Article 27 – Work and employment](#)

13.1 Emergency measures

We are unaware of any emergency measures that were implemented in the area of work and employment that have an explicit disability dimension. A member of our team conferred with an academic who works in the area of disability and employment in Iceland, and he was also unaware of any such measures.

13.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

We are unaware of any official or scholarly evidence about the impacts of COVID-19 on work and employment for people with disabilities in Iceland. Vinnumálastofnun, the Icelandic Directorate of Labour collects limited information about disability and nothing that we could see related to COVID and job losses for disabled people. The AMS program (supported employment) managers across the country were asked if they thought many people were terminated over the duration of the pandemic and reported that there was a slight increase. Most were working in tourism and 10 terminations registered at ISAVIA (the national airport and air navigation service provider of Iceland). The terminations during the year have been due to the recession linked to COVID. In the autumn 2020, consultants and managers of the Icelandic Directorate of Labour were optimistic that companies seem to be willing to hire, but this optimism has decreased due to economic recession. There are some reports of people wanting to quit their positions in the supported employment programme due to COVID with the Directorate of Labour working on providing a special “leave from employment” (leyfi frá störfum) so they can return when the situation improves.⁷²

⁷² Icelandic Directorate of Labour. *VMST punktar um stöðuna*. Unpublished internal memo. 2020.

14 Good practices and recommendations

14.1 Examples of good practice

- Close and active co-operation and flow of information between the welfare departments of municipalities in the capital region and disabled people's organisations after the onset of the pandemic. However, it must be noted that the situation within the capital region is not necessarily the case in other municipalities (See Sections 2.2, 4.4, 8.1 and 11.1 for further details).
- Priority was given to people with disabilities in terms of protection against COVID-19, especially the most vulnerable people living in municipal housing. This group, and the people who work with them, were also given priority in vaccination. People with disabilities living in residential homes and care facilities were vaccinated with the first shipments to arrive in the country in December of 2020 and people working in these services are prioritised at the same level as health care workers (See Sections 4.1, 4.3).
- Flexible and accessible testing for disabled people with the possibility of being tested at home, both those living in group homes as well as independent homes. Testing sites have also been made accessible (See Section 4.4).

14.2 Recommendations

- The process of writing Section 8 of this report (Violence, exploitation or abuse) highlighted how poorly violence is registered within the police in reference to disability and the lack of initiatives to educate people within the justice system about violence against disabled people. There is a notable lack of support for disabled women who experience violence and want to report it, and limited access to appropriate victim support services. As such, information about violence against disabled people in Iceland is very difficult to acquire, and rates about such violence in the specific context of COVID impossible to assess.
- COVID measures regarding people with disabilities to prioritise the group for protection and vaccination and should be formalised and written into the national disaster and recovery plans. Such efforts should include disabled people living in their own homes as well as those living in supported living environments. We recommend that people with disabilities be more closely involved in disaster and emergency planning and recovery. The heavy reliance on the internet and smartphones in the delivery of emergency information and notifications, as seen with the COVID pandemic in Iceland, is understandable but also needs to take into consideration those without access to this technology or find its use difficult.
- More support, particularly economic but other forms as well, is needed for families with children and young people with disabilities living at home.

14.3 Other relevant evidence

The authors have nothing further to report.

Annex

- Distributing information about COVID on easy-to-read format by RÚV (National Broadcaster) was promoted by Landsamtökin Þroskahjálp (National Association of Intellectual Disabilities) who reminded them of their obligations mentioned by the UN CRPD.
- <https://www.throskahjalp.is/is/samtokin/frettir/ruv-birtir-nu-frettir-a-audlesnu-mali>.
- https://www.ruv.is/audskilid?fbclid=IwAR35h8-wxMDT1E_COR7RgOByLqDpEeYshdqvFpq7xdINx1nd8jgKmose0ng.

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