



# **COVID-19 and people with disabilities**

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

Greece

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## Table of contents

1	Executive summary .....	5
2	Disability-inclusive disaster and recovery planning .....	7
	2.1 Commitments to disability in disaster management and recovery strategies .....	7
	2.2 Involvement of people with disabilities in disaster management and recovery strategies .....	7
	2.3 Disability impact assessments and research to inform disaster management and recovery planning.....	8
	2.4 Use of disaster management and recovery planning funds .....	8
3	Mortality connected to COVID-19 among people with disabilities .....	9
	3.1 Are official statistics available concerning the overall mortality rate of people with disabilities? .....	9
	3.2 Are official statistics available concerning the mortality rate of people with disabilities who have died from complications connected to COVID-19? ..	9
4	Access to health.....	11
	4.1 Emergency measures.....	11
	4.2 Access to hospital treatment for COVID-19 .....	12
	4.3 Treatment for COVID-19 in congregate settings.....	12
	4.4 Public health promotion and testing during the pandemic .....	12
	4.5 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on access to health services for general or pre-existing physical or mental health conditions .....	12
	4.6 Vaccination programmes .....	13
5	Income and access to food and essential items.....	15
	5.1 Emergency measures.....	15
	5.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis .....	15
6	Access to transportation and the public spaces .....	16
	6.1 Emergency measures.....	16
	6.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis .....	16
7	Involuntary detention or treatment.....	17
	7.1 Emergency measures.....	17
	7.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis .....	17
8	Violence, exploitation or abuse .....	18
	8.1 Emergency measures.....	18
	8.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis .....	18
9	Independent living .....	19
	9.1 Emergency measures.....	19
	9.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis .....	19
10	Access to habilitation and rehabilitation .....	21
	10.1 Emergency measures.....	21
	10.2 Impact of COVID-19 and/or emergency measures adopted .....	21
11	Access to justice .....	22
	11.1 Emergency measures .....	22
	11.2 Impact of COVID-19 crisis .....	22
12	Access to education .....	23
	12.1 Emergency measures .....	23
	12.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis.....	24
13	Working and employment .....	25
	13.1 Emergency measures .....	25
	13.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis.....	25

14	Good practices and recommendations.....	27
14.1	Examples of good practice .....	27
14.2	Recommendations .....	27
14.3	Other relevant evidence.....	28

## 1 Executive summary

### Disability inclusivity of disaster and recovery planning

The National Disability Action Plan (2020) is the single policy instrument to date that foresees disability inclusivity in civil protection in emergency situations. A series of actions to be implemented by the Ministry of Defence, General Secretariat of Civil Protection (2021-2022) aim to enhance access of people with disabilities to emergency services, including update of natural disaster management and recovery strategies to address disability, which have so far been lacking.

### Impact of the virus on mortality among people with disabilities

Proxy to disability used for the purposes of this report is older people (over 65), as official data related to COVID-19 does not disaggregate by disability or health condition/ activity limitation. 4,282 people aged 65 and over died from complications connected to COVID-19 (01 January 2020- 5 January 2021) representing 84.8 % of all deaths connected to COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> A total of 23,098 individuals aged 65+ were diagnosed with COVID-19 in the same period. A higher number of deaths was observed overall in the first 49 weeks of 2020 in comparison to 2019 in age groups over 90 (+1,650 deaths), 85-90 (+895) and 65-69 (+582).<sup>2</sup>

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

It must be noted that there is little, if any, evidence available on a national level with regard to the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups, and disabled people in particular. It is understood that this generally owes to low research capacity and/or monitoring intensity with respect to disability issues in the country as a whole, and thus limited readiness to review and produce evidence (in less than a year) on COVID-19 impact across the themes addressed in this report. No relevant analysis has been identified either in Country Reports produced for the Fundamental Rights Agency Monitoring Bulletins *Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – Fundamental Rights implications – with a focus on social rights* (April to November 2020).

Some indicative data about the potentially disproportionate negative impact of COVID-19 on disabled people is discussed in section 8.2 (Violence and abuse), 13.2 (Employment) as well as in relation to increased risks for disabled people living in institutions (section 14.2 Recommendations).

### Examples of good practice

Extended service provision, both in terms of services and targeted groups, under municipal Home Help schemes (please see section 9.1) is acknowledged as an important and timely step in supporting disabled people and other vulnerable groups in the community by the Greek Ombudsman in a relevant communication for

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<sup>1</sup> National Health Organization (5 January 2020) COVID-19 Daily Monitoring Report <https://eody.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/covid-gr-daily-report-20210105.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> National Statistical Service Deaths 2020 <https://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SPO09/2020>.

strengthening further protection measures for vulnerable groups. No other discussion and/or evidence of good practice, for instance in terms of effectiveness, was identified.

### **Recommendations and opportunities for change**

No relevant recommendations have been identified concerning recovery planning and people with disabilities. Rather, recommendations by equality bodies and disability organisations have focused on the immediate situation and protection of the rights of people with disabilities. In particular, the increased risks of people with disabilities residing in institutions, including mental health inpatients, are discussed based on recommendations by the Greek Ombudsman.

## 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

The National Disability Action Plan (2020)<sup>3</sup> seems to be the first policy instrument to foresee disability inclusivity in civil protection in emergency situations. In particular, a series of actions planned by the Ministry of Defence, General Secretariat of Civil Protection (2021-2022), aim to enhance access of people with disabilities to emergency services, including update of natural disaster management and recovery strategies which “have to date lacked specific regulations for people with disabilities”. The Action Plan foresees further: the modification of the Fire Safety Regulations (2018) according to Universal Design principles, accessibility interventions in public buildings, digital mapping of accessible shelters and evacuation routes in urban centres, accessible information sharing and announcement of emergencies, as well as guarantee of temporary shelter of for all people with disabilities affected by disaster.

With regard to COVID-19, response measures since the start of the pandemic,<sup>4</sup> have explicitly mentioned the general obligation of implementing authorities to make any necessary provisions to support disabled people. Finally, the government assigned a Committee for the Protection of Vulnerable Groups,<sup>5</sup> more specifically those living in residential elderly care units as well as other institutions, including those accommodating younger people with disabilities, tasked with monitoring epidemiological data, coordinating actors involved in implementing prevention and response measures, as well as inspections, and making recommendations for additional measures or modification of existing ones.

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

There is evidence of the involvement of persons with disabilities and their organisations in disaster planning and in recovery planning (generally and in relation to COVID-19 in particular) and process.

The National Disability Action Plan (2020), which foresees the inclusion of disability in civil protection planning (please see Section 2.1) has been the result of a continuous collaboration with the National Co-federation of Disabled People (NCDP), the official state partner in relation to disability equality and inclusion. This continuous engagement and endorsement of proposed actions is acknowledged in the preface by the Minister of State, National Focal Point for the Convention of the Rights of Persons

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<sup>3</sup> National Disability Action Plan [Target 17 page 37](#).

<sup>4</sup> Presidential Act 13.4.2020 Article 73 (FEK A 84/April 2020) in Greek Ombudsman (2020) Social Protection Measures for responding to consequences of Covid 19 pandemic (Policy Review) <https://www.synigoros.gr/resources/toolip/doc/2020/04/21/odigos-kp-ektakta-metra-COVID-19.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Investment and Growth October 2020 Committee for the Protection of Residents in Elderly Care units and other institutional settings <https://covid19.gov.gr/systasi-epitropon-mesko-po-tin-prostasia-apo-ton-koronoio-sars-cov-2-ton-filoxenoumenon-se-monades-frontidas-ilikioumenon-m-f-i-kai-loipes-kleistes-domes-filoxenias-efpathon-omadon-tou-plithysmou/>.

with Disabilities (UN CRPD), as much as by NCDP representatives,<sup>6</sup> who have consistently contributed with analytical recommendations and active participation in the technical committee conferences.

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

No evidence of the use of impact assessment or the commissioning of research concerning the situation of persons with disabilities to inform disaster and recovery planning has been identified. Sources reviewed: National Co-federation of Disabled People/ Disability Observatory, Greek Ombudsman, General Secretariat of Civil Protection.

### **2.4 Use of disaster management and recovery planning funds**

No explicit reference to disability-related purposes in relevant disaster management and recovery planning funding allocations was identified. It is interesting to note that Greece was recently granted EUR 595 million by the European Investment Bank, the “largest ever support for civil protection in Europe, (which) will provide mobile field hospitals, firefighting and medical evacuation aircraft, helicopters, drones and rescue equipment key to reduce loss of lives following natural disasters like fires, earthquakes and floods”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> National Co-federation of Disabled People Press Release 25 November 2020 Parliamentary Discussion about the National Disability Action Plan <https://www.esamea.gr/pressoffice/press-releases/5063-syzitisi-sti-boyli-gia-to-ethniko-sxedio-drasis-gia-ta-dikaiomata-ton-atomon-me-anapiria>.

<sup>7</sup> European Investment Bank Press Release 28 January 2021 [Greece: EIB backs transformation of civil protection and pandemic preparedness](#).

### 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?

Yes,<sup>8</sup> official statistics report the number of deaths from any cause (annually), rather than mortality rate.

Furthermore, there is no disaggregation by disability or activity limitation. The proxy used for this report is older people (over 65).<sup>9</sup> Number of deaths (65 and over):

2020 (first 49 weeks): 106 118

2019 (52 weeks): 101 988

2018 (52 weeks): 104 209

Higher mortality is observed in the first 49 weeks of 2020 in comparison to 2019 (in absolute terms) with the most affected age groups being those over 90 (+1 650 deaths), 85-90 (+895) and 65-69 (+582).<sup>10</sup> 2018 figures are not directly comparable (52 weeks), but it may be worth mentioning that the number of deaths in 2018 was also lower compared to 2020 for the age group 65-69 (-308) and those over 85 (-3 247).<sup>11</sup>

Compared to 2019, higher death rates (total deaths) were observed during the second wave of the pandemic, more specifically week 47 (16/11 – 22/11/2020) +42.1 %, week 48 (23/11 – 29/11/2020) + 37.6 %, and week 49 (30/11 – 6/12/2020) +32.6 %.<sup>12</sup>

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

Yes,<sup>13</sup> official published statistics do not provide disaggregation by disability or activity limitation, nor by underlying health conditions. The proxy used for this report is older people (65+).

4 282 people aged 65 and over died from complications connected to COVID-19 (1 January 2020- 5 January 2021).<sup>14</sup> A total of 23 098 individuals aged 65+ tested positive with COVID-19 in the same period.

<sup>8</sup> National Statistical Service Deaths 2020 <https://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SPO09/2020>.

<sup>9</sup> National Statistical Service Deaths 2020 <https://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SPO09/2020>.

<sup>10</sup> National Statistical Service Deaths 2020 <https://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SPO09/2020>.

<sup>11</sup> National Statistical Service Deaths 2018 <https://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SPO09/2018>.

<sup>12</sup> National Statistical Service Deaths 2020 <https://www.statistics.gr/el/statistics/-/publication/SPO09/2020>.

<sup>13</sup> National Health Organization (5 January 2020) COVID-19 Daily Monitoring Report <https://eody.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/covid-gr-daily-report-20210105.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> National Health Organization (5 January 2020) COVID-19 Daily Monitoring Report <https://eody.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/covid-gr-daily-report-20210105.pdf>.

People aged 65 and over represent 84.8 % of all deaths from complications connected to COVID-19 (1 January 2020-5 January 2021).<sup>15</sup> The number of people with disabilities under 65 who died due to COVID-19 complications is unknown.

No relevant data on the place of residence or the place of death of people with disabilities linked to COVID-19, are published in official statistics.

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<sup>15</sup> National Health Organization (5 January 2020) COVID-19 Daily Monitoring Report <https://eody.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/covid-gr-daily-report-20210105.pdf>.

## 4 Access to health

### [Article 25 – Health](#)

#### 4.1 Emergency measures

Measures for facilitating access to primary healthcare (in response to the COVID-19 pandemic) which are particularly relevant for disabled people, though not prioritised as such, include:<sup>16</sup>

- a. the creation of Mobile Health Teams (K.OM.Y) for the specific purpose of addressing the risk of spread of COVID-19, providing nursing care services and testing at home;
- b. designated COVID-19 health centres (24/7) to address the needs of patients with respiratory symptoms who do not need hospitalisation (established in five urban centres across the country);
- c. respectively, Health Centres are reserved for addressing the needs of people with chronic illness, and/or other urgent cases, as well as the population in the region who self-isolate during the pandemic;
- d. use of electronic prescriptions and doctor certificates for accessing medical supplies and medicine, as well as home delivery of the latter.

Furthermore, people living in residential care units were prioritized for COVID-19 vaccination (focusing firstly on the elderly population), along with frontline health professionals, while those over 65 as well as people with underlying health conditions at high risk of COVID-19 (regardless of age), were prioritized for the second phase of vaccinations (Please see also section 4.6 for more information).<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that there was recently a request by the National Co-Federation of Disabled People to prioritise people with disabilities who cannot visit COVID-19 vaccination premises, in vaccination appointments to be conducted at home.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that while prohibition of visitors for hospitalised patients who belong to vulnerable groups has applied during the pandemic, an escort is allowed where necessary, with permission granted on a case-by-case basis and provided they do not show any symptoms of respiratory infection.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Greek Ombudsman (2020) Social Protection Measures for responding to consequences of Covid 19 pandemic (Legislation Review)

<https://www.synigoros.gr/resources/toolip/doc/2020/04/21/odigos-kp-ektakta-metra-COVID-19.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> National Operational Vaccination plan

[https://emvolio.gov.gr/sites/default/files/ethniko\\_epiheirisiako\\_shedio\\_emvoliasmon\\_kata\\_toy\\_COVID-19\\_v6.1\\_1.pdf?t=1](https://emvolio.gov.gr/sites/default/files/ethniko_epiheirisiako_shedio_emvoliasmon_kata_toy_COVID-19_v6.1_1.pdf?t=1).

<sup>18</sup> NCDP 15 January 2021 [Request to Ministry of Health for prioritizing people with disabilities and chronic illness in home-based COVID-19 vaccination procedures](#).

<sup>19</sup> National Public Health Organization (EODY) 28.8.2020 Protective measures for hospitalised patients who belong to vulnerable groups <https://eody.gov.gr/metra-gia-tin-profylaxi-nosileyomenon-asthenon-poy-anikoyn-se-eypatheis-omades/>.

## 4.2 Access to hospital treatment for COVID-19

Official data from 5 January 2021.<sup>20</sup> Data on the number of people who, because of COVID-19 symptoms, have been hospitalised and admitted to intensive care units, is not disaggregated by disability. The proxy used here is older people (65+).

Please note these data reflect the current situation (cumulative figures on the number of hospitalised patients are not publicly available).

Total number: 247 people aged 65 or over; 166 male, 81 female - 61 % of total hospitalisations and admissions to intensive care for COVID-19.

## 4.3 Treatment for COVID-19 in congregate settings

It has not been possible to identify relevant evidence on the number of people with disabilities who were treated for COVID-19 inside care/nursing homes and other congregate settings and not admitted to hospital. Official data and/or monitoring reports related to COVID-19 typically published by the National Health Organization do not include that kind of information, while administrative data that may be gathered for the purposes of monitoring the situation in residential care units (for instance by the designated Committee) is not publicly available.

## 4.4 Public health promotion and testing during the pandemic

The following measures have been taken to ensure that announcements and guidelines concerning public health announcements and measures, and devices for home-testing for COVID, are accessible and reach people with disabilities.

The website of the [National Health Organisation](#) where official guidelines concerning COVID-19 are published is considered to meet basic web accessibility requirements as indicated. The National Educational Policy Institute has furthermore published official information in various accessible formats, including sign language and subtitling, enlarged font, braille, audio and easy to read<sup>21</sup> addressed to pupils, parents and educational staff.

There is furthermore at least one news release on public television on a daily basis that is available in sign language, according to relevant national legislation. It is acknowledged nevertheless that additional measures must be taken to enhance the accessibility of information in the context of emergencies (please see also Section 2.1), including the adoption of the EU Directive 2018/1808 (Audio-visual Media) for comprehensive access to broadcast information.

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

It has not been possible to identify relevant evidence about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on access to health services related to pre-existing physical or mental health

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<sup>20</sup> National Health Organization (5 January 2020) COVID-19 Daily Monitoring Report <https://eody.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/covid-gr-daily-report-20210105.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs Educational Policy Institute- Accessible Information for COVID-19 <http://prosvasimo.iep.edu.gr/el/de-fovomaste-prostateuomaste-aspida-mas-h-gnws>.

conditions or general health conditions, including access to treatments and medication. It is understood that research about the impact of COVID-19 is in its early stage on a national level. That is perhaps even more the case for projects looking into the impact for people with disabilities, such as <https://www.covinform.eu/>, where the Centre for Security Studies (KEMEA) within the Hellenic Ministry of Citizen Protection participates.

It is also indicative that Country reports produced for the Fundamental Rights Agency Monitoring Bulletins *Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – Fundamental Rights implications – with a focus on social rights* (April to November 2020) contain only descriptive information about measures enacted in response to COVID-19 in Greece. Equally, it has not been possible to identify relevant analysis by the Greek Ombudsman, a key body involved in monitoring disability equality in the country.

#### 4.6 Vaccination programmes

As noted above, people living in residential care units were prioritized for COVID-19 vaccination, along with frontline health professionals, according to initial planning,<sup>22</sup> with vaccinations having been completed for the former group by February 2021.<sup>23</sup> The updated plan<sup>24</sup> foresaw additionally the prioritization (first group) of staff and pupils (16+) in special education and centres for recreation of children with disabilities.

However, it must be noted that in practice, those aged 85+ and 80-84 (the second and third groups in line) were prioritized directly after frontline health professionals and people residing in institutions, while vaccinations are underway for those aged 75-79 (the fourth group) and 60-64 (the seventh group).<sup>25</sup> Indeed, educational staff and pupils in special education as well as day care centres for children and youth with disabilities are expected to start receiving vaccinations from the beginning of March 2021. As the President of the National Committee for COVID-19 vaccinations explained, “when the availability of vaccinations is limited, age constitutes the determining factor for prioritization”.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, persons with underlying “high risk” conditions (regardless of age) are the fifth group in line, prioritised along with those aged 70-74. This category includes:

- Persons who have had or are in a waiting list for organ transplant
- Persons with kidney failure
- Persons with cancer receiving treatment

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<sup>22</sup> National Operational Vaccination plan [https://emvolio.gov.gr/sites/default/files/ethniko\\_epiheirisiako\\_shedio\\_emvoliasmon\\_kata\\_toy\\_COV\\_ID-19\\_v6.1\\_1.pdf?t=1](https://emvolio.gov.gr/sites/default/files/ethniko_epiheirisiako_shedio_emvoliasmon_kata_toy_COV_ID-19_v6.1_1.pdf?t=1).

<sup>23</sup> National Co-federation of Disabled People Press Release 18 February 2021 Hesitant steps for the vaccination of persons with disabilities and chronic illnesses <https://www.esamea.gr/pressoffice/press-releases/5161-deila-bimata-gia-ton-emboliasmo-ton-atomon-me-anapiria-kai-xronies-pathiseis-apo-tin-politeia>.

<sup>24</sup> Greek Government Prioritization for COVID-19 Vaccination 19 February 2021 <https://emvolio.gov.gr/proteraiopoiisi-emvoliasmoy-kata-tis-COVID-19>.

<sup>25</sup> Daily update provided by <https://emvolio.gov.gr/>.

<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Health Press Release 15 February 2021 Information on COVID-19 National Vaccination Action Plan <https://www.moh.gov.gr/articles/ministry/grafeio-tytoy/press-releases/8449-enhmerwsh-ytoyrgieiy-ygeias-apo-thn-proedro-ethnikhs-epitrophs-emboliasmwn-ka-maria-theodwridoy-kai-ton-geniko-grammatea-prwtobathmias-frontidas-ygeias-ko-mario-themistokleoy>.

- Severe respiratory disorders
- Severe liver disease
- Severely affected immune system
- Down Syndrome
- Other severe conditions with specific clinical criteria

Finally, people aged 18-59 with other health conditions that result in “increased risk” are the seventh group in line, prioritised along with those aged 60-64, although the latter are currently receiving the AstraZeneca vaccine.<sup>27</sup> Those health conditions include:

- Chronic heart disease
- Diabetes
- Chronic respiratory disease
- Chronic neurological disorders
- Severe mental health illness
- Parents/ guardians of children (<16) with chronic illnesses
- Severe disability (not related to categories mentioned above)
- Categories such as cancer, kidney disease, liver disease and low immune response not categorized as high risk

With regard to the accessibility of vaccination centres, a local association of blind people in the municipality of Magnesia (Central Greece) raised the issue of transportation to the available vaccination centres for blind people but also people with disabilities in general, as available appointments are in health centres outside and indeed quite far from the city centre.<sup>28</sup> It may be important to restate here that the National Co-Federation of Disabled People has requested that people with disabilities who cannot visit COVID-19 vaccination premises are prioritized in vaccination appointments to be conducted at home.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.moh.gov.gr/articles/ministry/grafeio-typoy/press-releases/8422-th-xorhghsh-toy-emboloy-ths-astrazeneca-stoys-polites-hlikias-ews-kai-64-etwn-apofasise-omofwna-h-ethnikh-epitroph-emboliasmwn>.

<sup>28</sup> Magnesia News 19 February 2020 Press article Meeting of PM with Blind People’s Association of Magnesia <https://magnesianews.gr/magnisia/synantisi-al-meikopoyloy-me-to-somateio-amea-orasis-n-magnisias-magnites-tyfloi.html>.

<sup>29</sup> NCDP 15 January 2021 [Request to Ministry of Health for prioritizing people with disabilities and chronic illness in home-based COVID-19 vaccination procedures.](#)

## 5 Income and access to food and essential items

### [Article 28 – Adequate standard of living and social protection](#)

#### 5.1 Emergency measures

Overall, emergency measures have focused on minimizing disruptions in accessing existing disability provisions (rather than adding to those), particularly during/since the first lockdown (March-April 2020).<sup>30</sup> Indicatively:

- a. It has been possible to submit an online application to access disability welfare benefits, while information is also provided by email or by telephone. The website of the relevant authority <https://opeka.gr/> seems to fulfil basic accessibility criteria for visual impairments.
- b. An extension was granted to disability pensions and welfare benefits for which approval for renewal was pending at the time (first lockdown March- April 2020 and up until end of June 2020 when public service provision was severely disrupted). Public services have continued to operate with cautionary measures.

There was finally a one-time increase of the minimum guaranteed income (up to EUR 300) for applications approved up until 30 March 2020 (households with at least one minor).

Please see further section 9.1 for emergency measures taken to strengthen community-based support schemes (home help) to enhance access to food and essential items for elderly and people with disabilities in the community.

#### 5.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

It has not been possible to identify relevant evidence about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on income and poverty and on access to food for people with disabilities, as noted in other sections assessing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis across themes.

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<sup>30</sup> Greek Ombudsman (2020) Social Protection Measures for responding to consequences of Covid 19 pandemic (Legislation Review)  
<https://www.synigoros.gr/resources/toolip/doc/2020/04/21/odigos-kp-ektakta-metra-COVID-19.pdf>.

## **6 Access to transportation and the public spaces**

### [Article 9 – Accessibility](#)

#### **6.1 Emergency measures**

Measures imposing social distancing and restricted movement are applicable to the population as a whole. These have mainly included: mandatory use of face masks indoors and outdoors, keeping a 1.5 m distance from others, curfew 9 pm – 5 am during weekdays (6 pm – 5 am during weekends since February 2021 in high-risk areas), movement authorized only for specific purposes such as work, health reasons, basic items shopping, individual exercise and providing help to someone in need.<sup>31</sup> It has not been possible to identify relevant information, i.e., measures on restrictions of movements and/or related to transportation which have an explicit disability or older age dimension. Official information sources reviewed: [CoVid19.gov.gr](https://covid19.gov.gr) and [eody.gov.gr](https://eody.gov.gr).

#### **6.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis**

It has not been possible to identify relevant evidence about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on access to (and the accessibility of) transportation and the public realm for people with disabilities, as noted in other sections assessing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis across themes.

Please see Section 14.2 detailing the intervention of the Greek Ombudsman following reported cases where state COVID-19 operational guidelines for mental health support units translated to inpatients being “locked inside”. Following the successful intervention of the Ombudsman, COVID-19 operational guidelines of the Directorate of Mental Health have highlighted the need to ensure inpatients as much as outpatients of mental health support units access outdoor activities, on the same par with the general population.

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<sup>31</sup> Greek Government 10 February 2021 Mapping Health Safety and Protection Measures against COVID-19 <https://covid19.gov.gr/chartis-metron-ygeionomikis-asfaleias-kai-prostasias-apo-ti-loimoxi-COVID-19/>.

## 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

It is worth reporting a shortcoming in procedural requirements and safeguards implemented during the pandemic by the Social Security Body that directly placed people with mental health conditions at risk of being involuntarily hospitalised, which was brought to light, and corrected, following intervention by the Greek Ombudsman.<sup>32</sup>

In view of social distancing and general restricted movement regulations since the start of the pandemic, the Social Security body had announced that disability assessment, for accessing disability benefits and community-based support, would be conducted at home in all cases apart from those concerning mental health. That would in practice lead to fast-track (involuntary) hospitalisation. The Social Security Body quickly responded to the intervention of the Greek Ombudsman pointing out that this measure constitutes direct discrimination against people with mental health conditions and extended the possibility of being assessed at home to all cases.

Moreover, it must be noted that a universal ban to visitors in institutional care settings has applied since March 2020.<sup>33</sup> The only exception to this rule is in situations where a resident is in a dying process, where one person is allowed to visit. Please see the Greek Ombudsman's recommendations on that issue in section 14.

### 7.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

It has not been possible to identify relevant evidence of any increases or decreases in institutional living as well as in rates of compulsory detention, treatment or restraints, or of restrictions in access to family or friends for people living in institutional care, as noted in other sections assessing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis across themes.

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<sup>32</sup> Greek Ombudsman Press Release 1 December 2020 Disability Assessment at home equally for cases concerning mental health <https://www.synigoros.gr/resources/011220-dt-psyxika-astheneis-efka.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> National Health Organization 24 March 2020 Guidelines for Institutions for People with Chronic Illness and Residential Elderly Care units <https://eody.gov.gr/odigies-gia-idrymata-chronios-paschonton-kai-monades-filoxenias-ilikiomenon/>.

## 8 Violence, exploitation or abuse

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

#### 8.1 Emergency measures

No particular emergency policy measures have been taken to address violence, exploitation or abuse, with an explicit focus on disability or older age. In general, the only measure taken towards this direction has been the launch of a hotline for psychological support in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic,<sup>34</sup> including psychiatric counselling to people with mental health conditions, an initiative by the Ministry of Health and the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

#### 8.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

It has not been possible to identify relevant evidence about domestic violence,<sup>35</sup> institutional violence and disability hate crime experienced by people with disabilities since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, as noted in similar sections assessing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis across themes. There is some data reported by a state funded support hotline for reporting violence and domestic abuse,<sup>36</sup> indicating a sharp increase in received calls during the first general lockdown (although as such do not offer insight into whether people with disabilities are disproportionately affected).

More specifically, there were 1 070 calls reporting incidents of violence in April 2020 (a few weeks into the first general lockdown) in comparison to 325 in March 2020. It is further noted that incidents of domestic abuse recorded in April 2020 were four times higher than those reported in the preceding month. This is the latest data published by the General Secretariat for Family Policy and Gender Equality.

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<sup>34</sup> <https://eody.gov.gr/tilefoniki-grammi-psychokoinonikis-ypostirixis-10306-gia-ton-koronoio/>.

<sup>35</sup> For example: <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/un-supporting-%E2%80%98trapped%E2%80%99-domestic-violence-victims-during-COVID-19-pandemic>.

<sup>36</sup> General Secretariat of Family Policy and Gender Equality SOS 15900 Press Release 11 May 2020 [Significant increase in domestic violence incidents during lockdown](#).

## 9 Independent living

### [Article 19 – Living independently and being included in the community](#)

#### 9.1 Emergency measures

There are two main ways in which availability of support and access to community services for people with disabilities were strengthened during the pandemic. Firstly, there has been continuous operation of day care/ recreational centres for both children and adults with disabilities in the community, as opposed to day care/ recreational (child) centres addressed to the general population during the second lockdown (November 2020 - February 2021), noting that this was not the case during the first general lockdown in March-May 2020 when all support structures remained closed.<sup>37</sup> The measure included mandatory preventative measures, such as weekly testing (Rapid or PCR) for staff as well as beneficiaries attending the respective community-based care structures “to the extent that this is possible considering their impairment and provided it does not cause unnecessary distress”.

Secondly, the services provided by Home Help schemes on a municipal level were extended to address additional needs during the pandemic.<sup>38</sup> Home help services are generally provided to elderly people and people with physical impairments or complex needs, who have limited functionality in meeting personal needs. Priority is given to individuals who live alone, and/or are at risk of poverty. Typically, services include psychosocial counselling and support, medical and nursing care at home, practical support with daily chores, including escort to services, shopping basics and paying bills. During the pandemic, guidelines provided by the National Health Organization urged Home Help schemes to map individuals who may be in self-isolation or do not have support networks and/or cannot cater for their needs (as self-reported), as well as to provide:

- hotline to record requests for assistance;
- shopping for basic items;
- distribution of food, medicine, first aid and hygiene items from Municipal Social Groceries and Social Pharmacies;
- supporting access to prescriptions.

#### 9.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

It has not been possible to identify relevant evidence about the COVID-related impact on people with disabilities of access to support for independent living, as noted in other sections assessing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis across themes. It should be noted nevertheless that keeping community-based support structures and services, in particular day centres for children and adults with disabilities, open during the second wave of the pandemic is acknowledged as an important measure in maintaining access to support for independent living. In a recent (February 2021) press interview of Mr. Vardakastanis, President of the National Co-federation of Disabled People, he stated:

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<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Labour Circular November 2020 [https://kdap-kdapmea.blogspot.com/2020/11/blog-post\\_9.html](https://kdap-kdapmea.blogspot.com/2020/11/blog-post_9.html); extended up until 8 February 2021 [https://kdap-kdapmea.blogspot.com/2021/01/blog-post\\_29.html](https://kdap-kdapmea.blogspot.com/2021/01/blog-post_29.html).

<sup>38</sup> National Health Organisation 27 November 2020 <https://eody.gov.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/covid19-voithia-sto-spiti.pdf>.

“We saw how hard it was for some people with disabilities to maintain normalcy in daily life, such as people with intellectual disability, Down syndrome, autism and so on, during the first wave of the pandemic in spring 2020, when all structures closed due to the first lockdown. This is why we have supported the decision of the government during the second lockdown to keep all structures and support mechanisms for people with disabilities.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Macedonia Press 25 February 2021 “The pandemic poses significant challenges to people with disabilities” <https://www.makthes.gr/i-pandimia-thetei-simantikes-prokliseis-sta-atoma-me-anapiria-349943>.

## **10 Access to habilitation and rehabilitation**

### [Article 26 – Habilitation and rehabilitation](#)

#### **10.1 Emergency measures**

No relevant emergency measures on access by people with disabilities to habilitation and rehabilitation support and services were identified in official sources of information about COVID-19 related prevention and response measures ([CoVid19.gov.gr](https://www.covid19.gov.gr) and [eody.gov.gr](https://www.eody.gov.gr)).

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

It has not been possible to identify relevant evidence about changes in access to habilitation and rehabilitation support and services during lockdowns and periods of physical distancing, as noted in other sections assessing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis across themes.

## 11 Access to justice

### [Article 13 - Access to justice](#)

#### 11.1 Emergency measures

Emergency measures in the field of access to justice have concerned the postponement of judicial proceedings as a whole during the first lockdown (March - May 2020).<sup>40</sup> Services have continued since (in physical settings) with generic preventive measures applying (social distancing, avoiding congestion in public services and so on).<sup>41</sup>

#### 11.2 Impact of COVID-19 crisis

It has not been possible to identify relevant evidence about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on access to justice for people with disabilities, as noted in other sections assessing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis across themes.

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<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Justice Postponement of Judicial Proceedings <https://covid19.gov.gr/paratasi-anastolis-litourgias-dikastikon-ergasion/>.

<sup>41</sup> Ministry of Justice Preventative Measures in Courts <https://covid19.gov.gr/menoume-asfalis-proliptika-metra-se-ypothikofylakia-ke-dikastiria/>.

## 12 Access to education

### [Article 24 – Education](#)

#### 12.1 Emergency measures

Whereas during the first general lockdown (March - May 2020), school closures applied similarly for both special and mainstream educational units,<sup>42</sup> in the second one (November 2020 – February 2021) special educational units at primary and secondary levels have continued their operation throughout (in contrast with mainstream units).<sup>43</sup> General guidelines for the prevention of the spread of COVID-19 in educational settings apply, however it is worth noting that the use of face masks, which is mandatory for teaching staff, pupils and visitors across levels and units, is not required of pupils with developmental, intellectual, behavioural or mental impairment, nor of pupils with impairments which obstructs them from physically handling the mask.<sup>44</sup>

For pupils with disabilities and/or special educational needs attending mainstream schools, additional guidelines were issued for supporting remote school attendance.<sup>45</sup> The support available includes remote counselling sessions for parents and pupils by the regional Educational and Counselling Support Units' staff (K.E.S.Y), while both synchronous and asynchronous tools are suggested for remote learning. It is highlighted that all schoolbooks and manuals are transcribed into Braille code (printed and available by the Centre for Rehabilitation and Habilitation of Blind people – KEAT), are available in multiple size fonts for pupils with visual impairments, while digital teaching content accessible to pupils with visual, hearing, physical, intellectual and learning disabilities has been made available by the Institute of Educational Policy.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, specialized adult education and vocational training schemes for persons with disabilities, typically under the jurisdiction of the National Manpower Organization, Ministry of Labour, have maintained classes in person, even during specific periods when mainstream adult education structures had to temporarily switch to distance learning in high-risk areas.<sup>47</sup> Finally, it should be noted that in higher education institutions all teaching courses, as well as examinations, have taken place remotely

<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Health and Religious Affairs [Temporary Schools Closure](#) (21 March 2020) and [Reopening of Primary Education Units and Special Schools following their temporary closure 27 May 2020](#).

<sup>43</sup> Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs Operation of Schools and all kinds of educational structures as of 16 November 2020 (extended in a staged manner up until 8 February 2021) <https://covid19.gov.gr/leitourgia-scholeion-kai-pasis-fyseos-ekpaideftikon-domon-apo-tis-16-noemvriou-2020-eos-kai-tis-30-noemvriou-2020/>.

<sup>44</sup> Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs Operation of Educational Units School year 2020-2021 <https://covid19.gov.gr/mathenoume-asfalis-litourgia-ton-ekpedeftikon-monadon-kata-tin-enarxi-tou-scholikou-etous-2020-2021/>.

<sup>45</sup> Greece, Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, Circular on the Remote support for students with disabilities and / or special educational needs, No 12695/GD4/23-09-2020, Available in Greek at: <https://bit.ly/2JzTrox>.

<sup>46</sup> All accessible digital educational content produced by the Institute of Educational Policy is available at <http://prosvasimo.iep.edu.gr/el/>.

<sup>47</sup> Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 10 February 2021 Press Release <https://covid19.gov.gr/proliptiki-anastoli-eos-tis-15-fevrouariou-tis-dia-zosis-ekpaideftikis-leitourgias-ton-ekpaideftikon-domon-oaed/>.

practically since the first general lockdown in March 2020, although decisions for extending this mode of operation are taken in a staged manner.<sup>48</sup>

## **12.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis**

It has not been possible to identify relevant evidence about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on education for children and adults with disabilities, as noted in other sections assessing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis across themes.

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<sup>48</sup> Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (latest uploaded decision 18 January 2021) Operation of schools and all types of educational structures (under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education) <https://covid19.gov.gr/leitourgia-scholeion-kai-pasis-fysis-ekpaideftikon-domon-aei-kai-choron-latreias-gia-to-diastrima-apo-ti-deftera-18-ianouariou-2021-kai-ora-600-eos-kai-ti-deftera-24-ianouariou-2021-kai-ora-600/>.

## 13 Working and employment

### [Article 27 – Work and employment](#)

#### 13.1 Emergency measures

Emergency measures taken at the beginning of the pandemic (March 2020) only foresaw the possibility of special leave for public sector employees with specific health conditions, namely cancer, heart conditions, diabetes and severe lung disease.<sup>49</sup> The Greek Ombudsman at the time had pointed out that there lacked protection or other enabling measures for employees who belong to other vulnerable groups, or employees required to care for vulnerable family members due to COVID-19 related restrictions and recommended that special leave as well as remote working is extended for those categories.

Since early November 2020, remote working and special leave are mandatory for all employees in the public sector who are at high risk/ belong to vulnerable groups, including that is chronic health conditions and/or types of impairment that are related to limited functionality and disability, in COVID-19 high to medium risk areas.<sup>50</sup> Special leave, remote working, reduced working hours or flexible schedule are also options for employees who have children with disabilities (regardless of age) in cases where the latter are unable to attend a day care structure due to COVID-19 related restrictions. Those options are equally available in the private sector,<sup>51</sup> noting at the same time that remote working is required for 50 % of staff (where possible) across the country.<sup>52</sup>

Concerning disabled employees in the private sector,<sup>53</sup> they are entitled to request to work remotely, and employers are obliged to fulfil the request in cases where the nature of the work makes it possible. If the kind of work does not allow remote working, employers are obliged to take all necessary measures so that employees provide back-office work (do not come in contact with the public). If that is still not possible, the employer is obliged to declare postponement of contract (under relevant regulations), during which period employees receive a standard monthly wage and cannot be dismissed.

#### 13.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

It has not been possible to identify relevant evidence about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on work and employment for people with disabilities, as noted in other sections

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<sup>49</sup> Greek Ombudsman Letter to Government (20/3/2020) Preventive measures against the spread of COVID-19 and vulnerable social groups <https://www.synigoros.gr/resources/20200320-epistolisti-stp.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> Ministry of Internal Affairs Emergency measures for protecting against the spread of COVID-19 across the country from 7 November 2020 to 8 February 2021 in public and private work settings, <https://covid19.gov.gr/metra-kai-rythmiseis-se-dimosious-kai-idiotikous-chorous-ergasias-gia-ton-periorismo-tis-diasporas-tou-koronoiou-eidika-metra-entos-perifereias-attikis/>.

<sup>51</sup> Ministry of Labour Circular 12 November 2020 Special Leave in cases of school or day care units closure <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/nomikes-plirofories/egkuklios-up-ergasias-oik-46621-1415-12-11-2020.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Mandatory teleworking <https://www.taxheaven.gr/news/51286/ypoxrewtikh-thlergasia-50-se-olh-th-xwra-klimakwto-wrario-kai-anastoles-symbasewn-ergasias>.

<sup>53</sup> Ministry of Labour Presidential Act 24 August 2020 Remote working Measures for vulnerable groups in the private sector <https://covid19.gov.gr/menoume-asfalisi-ergasia-ex-apostaseos-merimna-gia-tis-efpathis-omades-ston-idiotiko-tomea/>.

assessing the impact of the COVID-19 crisis across themes. It could be useful nevertheless to review data available about the impact on employment in general, understanding that the disability unemployment rate is compounded by general unemployment.<sup>54</sup> Official statistics indicate that the unemployment rate in September 2020 was 13 % higher than in September 2019.<sup>55</sup> Quoting in more detail from the Fundamental Rights Agency Country Report Greece:<sup>56</sup>

“The General Confederation of Greek Workers (Γ.Σ.Ε.Ε.) notes in its report of 22/10/2020, that more than 200 000 workers have seen their income decrease more than 50 % and that the continuous employment and revenue instability lead to the impoverishment of the workers in Greece.<sup>57</sup> In the same report, it is stated that the average monthly pay dropped 10 % in the second semester of 2020 compared to 2019, even though the minimum salary did not suffer any further cuts. This drop is interpreted through the prism of flexible working hours, part-time employment and short-term contracts.”

Finally, it is worth quoting the National Co-federation of Disabled people who reported the exclusion of disabled people considered at high risk of COVID-19<sup>58</sup> from two calls for placements in the Region of Attika, and the Municipality of Iraklion (Crete) respectively, for meeting urgent needs due to the spread of COVID-19, claiming that COVID-19 risks to become “an alibi for discrimination on the grounds of disability”.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>54</sup> This trend has been evidenced by analysis of EU SILC data by EDE/ANED core team and discussed in Country Reports feeding into the European Semester Process in the recent years. Please see reports published at <https://www.disability-europe.net/theme/eu2020>.

<sup>55</sup> Fundamental Rights Agency Bulletin #6 Coronavirus pandemic in the EU- Fundamental Rights implications: Focus on Social Rights (p. 25) [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2020-coronavirus-pandemic-eu-bulletin-november\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-coronavirus-pandemic-eu-bulletin-november_en.pdf).

<sup>56</sup> Coronavirus pandemic in the EU –Fundamental Rights Implications Country Report: Greece November 2020 page 12 [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/el\\_report\\_on\\_coronavirus\\_pandemic\\_november\\_2020.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/el_report_on_coronavirus_pandemic_november_2020.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> Greece, Labour Institute of the General Confederation of Greek Workers, “Annual Report 2020 for the Greek Economy and Employment”, 22/10/2020, Available in Greek at: <https://gsee.gr/?p=37072>.

<sup>58</sup> Ministry of Health, Ministry of Internal Affairs Definition of High Risk Groups for severe infection of COVID-19 Official Journal 4011/B/18-9-2020 <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-ygeia/astheneies/koine-upourgike-apophase-didad-ph-64-420-16446.html>.

<sup>59</sup> National Co-federation of Disabled People Press Release 20 January 2021 <https://www.esamea.gr/pressoffice/press-releases/5126-i-pandimia-allothi-diakriseon-gia-ta-atoma-me-anapiria-stin-topiki-aytodioikisi-aparadekti-prokirixi-tis-perifereias-attikis>.

## 14 Good practices and recommendations

### 14.1 Examples of good practice

Extended service provision, both in terms of services and targeted groups, under municipal Home Help schemes (please see section 9.1) is acknowledged as an important and timely step in supporting disabled people and other vulnerable groups in the community by the Greek Ombudsman<sup>60</sup> in a relevant communication with recommendations for strengthening further protection measures for vulnerable groups (please see Section 14.2 below). There is not however any other discussion or evidence to showcase the extent to which this practice has helped mitigate the negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis on people with disabilities.

### 14.2 Recommendations

The Greek Ombudsman, the official independent monitoring body for equal treatment including disability equality, has made a series of recommendations for mitigating the potential negative impact on disabled people since the start of the pandemic, many of which were enacted, such as remote working (see Section 13.1) and access to essential disability provisions (see Section 5.1).

Importantly, the Greek Ombudsman additionally addressed the increased protection risks related to COVID-19 for people residing in institutions and made specific recommendations to the Government at an early stage of the pandemic.<sup>61</sup> The recommendations included (pp. 9-11):

- Close supervision and regular monitoring visits by staff from the National Health Organization “to ensure residents are not neglected, are not put at risk due to shortage of staff, as well as that compulsive isolation, movement restrictions and suppression through medical treatment are not used during the crisis”.
- Complete recruitment of 500 supplementary staff and extension of existing contracts (340) in state run social welfare centres.
- Ensure equal access of disabled people who reside in institutions to healthcare.
- Support remote communication of residents with family and close relatives.

Relevant health protocols available by the National Health Organization have not been updated since March 2020,<sup>62</sup> while the Committee for the Protection of Vulnerable Groups<sup>63</sup> was established albeit with delay. In December 2020, the National Confederation of Disabled People brought attention to the continuing spread of COVID-19

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<sup>60</sup> Greek Ombudsman Letter to Government (20/3/2020) Preventive measures against the spread of COVID-19 and vulnerable social groups <https://www.synigoros.gr/resources/20200320-epistolisti.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> Greek Ombudsman Letter to Government 27 April 2020 Recommendations for strengthening relief measures to groups that are affected by COVID-19 implications <https://www.synigoros.gr/resources/20200506-epistolisti.pdf>.

<sup>62</sup> National Health Organization 24 March 2020 Guidelines for Institutions for People with Chronic Illness and Residential Elderly Care units <https://eody.gov.gr/odigies-gia-idrymata-chronios-paschonton-kai-monades-filoxenias-ilikiomenon/>.

<sup>63</sup> Ministry of Investment and Growth October 2020 Committee for the Protection of Residents in Elderly Care units and other institutional settings <https://covid19.gov.gr/systasi-epitropon-mesko-po-tin-prostasia-apo-ton-koronoio-sars-cov-2-ton-filoxenoumenon-se-monades-frontidas-ilikiomenon-m-f-i-kai-loipes-kleistes-domes-filoxenias-efpathon-omadon-tou-plithysmou/>.

in institutional settings across the country, despite “full isolation” of residents and existence of related health protocols, calling for more frequent testing and closer supervision of the implementation of prevention measures.<sup>64</sup>

It is also worth mentioning separately the recommendation of the Greek Ombudsman to the Directorate for Mental Health to update guidelines towards institutional mental health structures so as to ensure that residents have access outdoors, at least on the same par with the general population, i.e., access shops for basic needs as well as physical activity (individual or in pairs) in close proximity to their residence. It was noted that initial guidance issued on 19 March 2020 imposing postponement of outdoor activities, was interpreted literally as “locked inside” by some institutions.<sup>65</sup> Guidelines subsequently updated (June 2020) and thereafter have made explicit reference to the importance of maintaining access of individuals to outdoor spaces and/or continuation of outdoor activities where possible, for both community and institutional mental health units, with staff escort.<sup>66</sup>

### 14.3 Other relevant evidence

Not applicable.

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<sup>64</sup> National Co-Federation of Disabled People Press Release 10 December 2020 <https://www.esamea.gr/pressoffice/press-releases/5080-na-entathoyn-edo-kai-tora-ta-metra-stis-kleistes-domes-ton-atomon-me-anapiria>.

<sup>65</sup> Greek Ombudsman Letter to Government 27 April 2020 Recommendations for strengthening relief measures to groups that are affected by COVID-19 implications page 11 <https://www.synigoros.gr/resources/20200506-epistoli.pdf>.

<sup>66</sup> Ministry of Health Updated measures for protection of Public health and response to COVID-19 cases in Mental Health Units <https://www.moh.gov.gr/articles/health/domes-kai-draseis-gia-thn-ygeia/c312-psyxikh-ygeia/8010-4h-epikairopoihsh-twn-metrwn-prolhpsis-gia-thn-prostasia-ths-dhmosias-ygeias-kai-antimetwpishs-kroysmatwn-asthenwn-me-koronaio-stis-monades-psyxikhs-ygeias-ths-xwras>.

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