



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

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

Lithuania

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## **Lithuania**

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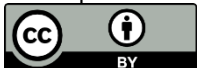
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## 1 Executive summary

### **Disability inclusivity of disaster and recovery planning**

On 6 May 2020, the Lithuanian Government adopted a strategy for general management and recovery of COVID-19 disease. In this strategy, there are no commitments that could be directly related to disability inclusivity. Despite that, two strategy priority axes could be linked with disability. The first axis is the establishment of an effective virus management control mechanism. The government declared a commitment to a proactively targeted testing strategy in nursing homes, and residential homes, where individuals at high risk for personal risk factors (, health condition) live. The second axis is ensuring the preparedness of the health system and strengthening the physical and psychological (emotional) health of the society.

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

At the moment there is a lack of statistical data in the overall mortality rate of people with disabilities, access to hospital treatment for COVID-19 and other issues which affected people with disabilities. Statistical data is a very important factor in order to see the real pandemic impact to people with disabilities. The Government must ensure that more varied and useful statistical data is collected and made easily accessible for society and researchers.

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

Key concerns include the following:

From the beginning of the pandemic the Lithuanian government didn't ensure the full inclusion of organisations of persons with disabilities in all decision-making processes relating to matters affecting persons with disabilities (chapter 2.2).

When the first quarantine started people with disabilities were affected by restrictions to health services. Furthermore, some health services were not accessible at all (chapters 4.2; 4.5).

During the pandemic people with disabilities were left without real support which could ensure the right to live independently. During the first lockdown the majority of available support in local municipalities were provided remotely. Only vital services were provided in a physical contact way. The number of other types of social services was dramatically reduced during lockdowns due to restrictions of physical contact (chapter 9.1).

### **Examples of good practice**

Good practice examples include:

- Despite late action on the systemic management of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Lithuanian government on 16 March 2020 announced EUR 5 billion allocation for public health and the national economy. These amounts of money were used to secure employment, health and security for the population. The Lithuanian Government made the possibility for employees during the extreme situation and

the quarantine to receive subsidies, grant a one-time benefit of EUR 200 to the elderly, people with disabilities, widows and orphans. Almost 900 000 people received this benefit.

- During the second quarantine which started on 17 November 2020, the Lithuanian government acted differently than in the first quarantine and tried to ensure access to necessary social and educational services for people with disabilities.
- From the start of the pandemic authorities switched to teleworking during quarantine and kept information about COVID-19 up to date. Information for people with disabilities is provided with accessible methods like telephone lines, videos, simple information using visuals, and concentrated information with the most frequent questions in one place. For that purpose, the special site [koronastop.lrv.lt](http://koronastop.lrv.lt) was created and it has concentrated information about COVID-19 in one place. Authorities' live press conferences are translated into sign language and also use subtitles.

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

Key recommendations relating to people with disabilities made by agencies in Lithuania include:

- From the beginning of the pandemic the Lithuanian government did not ensure the full inclusion of organisations of persons with disabilities in all decision-making processes relating to matters affecting persons with disabilities. The Government must ensure the full inclusion of people with disabilities in COVID-19 disaster management and recovery planning processes.
- The Lithuanian government mainly rely on financial aid for people with disabilities in disaster management and recovery planning. This report shows evidence that financial aid did not ensure that people with disabilities had access to vital social services during lockdowns. Furthermore, when the first quarantine started people with disabilities were affected by restrictions to health services. There were delays in reviewing and amending the necessary legislation and operational recommendations on the management of infections in personal healthcare institutions, and in reviewing and drafting amendments to the legal acts regulating. The Government must ensure access for people with disabilities to social services and health services no matter what kind of crisis is in the state. Restrictions in vital areas violate human rights. In order to reach such goals, the Government must allocate part of pandemic management budget to the expansion of social services and make decisions using the principles of Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Quarantine measures on education have had a negative impact on families with children with disabilities. As schools were physically closed all education processes were moved to distance learning. Teachers missed knowledge and ways to provide online training content that would be necessary to bring attention from children with special needs. Also, parents had to assist their children during distance learning and compensate for the lack of physical contact. In order to avoid a similar situation in the future, the state must look for alternative ways to ensure education processes for disabled pupils, because in most cases distance learning is not effective.



## 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 Lithuanian government acted late on systemic management of the COVID-19 outbreak. The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Lithuania was identified on 28 February.<sup>1</sup> Only on 6 May 2020, government adopted a strategy for general management and recovery of the COVID-19 virus.<sup>2</sup> The Strategy will be implemented following five key principles: 1) protection of high-risk individuals, 2) proactive localization of cases and prompt implementation of necessary measures, 3) the promptly and objectively informed public, 4) the evidence-based and fact-based decision-making, 5) international cooperation, in particular at the European Union level.

In the strategy, there are no commitments that could be directly related to disability inclusivity. Despite that, two strategy priority axes could be linked with disability. The first axis is the establishment of an effective virus management control mechanism. The government declared a commitment to a proactively targeted testing strategy in nursing homes, and residential homes, where individuals live at high risk for personal risk factors (health condition). The second axis is ensuring the preparedness of the health system and strengthening the physical and psychological (emotional) health of society. To implement this axis Government committed to cooperation with specialists in individual fields.

The strategy is being implemented according to these action plans:<sup>3</sup>

- Lithuania's plan for the DNA of the Future Economy;
- Lithuania's plan of measures for the implementation of the COVID-19 management strategy;
- the COVID-19 management strategy communication plan;
- the action plan for economic stimulus and mitigation of consequences of coronavirus transmission.

The implementation of the strategy is to be coordinated by the Government and monitored by the Government's COVID-19 Management Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister. The results of the implementation of the strategy will be regularly discussed in the Government and they will be presented in cooperation with the Office of the President, the Parliament, municipalities, as well as socio-economic partners and the public.

Some municipalities<sup>4</sup> adopted their own plans for COVID-19. For example, in response to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Vilnius City Municipality on 2020 May 5 has drawn up a plan of aid measures which focuses on four main areas ("directions"):

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<sup>1</sup> First coronavirus case confirmed in Lithuania; <https://lrv.lt/en/news/first-coronavirus-case-confirmed-in-lithuania>.

<sup>2</sup> [Lithuania COVID-19 management strategy](#).

<sup>3</sup> [COVID-19 management strategy implementation plan](#) (in Lithuanian).

<sup>4</sup> In total Lithuania has 60 municipalities.

aid for an individual, aid for business, aid for culture and embracement of opportunities. One of the plan's measures is assistance with rent for people with disabilities.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand there were municipalities which didn't provide any support for people with disabilities during quarantine.

The National Audit Office of Lithuania<sup>6</sup> in their 1 December 2020 press release states: "The Government has adopted a COVID-19 containment strategy to manage the shedding of the Coronavirus in the short term and to prepare for its new waves, however, the implementation of 28 % of actions is delayed. There are delays in reviewing and amending the necessary legislation and operational recommendations on the management of infections in personal healthcare institutions, reviewing and drafting amendments to the legal acts regulating the process of formation and use of the state reserve etc."<sup>7</sup>

Researchers from the Institute of International Relations and Political Science of Vilnius University conducted a study to compare the health and economic policy response of Lithuania and the EU to the COVID-19 crisis. Vitalis Nakrošis<sup>8</sup> pointed out: "In managing this crisis, Lithuania lacked the resilience of the public administration system, which could help us to adapt more quickly to new realities and be better prepared for the second wave of the pandemic". The study showed that the complex health crisis highlighted the need to strengthen the resilience of the public sector.<sup>9</sup>

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

There is no evidence of any involvement of persons with disabilities and their organizations in disaster planning and in recovery planning. Lithuania doesn't have a strategy aimed at achieving the full inclusion of organizations of persons with disabilities in all political decision-making processes relating to matters affecting persons with disabilities. This conclusion can be drawn from the 2020 Report on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>10</sup> This report states that the main decision-making cooperation is going through the Disability Council<sup>11</sup> and DPO.<sup>12</sup> According to publicly available Disability Council meeting agendas,<sup>13</sup> there are no topics that could be related to the Lithuanian government strategy for general management and recovery of COVID-19 disease.

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<sup>5</sup> Vilnius plan for combating after-effects of the Pandemic, <https://vilnius.lt/en/2020/05/05/its-official-vilnius-introduced-its-plan-for-combating-after-effects-of-the-pandemic/>.

<sup>6</sup> Supreme Audit Institution.

<sup>7</sup> National Audit Office of Lithuania press release about COVID-19 situation, [https://www.vkontrole.lt/pranesimas\\_spaudai\\_en.aspx?id=25218](https://www.vkontrole.lt/pranesimas_spaudai_en.aspx?id=25218).

<sup>8</sup> Head of the project "Lithuania and other EU Member States' response to COVID-19: impact on public policy and emergency management".

<sup>9</sup> Vilnius university, 23 December 2020 press release about study; <https://www.vu.lt/en/news-events/news/8409-managing-COVID-19-crisis-in-lithuania-what-can-we-learn>.

<sup>10</sup> Lithuanian special working group report on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/345f8c40018411ebbedbd456d2fb030d?jfwid=-whxwih0f6> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>11</sup> The Council has 20 members. Nine of them are members of the DPO.

<sup>12</sup> Disabled persons representative organisations.

<sup>13</sup> Disability Council agendas, <http://www.ndt.lt/neigaliuju-reikalu-taryba/> (in Lithuanian).

The Lithuania parliament Commission for the Rights of People with Disabilities did not make any comments or suggestions concerning the strategy for general management and recovery of COVID-19 disease through the legislative process.

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

On 17 March 2020, The Lithuanian Disability Forum (LDF) announced a public statement that was addressed to the Lithuanian government and other public institutions. In the statement, the LDF expressed deep concern to see that people with disabilities are not involved in the disaster management and recovery planning process.<sup>14</sup> In their statement the LDF also demanded the Lithuanian government ensure these measures:

1. Access to public information and communication;
2. Use of available digital technologies (for the blind and partially sighted community);
3. Accessible and inclusive health services;
4. Ensure that isolated people will not be left without basic goods, support and people-to-people contacts;
5. Income protection;
6. Ensure that public health communication messages are respectful and non-discriminatory;
7. Ensure the identification of people with disabilities and all vulnerable groups;
8. Involvement of people with disabilities and social partners in disaster management and recovery planning.

The Vice Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the United Nations Jonas Ruškus, in an article about the humanitarian crisis stated: “Lithuania does not seem to have a plan. Just as there was no realistic plan to protect the most vulnerable in society, including the disabled and their families, in dangerous and emergencies”.<sup>15</sup>

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

On 16 March 2020, the Lithuanian government announced EUR 5 billion allocation for public health and the national economy.<sup>16</sup> These amounts of money were used to secure the employment, health and security of the population. The Economic and Financial Action Plan had 5 purposes. The second purpose: “To help safeguard jobs and disposable income of natural persons” is disability related. One of the second purpose measures is intended to ensure the payment of sickness benefits to persons taking care of children, elderly people, and people with disabilities when the regime for mitigation of transmission of infections is imposed in educational establishments or

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<sup>14</sup> LDF, Public statement related COVID-19 disease, 17 March 2020, <https://www.lnf.lt/kreipimasis-del-prevenciniu-ir-pagalbos-priemoniu-uztikrinimo-zmonems-su-negalia-lietuvoje/> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>15</sup> Jonas Ruškus article about the humanitarian crisis in Lithuania; <https://manoteises.lt/straipsnis/humanitarine-krize-kaip-proga-atnaujinti-socialines-apsaugos-sistema-zmogaus-teisemis/>.

<sup>16</sup> Lithuanian government, 16 March 2020 announcement, <https://finmin.lrv.lt/en/news/eur-5-billion-for-public-health-and-the-national-economy>.

social care and employment centres, also to persons with severe chronic diseases.<sup>17</sup> EUR 200 million are allocated for this measure. The State Social Insurance Fund and borrowed funds are sources for this purpose. The second purpose has 8 measures – in total EUR 500 million are allocated for the second purpose. To sum up we can conclude that the Lithuanian government mainly rely on financial aid for people with disabilities in disaster management and recovery planning.

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<sup>17</sup> Action plan for economic stimulus and mitigation of consequences of COVID-19 transmission, [https://finmin.lrv.lt/uploads/finmin/documents/files/EN\\_ver/ACTION%20PLAN%20FOR%20ECONOMIC%20STIMULUS%20AND%20MITIGATION%20OF%20CONSEQUENCES%20OF%20CORONAVIRUS%20\(COVID-19\)%20TRANSMISSION%20.pdf](https://finmin.lrv.lt/uploads/finmin/documents/files/EN_ver/ACTION%20PLAN%20FOR%20ECONOMIC%20STIMULUS%20AND%20MITIGATION%20OF%20CONSEQUENCES%20OF%20CORONAVIRUS%20(COVID-19)%20TRANSMISSION%20.pdf).

### 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?

Lithuania does not have official statistics concerning the overall mortality rate of people with disabilities. The Lithuania Official Statistic portal provides a general mortality rate<sup>18</sup> in which people with disabilities are not distinguished. The expert made a request to The Institute of Hygiene<sup>19</sup> to provide the mortality rate of people with disabilities during the COVID-19 situation. The Institute answered that information about disability is not provided in medical death certificates. For this reason, they do not have a mortality rate of people with disabilities.<sup>20</sup>

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

Lithuania does not provide official statistics concerning the mortality rate of people with disabilities who died from complications connected to COVID-19 during the period of the pandemic.

The Lithuania general population mortality rate from COVID-19 is 97.3 deaths to 100 000 population (23 January 2021 data).<sup>21</sup> To identify the mortality rate between people with vs without disabilities is impossible because Lithuania does not provide official statistics concerning the overall mortality rate of people with disabilities. On the other hand, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour provides data which indicates the number of people who died in social care institutions. According to the Ministry, almost 13 000 people live in social care institutions<sup>22</sup> (from this total number ~6 300 are people with disabilities).<sup>23</sup> From COVID-19 and complications connected to COVID-19 in social care institutions died 631 people (21 January 2021 data). Starting from March 2020 until 21 January 2021 5 716 cases of COVID-19 have been identified in social care institutions. To sum up it can be concluded that the mortality rate in social care institution from COVID-19 is 4 853,84 deaths to 100 000 population (23 January 2021 data) (49.9 times higher than the general population).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Lithuania Official Statistic data about general mortality rate, <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/statistiniu-rodikliu-analize#/>.

<sup>19</sup> The Institute of Hygiene is a Lithuanian budgetary institution under the Ministry of Health. Institute manages public health registers and is responsible for monitoring of Lithuanian population health, health care activities and resources.

<sup>20</sup> Request also was sent to Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Ministry of Health of The Republic of Lithuania, Department for the Affairs of the Disabled under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Disability and Working Capacity Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. From all institution's expert received negative answer about asked information.

<sup>21</sup> World meter data, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/lithuania/>.

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Social Security and Labour data about social care institutions, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/veiklos-sritys/socialine-integracija/socialines-paslaugos/globos-istaigu-sarasai/COVID-19-atvejai-socialines-globos-istaigose> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>23</sup> National audit office of Lithuania, Study about disabled social integration, press release 8 September 2020, [https://www.vkontrole.lt/pranesimas\\_spaudai\\_en.aspx?id=25169](https://www.vkontrole.lt/pranesimas_spaudai_en.aspx?id=25169).

<sup>24</sup> How mortality rate is being calculated, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mortality\\_rate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mortality_rate).

## 4 Access to health

### [Article 25 – Health](#)

#### 4.1 Emergency measures

During the first quarantine (duration from 16 March to 11 May 2020) the Ministry of Health of The Republic of Lithuania released guidelines about work of health care institutions during the quarantine.<sup>25</sup> There exist several guidelines directly related to disability status and access to healthcare services. Point 1.3.7 of the guidelines indicates that if a person is applying to the Disability and Working Capacity Assessment Office under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour for identification of disability, work levels or special needs, it can be done without the physical participation of the person. The evaluation questionnaire is completed by contacting the person or his representatives by telephone or email.

Additionally point 1.3.8 of these guidelines state that previously rated work levels, disabilities and special needs are extended automatically until the end of quarantine and 30 calendar days after it ends.

Moreover, in the announcement of the second quarantine (started 17 November - ongoing), point 2.2.11.8.3 has prohibited visits to hospitalised COVID-19 patients except for terminally ill and under 14 years of age patients with the permission of the attending physician. The same rule for visitors was available during the first quarantine in Lithuania.

At the time when Lithuania has started vaccinating from COVID-19, the priority list was released.<sup>26</sup> It has indicated quite a high position in line for vaccines dedicated for staff and residents of care institutions, right after medical staff and the biggest risk patients that have end stage chronic kidney disease, undergoing organ transplantation, onco-haematological or immunodeficiency disease patients. Age was also considered as priority for vaccinations, distinguishing 65 years and older people to have priority for vaccination. However, in discussions at Parliament meetings with the Commission of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the chairman of the Commission Monika Ošmianskienė has stated that “According to current priorities there is no possibility to include people according to level of disability. Current priorities are calculated only according to health state and possibility to get infected with COVID-19”.<sup>27</sup> Additionally it was proposed to review the priority list and add people with complex disability, having physical and mental disabilities at the same time as with the 80 years and older people group. This group of people usually have additional chronic or congenital disease and are cared for by relatives at home. In relation to this they are in a high-risk group to get infected by COVID-19.

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<sup>25</sup> Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania order Nb.V-387 (Took effect 17 March 2020, ended 18 June 2020) <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/f770372267a611eaa02cacf2a861120c?jfwid=9tq147qgh> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>26</sup> Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania order Nb.V-3006 (Took effect 26 December 2020) <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/fd056f90469711ebb394e1efb98d3e67?jfwid=16b1fy6f5c> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>27</sup> Article about vaccination priority list, 7 January 2021, <https://www.regionunaujienos.lt/zmoniu-suneigalia-atstovams-kelia-nerima-vakcinacijos-nuo-COVID-19-situacija/> (in Lithuanian).



## 4.2 Access to hospital treatment for COVID-19

There is no publicly available data on the number of people with disabilities that were hospitalised or admitted to intensive care units as a result of COVID-19. Statistics Lithuania releases daily data on overall hospitalisations or intensive care cases.<sup>28</sup> However, people with disabilities are not separated from overall statistics. I have sent a query for this data to Statistics Lithuania and received the response that they do not have this information exclusively for people with disabilities. On the other hand, Statistics Lithuania have mentioned that it is a plan for this year to take data from the Disability and Working Capacity Assessment Service and this would give a possibility to prepare data exclusively related with people with disabilities. Additionally, I have sent a request for data to the National Public Health Centre and the Ministry of Health, and they submitted an official letter explaining that there is no possibility to distinguish data for people with disabilities.

On 4 November 2020, the Ministry of Health have released a decree<sup>29</sup> which was directed to social care institutions. In the decree, the Ministry of Health required that all people from social care institutions, if they have a severe form of coronavirus, should be hospitalised. In the author's opinion, he concludes that some people who had a severe form of coronavirus in social care institutions were not mandatory hospitalised until 4 November 2020.

## 4.3 Treatment for COVID-19 in congregate settings

The Department of Social Services Supervision publishes information about COVID-19 cases in social care institutions, but they do not provide data on the number of people with disabilities who were treated for COVID-19 in the institutions and not admitted to hospital. Additional research was done in the same way as in part 4.2.

## 4.4 Public health promotion and testing during the pandemic

At the moment when the first quarantine started, the community of people with disabilities has faced a lot of challenges in order to receive information and guidelines. For example, people with hearing impairments have asked for live press conferences to be translated into sign language and to use subtitles.<sup>30</sup> This request was implemented and additionally sign language translators are now working 24 hours. This working hour change really helps when people with hearing impairments need to contact COVID-19 call centres and use translator help via the Skype program.

The Forum of Lithuanian Disability Organizations circulated an appeal to the Lithuanian authorities regarding the provision of preventive measures for people with disabilities

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<sup>28</sup> Official Statistics Portal daily statistics related COVID-19 <https://osp.stat.gov.lt/praejusios-paros-COVID-19-statistika>.

<sup>29</sup> Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania decree Nb. V-653 (Took effect 1 April 2020) [https://sam.lrv.lt/uploads/sam/documents/files/D%C4%96L%20COVID-19%20LIGOS%20\(KORONAVIRUSO%20INFEKCIJOS\)%20VALDYMO%20STACIONARIOSE%20SOCIALIN%C4%96S%20GLOBOS%20%C4%AESTAIGOSE%20\(V-2468\).pdf](https://sam.lrv.lt/uploads/sam/documents/files/D%C4%96L%20COVID-19%20LIGOS%20(KORONAVIRUSO%20INFEKCIJOS)%20VALDYMO%20STACIONARIOSE%20SOCIALIN%C4%96S%20GLOBOS%20%C4%AESTAIGOSE%20(V-2468).pdf) (in Lithuanian).

<sup>30</sup> Article about challenges in order to receive information and guidelines, 20 March 2020, <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/sveikata/koronavirusas-kelia-issukiu-ir-neigaliesiems-kurtiesiems-per-sunku-issikvesti-pagalba-541-1289942> (in Lithuanian).

during the global pandemic for the COVID-19 virus.<sup>31</sup> In this appeal they have requested for information for people with disabilities to be provided with accessible methods like telephone lines, videos, simple information using visuals, and concentrated information with the most frequent questions in one place. For that purpose, a special site [koronastop.lrv.lt](https://koronastop.lrv.lt)<sup>32</sup> was created and it has concentrated information about COVID-19 in one place.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that The Ministry of Health has released guidelines on ways to obtain medicines and compensatory medical devices without leaving home.<sup>33</sup> It was a possibility to buy medications online or authorize another person to purchase prescript medications, that could help people with disabilities in case of self-isolation.

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

During the first quarantine a lot of medical services were postponed or cancelled. Scheduled surgeries, hospitalisations and medical rehabilitation services were stopped unless it could cause a serious deterioration of the patient's condition. Other medical services were organized remotely, diagnostic services and procedures were provided only in cases where not having them could cause deterioration of the patient's health. LDF and The National Network of Poverty Reduction Organizations conducted a survey from various social groups to find out how they were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>34</sup> The results of this survey clearly showed that people with disabilities were affected by restrictions of health services. As people with disabilities have a lot of health issues, accessibility to health services is very important and consultations by phone are not always beneficial. According to the survey 84 % of survey participants mentioned that social isolation has had a big impact on their psychological state.

During the second quarantine restrictions on health care services were not so strict and the method of provision of services could be chosen according to criteria that best meets patient's interests. On the other hand, it was emphasised that health care services can be minimized or stopped in case of increase of COVID-19 patients.

#### **4.6 Vaccination programmes**

The degree of prioritisation accorded to persons with disabilities in vaccine roll out programmes is described in chapter 4.1.

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<sup>31</sup> LDF, Public statement related COVID-19 disease, 17 March 2020, <https://www.lnf.lt/kreipimasis-del-prevenciniu-ir-pagalbos-priemoniu-uztikrinimo-zmonems-su-negalia-lietuvoje/> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>32</sup> Webpage which provides information about COVID-19 <https://koronastop.lrv.lt/en/#information>.

<sup>33</sup> The Ministry of Health released guidelines on ways to obtain medicines and compensatory medical devices without leaving home, [https://sam.lrv.lt/uploads/sam/documents/files/Rekomendacijos%20d%C4%97I%20vaist%C5%B3%20ir%20MPP%20C4%AFsigijimo%20nei%C5%A1vykus%20i%C5%A1%20nam%C5%B3\\_v1\\_0\\_20200319\\_Be%20hiperlink.pdf](https://sam.lrv.lt/uploads/sam/documents/files/Rekomendacijos%20d%C4%97I%20vaist%C5%B3%20ir%20MPP%20C4%AFsigijimo%20nei%C5%A1vykus%20i%C5%A1%20nam%C5%B3_v1_0_20200319_Be%20hiperlink.pdf) (in Lithuanian).

<sup>34</sup> Juodkaitė, D., the president of Lithuanian Disability Forum (Mano teisės. Žmogaus teisių portalas) (2020), 'When Will We Announce the End of the 'Quarantine' For People With Disabilities?', <https://manoteises.lt/straipsnis/kada-skelbsime-zmoniu-su-negalia-karantino-pabaiga/?fbclid=IwAR3OpbSKB4DtQ7wO-LMbUuuEXxW8zBylxeKvSXI6wmVA30AagcF3fuUTi-Q>.



On 28 January 2021, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour made a public announcement that over 6 000 elderly people and people with disabilities, as well as more than 4 000 staff in care homes have received their first shots of the vaccine. According to the Ministry of Social Security and Labour more than 90 % of people got the vaccine. Also, before vaccinations people got a rapid antibody test in order to find out if they had the virus in the past. Those whose test was positive are not vaccinated.<sup>35</sup>

Also, there are some issues concerning the accessibility of the vaccine. The Government at the moment does not ensure that vaccines could be delivered to people's own homes if they are unable to travel to vaccine centres. On 7 January 2021, discussions at a Parliament meeting with the Chancellor of the Ministry of Health Jurgita Grebenkoviene has stated that "In the case of residents with reduced mobility or who will have difficulty accessing vaccine centres, it will be ensured that residents receive this service in their living environments. At the moment the exact process has not been determined. The process is being coordinated with the municipalities."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Social Security and Labour public announcement about Vaccination in social care institutions, 28 January 2021, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/socialines-globos-istaigu-globotiniai-ir-darbuotojai-pirmuoju-skiepu-nuo-COVID-19-jau-paskiepyti> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>36</sup> Discussions at Parliament about vaccination priority list, 7 January 2021, [https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p\\_r=36002&p\\_t=274109](https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=36002&p_t=274109) (in Lithuanian).

## 5 Income and access to food and essential items

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

#### 5.1 Emergency measures

The Lithuanian government mainly rely on financial aid for people with disabilities in order to maintain the standard of living and social protection.

On 16 March 2020, the Economic and Financial Action Plan was announced<sup>37</sup> providing 5 purposes. One of the measures in the plan is to ensure the payment of sickness benefits to persons taking care of children, elderly people, and people with disabilities when the regime for mitigation of transmission of infections is imposed in educational establishments or social care and employment centres, also to persons with severe chronic diseases.<sup>38</sup> EUR 200 million are allocated for this measure.

On 7 May 2020, the Lithuania Parliament decided to grant a one-time benefit of EUR 200 for the elderly, the disabled, widows and orphans. It is expected that almost 900 000 people will have received this benefit.<sup>39</sup>

Under the special urgency procedure, the Lithuania Parliament adopted amendments to the Law on Civil Protection to allow, if necessary, during the emergency, to temporarily fix maximum prices for the most important goods and services, as well as to impose other necessary restrictions on the sale of goods and the provision of services.<sup>40</sup>

During all quarantine periods the Lithuania Parliament decided that self-employed persons who have no employment relationships and do not receive employment income may apply for a fixed-rate EUR 257 a month benefit.<sup>41</sup>

The Lithuania Government also made the possibility for employees during extreme situations and the quarantine to receive subsidies. In order to receive subsidy, the employee must appeal to the Employment Services.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that The Ministry of Health has released guidelines on ways to obtain medicines and compensatory medical devices without leaving home. It was a possibility to buy medications online or authorize another person to purchase prescription medications that could help people with disabilities in case of self-isolation.

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<sup>37</sup> The plan is discussed in the report, chapter 2.4.

<sup>38</sup> Action plan for economic stimulus and mitigation of consequences of COVID-19 transmission, [https://finmin.lrv.lt/uploads/finmin/documents/files/EN\\_ver/ACTION%20PLAN%20FOR%20ECONOMIC%20STIMULUS%20AND%20MITIGATION%20OF%20CONSEQUENCES%20OF%20CORONAVIRUS%20\(COVID-19\)%20TRANSMISSION%20.pdf](https://finmin.lrv.lt/uploads/finmin/documents/files/EN_ver/ACTION%20PLAN%20FOR%20ECONOMIC%20STIMULUS%20AND%20MITIGATION%20OF%20CONSEQUENCES%20OF%20CORONAVIRUS%20(COVID-19)%20TRANSMISSION%20.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> Lithuania Parliament announcement about the benefit, [https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p\\_r=35435&p\\_k=1&p\\_t=270935](https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=35435&p_k=1&p_t=270935) (in Lithuanian).

<sup>40</sup> [Regulation of prices of essential commodities allowed during the emergency - News \(lrs.lt\)](#).

<sup>41</sup> Ministry of Social Security and Labour announcement about EUR 257 benefit, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/en/news/decisions-taken-regarding-subsidies-for-employers-and-self-employed-persons-main-steps>.

<sup>42</sup> Employment Services Under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania.

Local level municipalities approved their own COVID-19 plans for the COVID-19 situation. For example, in response to the effects of the COVID19 pandemic, Vilnius City Municipality on 5 May 2020 has drawn up a plan of aid measures which focuses on four main areas (“directions”): aid for an individual, aid for business, aid for culture and embracement of opportunities. One of the plan’s targets is assistance with rent for people with disabilities.<sup>43</sup>

Municipalities also organised food aid for the poorest and most vulnerable residents.

## 5.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

The prohibition of day care centres and other institutions providing social services was one of the most impactful aspects during the extreme situation and first quarantine. In Lithuania, according to the Resolution “On Declaration of Quarantine in the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania”,<sup>44</sup> activities in day care centres for children and persons with disabilities were prohibited from 16 March 2020 until 16 May 2020.<sup>45</sup> Lithuania Official Statistic data indicates that almost 4 400 children with disabilities during 2019 (see table 1) received services in day centres. Closed day care centres definitely affected disabled and their family’s income and poverty. The Lithuanian Disability Forum administration director *Henrika Varnienė* in their news portal made a statement about the first quarantine: “During the quarantine, the parents had the main problems - not only to work, but also to take care of the children with disabilities, ensure his distance education”.<sup>46</sup> For various sources we can see that families which one member is a person with disabilities had problems coordinating work and care. Usually situation - one of the family member had to stop his work in order to take care of the person with disabilities during quarantine. Families during the first quarantine faced a lack of social services. Also, not all parents could take a certificate of incapacity for work in order to get sickness benefit.

Only in September 2020, did the Lithuania Parliament approve the proposal to pay sickness benefits for the care of young children or children with disabilities when they must self-isolate. Sickness benefit for a care of a child is 65.94 % of gross salary and can be paid to one of the parents, guardians or working grandparents for as long as the infection control regime lasts. It is paid during the period of compulsory self-isolation, but not longer than 14 calendar days.<sup>47</sup>

According to the results of a survey conducted by the LDF and National Network of Poverty Reduction Organisations persons with disabilities faced limited access to social and health services. Furthermore, restrictions related to the emergency state

<sup>43</sup> Vilnius plan for combating after-effects of the Pandemic, <https://vilnius.lt/en/2020/05/05/its-official-vilnius-introduced-its-plan-for-combating-after-effects-of-the-pandemic/>.

<sup>44</sup> Lithuania government resolution ‘On Declaration of Quarantine in the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania’, No. 207 on 14 March 2020, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/73c0b060663111eabee4a336e7e6fdab/WtdCSilMXu> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>45</sup> Ministry of Social Security and Labour announcement about day care centres, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/duris-atvere-vaiku-ir-neigaliuju-dienos-centrai-ka-privalu-zinoti-ju-lankytojams-atnaujinta-birzelio-10-d>.

<sup>46</sup> Article about first quarantine and its impact to people with disabilities and their parents, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1182859/karantino-metu-vaikai-su-negalia-pagalbos-nesulauke-pirmenybe-teikta-verslui> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>47</sup> Ministry of Social Security and Labour announcement about sickness benefit, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/en/news/the-seimas-finally-approved-the-amendments-benefits-will-be-paid-for-the-isolation-of-children>.

and quarantine regime have negatively impacted their financial situation. According to the NGO National Network of Poverty Reduction Organisations, 53 % of families with persons with disabilities faced reduced incomes, and 22 % of families with persons with disabilities reported food shortages.<sup>48</sup>

In order to meet a need of social services<sup>49</sup> municipalities are trying to collaborate with NGOs. A lack of social services for people with disabilities was confirmed by the Association of Local Municipality's president Mindaugas Sinkevicius. Mindaugas Sinkevicius noticed that during the quarantine period the burden of caring for people with disabilities has been shifted to relatives, who are often unable to work as a result. Lithuania president Gitanas Nausėda in the context of COVID-19 states: "The pandemic crisis poses a real risk of an increase in the absolute poverty rate and social exclusion of people with disabilities".<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Juodkaitė D., the president of Lithuanian Disability Forum (Mano teisės. Žmogaus teisių portalas) (2020), 'When Will We Announce the End of the 'Quarantine' For People With Disabilities?', <https://manoteises.lt/straipsnis/kada-skelbsime-zmoniu-su-negalia-karantino-pabaiga/?fbclid=IwAR3OpbSKB4DtQ7wO-LMbUuuEXxW8zBylxeKvSXI6wmVA30AagcF3fuUTi-Q>.

<sup>49</sup> In total Lithuania has 3 000 social workers and social workers assistants.

<sup>50</sup> Article about COVID-19 impact for the disabled, <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/g-nauseda-koronaviruso-sukelta-krize-neigaliesiems-gali-smogti-labiausiai-56-1306840> (in Lithuanian).

## 6 Access to transportation and the public spaces

### Article 9 – Accessibility

#### 6.1 Emergency measures

On 14 March 2020, The Lithuanian government adopted the Resolution “On Declaration of Quarantine in the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania”. The first quarantine lasted until 11 May 2020. The quarantine measures have had the impact on free movement to all people (including people with disabilities). According to the resolution people were allowed to visit open public places in groups not larger than 2 persons, except for close relatives. The government has set safe distance (more than 2 meters) and limited physical contact time (less than 15 minutes) while communicating with others. Furthermore, people must avoid direct physical contact and comply with personal hygiene requirements. Every person older than 6 years must wear a face mask, respirator or other means covering their nose and mouth in public places with exceptions while eating, exercising, or keeping a distance of 20 meters from other people.<sup>51</sup> Due to these restrictions, it was impossible to provide necessary social services for people with disabilities.

In April 2020, after the situation with COVID-19 began to deteriorate, new restrictions came into force. Entry into the municipality other than a place of residence was restricted, with exceptions for cases of the death of close relatives, work (when the workplace is in another municipality), necessary medical assistance, or for persons who own a real estate property in another municipality. Restrictions were valid for the Easter weekend only (from 20:00 of 10 April 2020 until 20:00 of 13 April 2020).

During the summer, the situation with COVID-19 was controlled and restrictions step by step were revoked. The government decided to lift the nationwide quarantine on 17 June. The situation was stable until Autumn when on 4 November 2020 the Lithuanian government decided to put the country under a nationwide quarantine, that includes limiting contact outside households, a maximum public congregation size of 5, and limiting attendee numbers in weddings and funerals. Also closing restaurants and cafes except for take-away services, closing of gyms, swimming pools, SPA centres, museums, cinemas and theatres, allowing sporting events without spectators, limiting the number of on-site classes for secondary schools, suspending non-essential healthcare treatments, limiting the number of passengers on public transport, making masks mandatory in all public places and prohibiting hospital visits.

On 16 December 2020, the biggest number of 3 418 new cases were confirmed and it was the largest single day increase since the start of the pandemic. Forty-four additional deaths were confirmed, the largest death toll since the start of the pandemic. In regard to that, the government adopted more restrictions.<sup>52</sup> Contacts between more than one household were forbidden. Events involving more than one household were also banned. Non-essential travel within your municipality was forbidden. People were

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<sup>51</sup> Lithuania government resolution “On Declaration of Quarantine in the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania”, No. 207 on 14 March 2020, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/73c0b060663111eabee4a3336e7e6fdab/WtdCSiIMXu> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>52</sup> Press release, “A nationwide lockdown came into effect on Wednesday, 16 December”, 13 December 2020, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1296887/lithuania-imposes-nationwide-lockdown>.

allowed to leave their homes to go for shopping, to work, to attend a funeral, or to seek healthcare with exceptions for students who need to travel for work, such as internships, or exams. All non-food shops had to close or move trading online. Services that involve physical contact for more than 15 minutes were also prohibited, including hairdressers and other beauty services with an exception for psychotherapy, emotional, and other health services, as well as professional legal and financial services that cannot be provided remotely. All classes had to move online, except for children with special needs and students whose parents cannot work from home.<sup>53</sup>

As of 21 January 2021, two families or two households are allowed to meet if one of them has no more than one adult person or one person and his/ her minor children, or a household with a person in need of constant care and nursing, allowed to be in public places in groups of no more than 2 persons or in groups of one family and/or one household. On 15 February, relaxing quarantine restrictions on business were announced.<sup>54</sup> On 25 February, the Government announced some more relaxing restrictions. Face masks are not required in open spaces, where there are no other people except family members within the radius of 2 metres. People are allowed to move between 'inner-ring' municipalities.

## 6.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

Even before the pandemic in Lithuania, the situation with public transport accessibility was quite difficult and during the pandemic this situation did not change in a better way. The National Audit Office of Lithuania in a study about the social integration of people with disabilities noticed: "According to data provided by municipalities, more than half of them (32 per cent) do not ensure that at least 30 per cent of public buildings providing social, educational, health and cultural services are adapted to persons with disabilities. In 34 municipalities,<sup>55</sup> no means of public transport were available for persons with disabilities. In 5 major cities, accessibility is increasing to 56 %, in other municipalities, transport renewal is slow, and accessibility is only 12 %. State and municipal websites for persons with disabilities need to be adapted by September 2020, however, in 2019 only 3.4 % of them were adapted and mobile applications were not assessed."<sup>56</sup>

During the first quarantine which took from 14 March to 11 May 2020 older persons faced age discrimination in the public realm. The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of the Republic of Lithuania reported that they received much more than usual applications to start investigations on discrimination.<sup>57</sup> People contacted the Ombudsperson because of signs which were hanged on the doors of sales outlets, cafes, hairdressers. Signs stated that is not recommended to visit place for persons over 60 or with chronic diseases.

<sup>53</sup> Lockdown in Lithuania, <https://infogram.com/lockdown-in-lithuania-lrt-english-1h9j6qggj9jyv4g>.

<sup>54</sup> <https://eimin.lrv.lt/en/news/relaxing-quarantine-restrictions-on-business-individual-services-reopening-of-more-shops-allowed>.

<sup>55</sup> Lithuania is sub-divided into 60 municipalities.

<sup>56</sup> National audit office of Lithuania, Study about disabled social integration, press release 8 September 2020, [https://www.vkontrole.lt/pranesimas\\_spaudai\\_en.aspx?id=25169](https://www.vkontrole.lt/pranesimas_spaudai_en.aspx?id=25169).

<sup>57</sup> Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of the Republic of Lithuania, press release about discrimination, 5 May 2020, <https://manoteises.lt/straipsnis/vyresnio-amziaus-zmonems-taikomi-karantino-ribojimai-gali-virsti-diskriminacija/> (in Lithuanian).



## 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

From 14 March 2020, in Lithuania, according to the Resolution “On Declaration of Quarantine in the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania”,<sup>58</sup> visiting disabled and other persons who are living in social care institutions, families, group and community homes was prohibited. The Ministry of Health on 1 April 2020 released guidelines<sup>59</sup> which in detail described how work in social care institutions should be organized. In guidelines all group activities in social care institutions were prohibited. Restrictions were in force till 17 June 2020 when new guidelines were released.<sup>60</sup>

New guidelines allowed visits to people in social care institutions, but some restriction was left. The most important rule – the visitor can visit one person in their room at a time, and the visit can last up to 15 minutes. If the meeting takes place outdoors, its duration can be longer. The guest is admitted only if he/she does not have symptoms such as fever, runny nose, cough, difficulty breathing, and so on. All visitors are advised to wear a face mask or respirator and periodically clean hands. The situation remains unchanged until Autumn (see table 2).

Moreover, in the announcement of the second quarantine (started 17 November-Ongoing), point 2.2.11.8.3 has prohibited visits to hospitalised COVID-19 patients except for terminally ill and under 14 years of age patients with the permission of the attending physician.

Visits to residential social care institutions, foster families, group and community homes have been prohibited by the Lithuanian government in 21 municipalities which have declared local quarantine in October 2020.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, visits were not prohibited nationwide.

There is no publicly available information about the involuntary detention of people with disabilities. I was personally contacted by people with disabilities who are living in group homes and I got confirmation that residents during quarantine are not allowed to leave the institution.

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<sup>58</sup> Lithuania government resolution ‘On Declaration of Quarantine in the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania’, No. 207 on 14 March 2020, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/73c0b060663111eabee4a336e7e6fdab/WtdCSilMXu> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>59</sup> Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania decree Nb. V-653 (Took effect 1 April 2020) <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/812a9f40741911eabee4a336e7e6fdab> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>60</sup> Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania decree Nb. V-1496 (Took effect 17 June 2020) <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/b751ab70b07011eab9d9cd0c85e0b745> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>61</sup> Lithuania government resolution ‘On Declaration of Quarantine in some municipalities of the Republic of Lithuania’, No. 1159 on 21 October 2020, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/22fb9b40143c11ebb0038a8cd8ff585f> (in Lithuanian).

On 17 April 2020, The Ministry of Health have released a decree<sup>62</sup> which allowed the use of involuntary treatment for people who are sick with coronavirus and refuse to be hospitalised or isolated from society. This decree was in force from 17 April until 18 June 2020.

## 7.2 Impact of the COVID-19 crisis

There is no analysis or official statements about increases or decreases in institutional living, orates of compulsory detention, treatment or restraints, or of restrictions in access to family or friends for people living in institutional care.

Only the Lithuanian Social Research Centre has periodically published reports<sup>63</sup> about measures which the Lithuanian government put in place to protect public health. On the other hand, a number of well-known people spoke in public about problematic issues related to people with disabilities.

One of the key speakers in public about restrictions and institutional living problems during the pandemic was the President of the Republic of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda. The President expressed his concern about the problematic issues related to the persons with disabilities. The President highlighted the problem of restricted access to necessary social and educational services for disabled people. He argued that the COVID-19 crisis has exposed the failure to implement institutional care reform, and the lack of community based and personalized services.<sup>64</sup>

On 8 April 2020, a group of more than 200 NGOs released an open statement recommendation related to the social consequences of the pandemic and quarantine for public authorities.<sup>65</sup> It stated the importance of helping the most vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities and elderly people and provided recommendations to be introduced to facilitate their situation. These recommendations cover financial support measures and adequate access to necessary social services.

The Director of the Human Rights Monitoring Institute and UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, Prof. Dainius Pūras, stated about Lithuanian government policy in order to protect people with disabilities: “children and adults with disabilities, and in particular mental and intellectual disabilities, suffer disproportionately from this desire to protect them”.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania decree Nb. V-900 (Took effect 17 April 2020) [https://sam.lrv.lt/uploads/sam/documents/files/KORONA/D%C4%96L%20%C4%AEPAREIGOJIMO%20ASMEN%C5%B2%20VEIKSMUS%20LAIKYTI%20PAVOJUMI%20APLINKINI%C5%B2%20SVEIKATAI%20\(V-900\).pdf%20](https://sam.lrv.lt/uploads/sam/documents/files/KORONA/D%C4%96L%20%C4%AEPAREIGOJIMO%20ASMEN%C5%B2%20VEIKSMUS%20LAIKYTI%20PAVOJUMI%20APLINKINI%C5%B2%20SVEIKATAI%20(V-900).pdf%20) (in Lithuanian).

<sup>63</sup> European union agency for fundamental rights at the moment implementing the project “Coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak in the EU – fundamental rights implications”. Lithuanian Social Research Centre is a project partner. More about project <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2020/covid19-rights-impact-november-1>.

<sup>64</sup> The President’s Communication Group public announcement, 21 March 2020, <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/prezidentas-asmenims-su-negalia-si-krize-gali-smogti-smarkiausiai/33993> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.fsf.vu.lt/naujienos/karantino-dienorastis/2926-nevyriausybininkai-ir-mokslininkai-paramos-reikia-ne-tik-verslui-2>.

<sup>66</sup> Dainius Pūras article about human rights during COVID-19 crisis, 31 May 2020, [https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/nuomones/3/1183032/dainius-puras-ar-galime-susitarti-kad-lietuvoje-gerbsime-zmogaus-teises?fbclid=IwAR0jo6TfDiWMD4rkhZkLK3E7OaUBiP-m\\_Zcy24AvNDqPDHFYW0rVOMcFEXU](https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/nuomones/3/1183032/dainius-puras-ar-galime-susitarti-kad-lietuvoje-gerbsime-zmogaus-teises?fbclid=IwAR0jo6TfDiWMD4rkhZkLK3E7OaUBiP-m_Zcy24AvNDqPDHFYW0rVOMcFEXU) (in Lithuanian).



Prof. Dainius Pūras predicted that the measures which were taken by government would do more harm than the pandemic.

## 8 Violence, exploitation or abuse

### Article 16 – Freedom from violence, exploitation and abuse

#### 8.1 Emergency measures

On 5 May 2020, the Ministry of the Interior announced about prepared recommendations under the title “Cooperation with communities vulnerable to hate crimes”. This practical guide provides information about the communities most vulnerable to hate crime in Lithuania - Roma, Jews, Muslims, foreigners, the LGBTI community and people with disabilities. This information should contribute to better knowledge and understanding of these communities as well as better recognition of hate crimes and deeper understanding of the impact of these crimes.<sup>67</sup>

On 1 April 2020, The Prosecutor General’s Office adopted methodical recommendations on investigating hate crimes.<sup>68</sup> In these recommendations hate crimes against people with disabilities are highlighted. The recommendations set out criteria and principles to help officials address these and other issues in practice, promote a conscious and sensitive approach by law enforcement officials to victims of hate crimes or hate speech, and emphasize the requirement to assess the needs for special protection and apply necessary special protection measures.

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

During the pandemic people with disabilities’ rights were violated. This conclusion can be drawn from several sources. First of all from a public opinion. The Vice Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the United Nation Jonas Ruškus in his article states: “The COVID-19 pandemic shows that the accommodation of people with disabilities in a social care institution is not only a discriminatory but also fatal measure: people with disabilities are not only accommodated in densely populated buildings, but also are locked there and separated from the health services provided to the entire population.”<sup>69</sup>

Second, during the period between lockdowns several inspections were performed in social care homes by the Human Rights Division of the Seimas Ombudsmen’s Office.<sup>70</sup> In one of inspections a man with special needs was found illegally imprisoned at Skemai Social Care Home in Rokiškis district. Here he spent two weeks behind the

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<sup>67</sup> Ministry of the Interior public announcement about recommendations for law enforcement officials on how to cooperate with communities vulnerable to hate crime, 5 May 2020, <https://vrm.lrv.lt/en/news/recommendations-for-law-enforcement-officials-on-how-to-cooperate-with-communities-vulnerable-to-hate-crime>.

<sup>68</sup> Prosecutor General’s Office public announcement about recommendations on investigating hate crimes, 1 April 2020, <https://www.prokuraturos.lt/lt/naujienos/ikiteisminiai-tyrimai-ir-viesojo-intereso-gynimas/isigaliojo-rekomendacijos-del-neapykantos-nusikaltimu-ir-neapykanta-kurstancios-kalbos-tyrimo-atlikimo/6890> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>69</sup> Jonas Ruškus article about human rights; <https://manoteises.lt/straipsnis/negalia-yra-zmogaus-teisiu-tema-ka-isipareigojo-musu-valstybe/> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>70</sup> The purpose of activities of the Seimas Ombudsmen is to protect a person’s right to good public administration securing human rights and freedoms, to supervise fulfilment by state authorities of their duty to properly serve the people.

bars and an inspection was made on 4 September 2020.<sup>71</sup> This example is typical institutional violence against people with disabilities.

21 January 2021 the Seimas Ombudsman published conclusions which summarise the results of the investigation into the provision of assistance to persons who had experienced domestic violence. The investigation was made during the pandemic period. The Seimas Ombudsman highlighted people with disabilities as one of the target groups who face domestic violence. This investigation on providing assistance to victims of domestic violence revealed a sad reality: assistance to victims of violence is often still unavailable, those who call the police are still left alone with the perpetrator and assistance often includes purely formal oral consultations, despite the obvious need for specific assistance. Additionally, the Seimas Ombudsman noticed that number of professionals who are working in specialized helpdesks, in particular lawyers and psychologists, are not sufficient to meet the needs of all individuals and greater involvement of NGOs in this service delivery system is not ensured.<sup>72</sup>

During 2020, 510 people with disabilities registered as victims of crime. This number is slightly lower if we compare with 2019 when 648 people with disabilities were registered as suffering from crime.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Seimas Ombudsmen public announcement about inspection in Skemai Social Care Home, 4 September 2020, <https://www.lrski.lt/en/naujienos/after-the-inspection-of-the-seimas-ombudsmen-a-pre-trial-investigation-was-launched-in-skemai-social-care-home-and-the-director-of-the-institution-was-removed-from-office/>.

<sup>72</sup> Seimas Ombudsmen public announcement about investigation on providing assistance to people who have experienced domestic violence, 21 January 2021, <https://www.lrski.lt/en/naujienos/after-conducting-an-investigation-on-providing-assistance-to-people-who-have-experienced-domestic-violence-the-seimas-ombudsman-calls-for-ratification-of-the-istanbul-convention/>.

<sup>73</sup> Information technology and Communication department data, <https://ird.lt/en/>.

## 9 Independent living

### Article 19 – Living independently and being included in the community

#### 9.1 Emergency measures

In the COVID-19 pandemic period people with disabilities were left without real support which could ensure the right to live independently. During the first lockdown<sup>74</sup> the majority of available support in local municipalities were provided remotely. Only vital services were provided in a physical contact way. On the other hand, there were municipalities which did not produce any support for people with disabilities during quarantine. This conclusion can be drawn from LDF and The National Network of Poverty Reduction Organizations survey. LDF president Dovilė Juodkaitė commenting on survey results noticed: “about half of respondents were left without domestic help, without transportation, without necessary health and rehabilitation services, without psychological help and the opportunity to take a break from caring for relatives.”<sup>75</sup>

Lack of social services for people with disabilities was confirmed by the Association of Local Municipality’s president Mindaugas Sinkevicius. Sinkevicius noticed that during the quarantine period the burden of caring for people with disabilities has been shifted to relatives, who are often unable to work as a result.

Other emergency measures are in details described in Chapter 7.

Access to community services such banking and other services which required physical contact during lockdowns was prohibited. Access to food for the most vulnerable people with disabilities was ensured by local municipality’s social workers.<sup>76</sup>

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

The Commission for the Monitoring of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities under the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman commissioned a study on the social impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on people with disabilities in Lithuania. No further systematic studies have been performed regarding the impact of the pandemic on the lives of people with disabilities.

One of most impactful aspects on ensuring independent living during the extreme situation and quarantine was the prohibition of day care centres and other institutions providing social services. In Lithuania, according to the Resolution “On Declaration of Quarantine in the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania<sup>77</sup> activities in day care centres for children, and persons with disabilities were prohibited from 16 March 2020 until 18

<sup>74</sup> First lockdown took place from 14 March 2020 to 11 May 2020.

<sup>75</sup> Juodkaitė D., the president of Lithuanian Disability Forum (Mano teisės. Žmogaus teisių portalas) (2020), ‘When Will We Announce the End of the ‘Quarantine’ For People With Disabilities?’, <https://manoteises.lt/straipsnis/kada-skelbsime-zmoniu-su-negalia-karantino-pabaiga/?fbclid=IwAR3OpbSKB4DtQ7wO-LMbUuuEXxW8zBylxeKvSXI6wmVA30AagcF3fuUTi-Q>.

<sup>76</sup> Minister of Social Security and Labour order Nb. A1-94, <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.274454/tWovEOcyrU> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>77</sup> Lithuania government resolution ‘On Declaration of Quarantine in the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania’, No. 207 on 14 March 2020, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/73c0b060663111eabee4a336e7e6fdab/WtdCSilMXu> (in Lithuanian).

May 2020.<sup>78</sup> From 14 March 2020, visiting disabled and other persons who are living in social care institutions, families, group and community homes was prohibited. This prohibition was valid until 17 June 2020.

During the pandemic all new forms of community based social services (temporary respite care, protected housing, personal assistants, assisted employment and in-work support assistance) have been financed from EU funds. Another shortcoming is the availability of new social services. Kristina Dūdonytė<sup>79</sup> in a 21 January 2021 article noticed that until October 2020, about 600 people with disabilities had benefited from personal assistants and in 12 out of 58 municipalities the funds had already been used.<sup>80</sup>

Also, the number of other types of social services was dramatically reduced during lockdowns due to restrictions on physical contact. For example, before the pandemic in the largest Vilnius municipality almost 1 259<sup>81</sup> people per day received social support at home. After the pandemic started this number in April 2020 reduced to 800.<sup>82</sup>

People with intellectual disabilities face discrimination in accessing coronavirus tests. The Lithuanian government have only two type of coronavirus test which are free of charge - nasopharyngeal swab and oropharyngeal swab. If people with disabilities or relatives demand another type of test, they have to do it from their own expenses.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ministry of Social Security and Labour announcement about day care centres, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/duris-atvere-vaiku-ir-neigaliuju-dienos-centrai-ka-privalu-zinoti-ju-lankytojams-atnaujinta-birzelio-10-d>.

<sup>79</sup> President Commission for the Monitoring of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

<sup>80</sup> Kristina Dūdonytė article about personal assistant; <https://www.biciulyste.lt/lt/as-pilietis/2530-asmene-pagalba-turi-buti-uztikrinta?fbclid=IwAR0evlGOuuwMI4O26hsVcWwE0IYA4DKsIxQSJEFUDPIIQpss-1AeVUuJuxo/> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>81</sup> This number does usually not show a real demand of social services for elderly and disabled. As an example, could be taken Klaipėda municipality. According Klaipėda municipality social services plan during 2020 from 759, people who asked social support in the home, only 613 received assistance.

<sup>82</sup> Article about reduced social services during pandemic, 1 April 2020, <https://www.tv3.lt/naujiena/gyvenimas/ar-per-karantina-neigalieji-neliks-uz-borto-n1037038> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>83</sup> Commission for the Monitoring of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities under the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman meeting protocol, 28 December 2020, <https://www.lygybe.lt/lt/neigaliuju-teisiu-stebesenos-komisija> (in Lithuanian).

## 10 Access to habilitation and rehabilitation

### Article 26 – Habilitation and rehabilitation

#### 10.1 Emergency measures

After the pandemic started on 14 March 2020, the Lithuanian government adopted legal acts which restricted the access of people with disabilities to habilitation and rehabilitation support. According to the Resolution “On Declaration of Quarantine in the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania”<sup>84</sup> the activities of wellness and health centres, spas and recreation centres shall be prohibited, except for individual medical rehabilitation services that are related to treatment. The provision of medical rehabilitation services was also restricted. Such restrictions lasted until May 2020 when the government started a lighter quarantine regime. The Ministry of Health on 29 April 2020 released a decree<sup>85</sup> which allowed the resumption of habilitation and rehabilitation support as soon as providers have a services renewal plan, which must be accepted by National Public Health Centre under the Ministry of Health. By 27 May and four weeks after planned services were allowed to resume, about 53 % of outpatient clinics and about 56 % hospitals had submitted service renewal plans and started working.

The Ministry of Health’s 29 April 2020 Decree entered into force until 17 June 2020.<sup>86</sup> During the second quarantine which started on 17 November 2020, no more restrictions were placed on habilitation and rehabilitation support. Providers were allowed to decide whether to provide services face-to-face or remotely.

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

The prohibition of day care centres and other institutions providing social services was one of the most impactful aspects during the extreme situation and first quarantine. In Lithuania, according to the Resolution “On Declaration of Quarantine in the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania”,<sup>87</sup> activities in day care centres for children and persons with disabilities were prohibited from 16 March 2020 until 18 May 2020.<sup>88</sup> Lithuania Official Statistic data indicates that almost 4400 children with disabilities during 2019 (see table 1) received services in day centres. Closed day care centres definitely affected disabled and their family’s income and poverty. The Employment Service under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour provide statistical data which shows dramatically the decrease of the number of people with disabilities who participated in professional rehabilitation programs during the pandemic. By comparison to 2019 there were 230

<sup>84</sup> Lithuania government resolution ‘On Declaration of Quarantine in the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania’, No. 207 on 14 March 2020, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/73c0b060663111eabee4a336e7e6fdab/WtdCSilMXu> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>85</sup> Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania decree Nb. V-1018 <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/2c280bf08a2011eaa51db668f0092944> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>86</sup> Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania decree Nb. V-1493 <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/972b8b61b05a11ea9a12d0dada3ca61b?jfwid=57lm52psk> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>87</sup> Lithuania government resolution ‘On Declaration of Quarantine in the Territory of the Republic of Lithuania’, No. 207 on 14 March 2020, <https://www.e-tar.lt/portal/lt/legalAct/73c0b060663111eabee4a336e7e6fdab/WtdCSilMXu> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>88</sup> Ministry of Social Security and Labour announcement about day care centres, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/duris-atvere-vaiku-ir-neigaliuju-dienos-centrai-ka-privalu-zinoti-ju-lankytojams-atnaujinta-birzelio-10-d>.

persons with disabilities who participated in the vocational rehabilitation programme and in 2020 only 14 people with disabilities participated (see table 6). To sum up it could be concluded that rehabilitation programs for people with disabilities during the first quarantine stopped due to COVID-19. After the first quarantine some services have returned but not at the same level.

## 11 Access to justice

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

#### 11.1 Emergency measures

During the pandemic the Lithuanian government didn't ensure protection of human rights and timely decision-making. According to the Lithuanian Social Research Centre report: „In Lithuania, the Judicial Council postponed all scheduled hearings in oral procedure from the beginning of quarantine, except in cases of statutory urgency (issues related to arrest, removal of a child from an unsafe environment). Court hearings with some recommendations related to physical distancing and personal hygiene were renewed in May 2020 after the decision of the Judicial Council on 27 April 2020. Statistics show increase in written procedure (changed from oral procedure upon agreement of parties) and cases examined by electronic means and videoconferencing equipment. According to the information from the Lithuanian National Courts Administration, all courts have resumed functioning as usual since 17 June 2020.”<sup>89</sup>

From the Lithuanian Social Research Centre report information, it could be concluded that the Lithuanian Government did not take any emergency measures, except changes from oral procedure to written in courts, to ensure access to justice for people with disabilities.

During the pandemic State guaranteed legal aid services were organised remotely.

#### 11.2 Impact of COVID-19 crisis

On 17 April 2020, the Ministry of Health released a decree<sup>90</sup> which allowed the use of involuntary treatment for people who are sick with coronavirus and refuse to be hospitalised or isolated from society. This decree was in force from 17 April 2020 until 18 June 2020.

The State guaranteed legal aid service has not provided statistical data about the number of people with disabilities who asked for legal aid during pandemic.

On 5 May 2020, the Ministry of the Interior announced about prepared recommendations under the title “Cooperation with communities vulnerable to hate crimes”. This practical guide provides information about the communities most vulnerable to hate crime in Lithuania - Roma, Jews, Muslims, foreigners, the LGBTI community and people with disabilities. This information should contribute to better knowledge and understanding of these communities as well as better recognition of hate crimes and deeper understanding of the impact of these crimes.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Lithuanian Social Research Centre report, 2 July 2020, [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/lt\\_report\\_on\\_coronavirus\\_pandemic\\_july\\_2020.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/lt_report_on_coronavirus_pandemic_july_2020.pdf).

<sup>90</sup> Minister of Health of the Republic of Lithuania decree Nb. V-900 (Took effect 17-04-2020) [https://sam.lrv.lt/uploads/sam/documents/files/KORONA/D%C4%96L%20%C4%AEPAEIGOJIMO%20ASMEN%C5%B2%20VEIKSMUS%20LAIKYTI%20PAVOJUMI%20APLINKINI%C5%B2%20SVEIKATAI%20\(V-900\).pdf%20](https://sam.lrv.lt/uploads/sam/documents/files/KORONA/D%C4%96L%20%C4%AEPAEIGOJIMO%20ASMEN%C5%B2%20VEIKSMUS%20LAIKYTI%20PAVOJUMI%20APLINKINI%C5%B2%20SVEIKATAI%20(V-900).pdf%20) (in Lithuanian).

<sup>91</sup> Ministry of the Interior public announcement about recommendations for law enforcement officials on how to cooperate with communities vulnerable to hate crime, 5 May 2020,



The Prosecutor General's Office on 1 April 2020 adopted methodical recommendations on investigating hate crimes.<sup>92</sup> In these recommendations hate crimes against people with disabilities are highlighted. The recommendations set out criteria and principles to help officials address these and other issues in practice, promote a conscious and sensitive approach by law enforcement officials to victims of hate crimes or hate speech, and emphasize the requirement to assess the needs for special protection and apply necessary special protection measures.

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<https://vrm.lrv.lt/en/news/recommendations-for-law-enforcement-officials-on-how-to-cooperate-with-communities-vulnerable-to-hate-crime>.

<sup>92</sup> Prosecutor General's Office public announcement about recommendations on investigating hate crimes, 1 April 2020, <https://www.prokuraturos.lt/lt/naujienos/ikiteisminiai-tyrimai-ir-viesojo-intereso-gynimas/isigaliojo-rekomendacijos-del-neapykantos-nusikaltimu-ir-neapykanta-kurstancios-kalbos-tyrimo-atlikimo/6890> (in Lithuanian).

## 12 Access to education

### [Article 24 – Education](#)

#### 12.1 Emergency measures

The quarantine measures have had a big impact on access to education. In the Resolution on declaration of quarantine part 3.3: education and childcare processes, educational activities in all institutions including schools, day care centres and employment centres were stopped from 13 March 2020. All education processes had to be moved to distance learning. In order to make this process easier for people with disabilities, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport have provided systematic information on recommendations for special schools and special education centres on how to organise educational process and educational assistance during distance learning.<sup>93</sup> These recommendations have included challenges and opportunities, peculiarities and lists of digital sources intended for special needs education. Moreover, it has included guidelines for providing software, organizing processes and how educational assistance needs to be granted to parents and children.

It is important to mention that in the Resolution on the declaration of the second quarantine part 2.2.9.2 it was exclusively mentioned that pupils in special schools and special classes of general education can have contact education if security measures are met. Additionally, it was allowed in part 2.2.9.8 for such schools and classes to organise activities during student holidays.

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

Quarantine measures on education have had a negative impact on families with children with disabilities. As schools were physically closed these families had to take childcare and working from home at the same time. For example, the Head of the Lithuanian Disability Forum Henrika Varniene has stated that no additional help was provided to parents raising children with disabilities during the first quarantine. According to her it is very difficult for parents to work from home and ensure distance learning because children with disabilities need constant attention and assistance with learning activities.<sup>94</sup>

On the other hand, during the quarantine the Seimas adopted amendments that sickness benefit may be paid to parents or grandparents if they need to take care of disabled child under 21 years of age who previously attended school.<sup>95</sup>

In order to help with the distance learning situation, The Ministry of Education have taken an initiative to buy or rent additional computers and distribute them for socially

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<sup>93</sup> Guidelines prepared by Ministry of education, science and sport guidelines for distance learning <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/f770372267a611eaa02cacf2a861120c?jfwid=9tq147ggh> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>94</sup> Article about COVID-19 impact on education for children with disabilities, <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/1182859/karantino-metu-vaikai-su-negalia-pagalbos-nesulauke-pirmenybe-teikta-verslui> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>95</sup> Detail explained in the report, chapter 5.2.

disadvantaged groups.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, the Ministry of Health have prepared an order to ensure free meal distribution during the suspension of educational processes. There was a possibility to have contactless food delivery to home that could benefit families with children with disabilities.

The National Forum on Human Rights have organised a discussion “COVID-19 and Education: The Lessons (Un)Learned”. During this discussion one of the speakers Artūr Adam Markevič – a teacher working with children with disabilities and special needs, has indicated the main difficulties in working with children with disabilities during distance learning. First of all, children in special schools and classes require more additional attention and physical contact so this needs to be compensated by parents helping and assisting their children during distance learning. Secondly, teachers miss knowledge and ways how to provide online training content that would bring the necessary attention from children with special needs.<sup>97</sup>

To summarise, it looks like lessons have been learned during the first quarantine. As a result, during the second quarantine an exception was made to let children with disabilities attend special schools and classes that made the education process easier.

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<sup>96</sup> Ministry of education, science and sport public announcement about extra computers procurement, 20 March 2020, [https://www.smm.lt/web/lt/pranesimai\\_spaudai/svietimo-ministerija-isigis-35-tukst-kompiuteriu-taip-pat-praso-verslo-ir-visuomenes-pagalbos](https://www.smm.lt/web/lt/pranesimai_spaudai/svietimo-ministerija-isigis-35-tukst-kompiuteriu-taip-pat-praso-verslo-ir-visuomenes-pagalbos) (in Lithuanian).

<sup>97</sup> Discussion video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wepdKcJdqw0&t=3362s>.

## 13 Working and employment

### Article 27 – Work and employment

#### 13.1 Emergency measures

According to quarantine measures physical shops other than selling food, veterinary, pharmaceutical and optical goods were prohibited. Additionally, all contact services that require more than 15 minutes of contact between the service provider and the recipient, with some exceptions were forbidden during the second quarantine. The Ministry of Health released recommendations for institutions, organizations, enterprises and offices in not restricted areas, to enable employees to work remotely if possible.<sup>98</sup>

Moreover, recommendations also emphasised that employees older than 60 years, having chronic diseases or being in other risk groups must be prioritised to work remotely. People with disabilities were not specifically distinguished in the risk group as definition was based only on the list of chronic diseases. In cases where work from home was not possible, recommended safety measures at the workplace were mentioned.

It is important to note that law of Social Enterprises has been changed from July 2020.<sup>99</sup>

Changes in this law identified that Social Enterprises must hire more people with disabilities (at least 6 and previously it was 4). Also, half of the employees must be disabled and at least 40 % of them should be with severe or moderate disability or less than 40 % working capacity.

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

According to Employment Service data we can see a big drop in the number of Social Enterprises at the end of 2020 (see table 3). This significant 27 % decrease was due to several reasons, one of them being changes in the law of Social Enterprises. Additionally, people with disabilities mostly have leading health issues and are very sensitive to the risk of coronavirus so they decided to take temporary incapacity from work during quarantine. In regard to this fact, some Social Enterprises needed to close, not having working people.<sup>100</sup>

If we take a look at the number of disabled people working in Social Enterprises, we can identify a sharp drop at the end of 2020 by 31 % (see table 4). The closing of Social Enterprises has led to the fact that 1 622 disabled people were left without work at the

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<sup>98</sup> Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania recommendations on COVID-19 management measures at the workplace  
[https://sam.lrv.lt/uploads/sam/documents/files/KORONA/Rekomendacijos\\_del\\_COVID\\_valdymo\\_d\\_abovietese.pdf](https://sam.lrv.lt/uploads/sam/documents/files/KORONA/Rekomendacijos_del_COVID_valdymo_d_abovietese.pdf) (in Lithuanian).

<sup>99</sup> Public announcement about changes in Law on Social Enterprises, 1 July 2020,  
<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/verslas/4/1193763/nuo-liepos-pokyciai-darbuotojams-su-negalia-dirbantiems-socialinese-imonese> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>100</sup> 15min.lt news portal article about COVID-19 impact to Social Enterprises, 31 March 2020,  
<https://www.15min.lt/verslas/naujiena/bendroves/koronavirusas-skaudziai-smoge-socialinems-imonems-nedirba-trecdalis-darbuotoju-663-1297458>.

end of 2020 (newly recruited minus fired). Furthermore, the number of disabled people registered in the Employment Service has increased dramatically by 89 % during the year of 2020 (see table 5). The total number of working people with disabilities has decreased by 4 % in 2020. This indicates the fact that not only people with disabilities working in Social Enterprises but also in the open labour market have lost workplaces. To summarize, the COVID-19 crisis has had big impact on the employment of people with disabilities and increased their unemployment rate.

On other hand, in order to mitigate negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis and provide assistance to persons with disabilities, state aid measures were introduced.<sup>101</sup> In relation to the disability and age dimensions, there was the previously mentioned one-off benefit of EUR 200 for the elderly and people with disabilities, and EUR 100 for children with disabilities. Additionally, there were subsidies for the payment of employee's wages if employing people with disabilities, the elderly or younger people and the possibility to receive support for the establishment of your workplace.

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<sup>101</sup> Ministry of Social Security and Labour, public announcement about aid package after quarantine, 12 May 2020, <https://socmin.lrv.lt/en/news/approved-aid-package-after-quarantine-1-4-million-lithuanians-will-benefit>.

## 14 Good practices and recommendations

### 14.1 Examples of good practice

Good practice examples include:

- Despite late action on systemic management of the COVID-19 outbreak, the Lithuanian government on 16 March 2020 announced EUR 5 billion allocation for public health and the national economy. These amounts of money were used to secure employment, health and security for the population. The Lithuanian Government made a possibility for employees during the extreme situation and the quarantine to receive subsidies, granted a one-time benefit of EUR 200 to the elderly, people with disabilities, widows and orphans. Almost 900 000 people received this benefit.
- During the second quarantine which started on 17 November 2020 the Lithuanian government acted differently than in the first quarantine and tried to ensure access to necessary social and educational services for people with disabilities.
- From the start of the pandemic authorities switched to teleworking during quarantine and kept information about COVID-19 up to date. Information for people with disabilities is provided with accessible methods like telephone lines, videos, simple information using visuals, and concentrated information with most frequent questions in one place. For that purpose, the special site [koronastop.lrv.lt](http://koronastop.lrv.lt) was created and it has concentrated information about COVID-19 in one place. Authorities live press conferences are translated into sign language and also uses subtitles.
- When the first quarantine started people with disabilities were affected by restrictions to health services. As people with disabilities have a lot of health issues accessibility to health services is very important and consultations by phone are not always beneficial. During the second quarantine restrictions on health care services were not so strict and the method of provision of services could be chosen according to criteria that best meets the patient's interests.
- When the pandemic started people with disabilities faced limited access to social and health services. Furthermore, restrictions related to the emergency state and quarantine regime have negatively impacted their financial situation. In order to meet a need, social services municipalities tried to collaborate with NGOs. Some municipalities adopted their own plans for the COVID-19 situation. For example, in response to the effects of the COVID –19 pandemic, Vilnius City Municipality on 5 May 2020 has drawn up a plan of aid measures which focuses on four main areas (“directions”): aid for an individual, aid for business, aid for culture and embracement of opportunities. One of plan measures is assistance with rent for people with disabilities.

### 14.2 Recommendations

A number of agencies have made recommendations with regard to people with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- The Lithuanian Disability Forum (LDF) on 17 March 2020 announced a public statement that was addressed to the Lithuanian government and other public institutions. In the statement, LDF expressed deep concern to see that people with disabilities are not involved in the disaster management and recovery

- planning process.<sup>102</sup> In the statement LDF demanded involvement of people with disabilities and social partners in disaster management and recovery planning.
- The Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of the Republic of Lithuania reported that they received much more than usual applications to start investigations on discrimination.<sup>103</sup> People contacted the Ombudsperson because of signs which were hung on the doors of sales outlets, cafes, and hairdressers. Signs stated that is not recommended to visit place for persons over 60 or with chronic diseases. The Ombudsperson recommended to government that any restrictions on quarantine must be proportional and not violate the Law on Equal Treatment.
  - During the period between lockdowns several inspections were performed in social care homes by the Human Rights Division of the Seimas Ombudsmen's Office. In one of these inspections a man with special needs was found illegally imprisoned at Skemai Social Care Home in Rokiškis district, where he spent two weeks behind the bars.<sup>104</sup> The Government must pay more attention to human rights in institutional care.
  - Seimas Ombudsman A. Normantas acknowledged that the availability of social services in Lithuania is extremely problematic, there is a lack of clear regulation, and municipalities do not collect information on the real need of social services for vulnerable persons. The quality and quantity of social services often depend on the social services policy implemented by the municipality where the service recipient lives, the funds allocated, and the efforts made to provide these services. Moreover, the country does not collect information on the availability of social services, and the elderly or people with disabilities are not visited on a preventive basis.<sup>105</sup>
  - The Director of the Human Rights Monitoring Institute and United Nations Special Rapporteur Prof. Dainius Pūras stated about Lithuanian government policy in order to protect people with disabilities: 'children and adults with disabilities, and in particular mental and intellectual disabilities, suffer disproportionately from this desire to protect them'.<sup>106</sup> Prof. Dainius Pūras predicted that the measures taken by government would do more harm than the pandemic. The Government must find a balance between restrictions and human rights.
  - The Vice Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of the United Nation Jonas Ruškus in his article states: "The COVID-19 pandemic shows that the accommodation of people with disabilities in a social care institution is not only a discriminatory but also fatal measure: people with disabilities are not only accommodated in densely populated buildings, but also are locked there and separated from the health services provided to the entire

<sup>102</sup> LDF, Public statement related COVID-19 disease, 17 March 2020, <https://www.lnf.lt/kreipimasis-del-prevenciniu-ir-pagalbos-priemoniu-uztikrinimo-zmonems-su-negalia-lietuvoje/> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>103</sup> Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of the Republic of Lithuania, press release about discrimination, 5 May 2020, <https://manoteises.lt/straipsnis/vyresnio-amziaus-zmonems-taikomi-karantino-ribojimai-gali-virsti-diskriminacija/> (in Lithuanian).

<sup>104</sup> Seimas Ombudsman public announcement about pre-trial investigation, 4 September 2020, <https://www.lrski.lt/en/naujienos/after-the-inspection-of-the-seimas-ombudsmen-a-pre-trial-investigation-was-launched-in-skemai-social-care-home-and-the-director-of-the-institution-was-removed-from-office/>.

<sup>105</sup> Seimas Ombudsman public announcement about the availability of social services, 4 January 2021, <https://www.lrski.lt/en/naujienos/seimas-ombudsman-it-is-necessary-to-increase-the-availability-of-social-services-in-municipalities-for-persons-with-disabilities-and-the-elderly/>.

<sup>106</sup> Dainius Pūras article about human rights during COVID-19 crisis, 31 May 2020, [https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/nuomones/3/1183032/dainius-puras-ar-galime-susitarti-kad-lietuvoje-gerbsime-zmogaus-teises?fbclid=IwAR0jo6TfDiWMD4rkhZkLK3E7OaUBiP-m\\_Zcy24AvNDqPDHFYW0rVOMcFEXU](https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/nuomones/3/1183032/dainius-puras-ar-galime-susitarti-kad-lietuvoje-gerbsime-zmogaus-teises?fbclid=IwAR0jo6TfDiWMD4rkhZkLK3E7OaUBiP-m_Zcy24AvNDqPDHFYW0rVOMcFEXU) (in Lithuanian).

population.”<sup>107</sup> Jonas Ruškus demanded the government ensures independent living and community based social services for people with disabilities.

### **14.3 Other relevant evidence**

All relevant information was provided in the report.

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<sup>107</sup> Jonas Ruškus article about human rights; <https://manoteises.lt/straipsnis/negalia-yra-zmogaus-teisiu-tema-ka-isipareigojo-musu-valstybe/> (in Lithuanian).



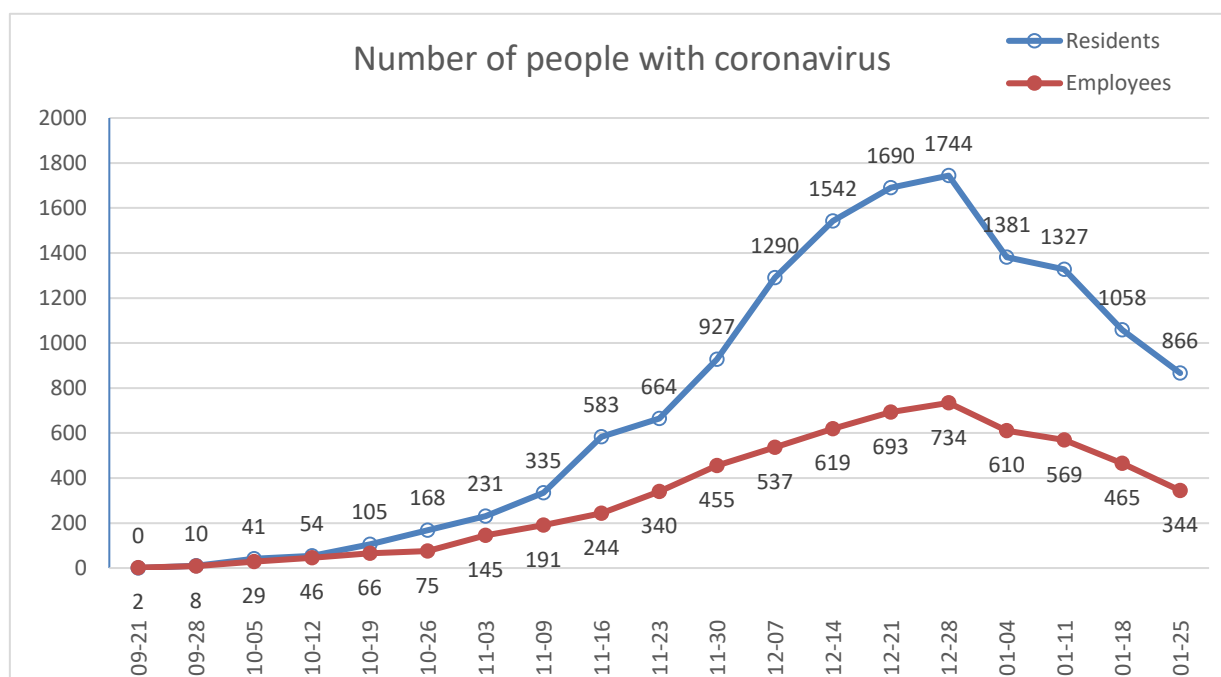
**Annex**

**Table 1: Number of persons who received social services in day centres**

		Number of persons who received social services in day centres   thousand persons				
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Males and females	Elderly (of retirement age) persons	18.3	17.4	16.9	14.3	25.5
	Disabled persons of employable age	13.7	14.7	15.3	12.1	14.4
	Disabled children	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.2	4.4
	Children from families at social risk, total	8.8	8.4	8.4	8.2	13.7
	High-risk persons	6.5	6.4	6.6	9.0	20.5

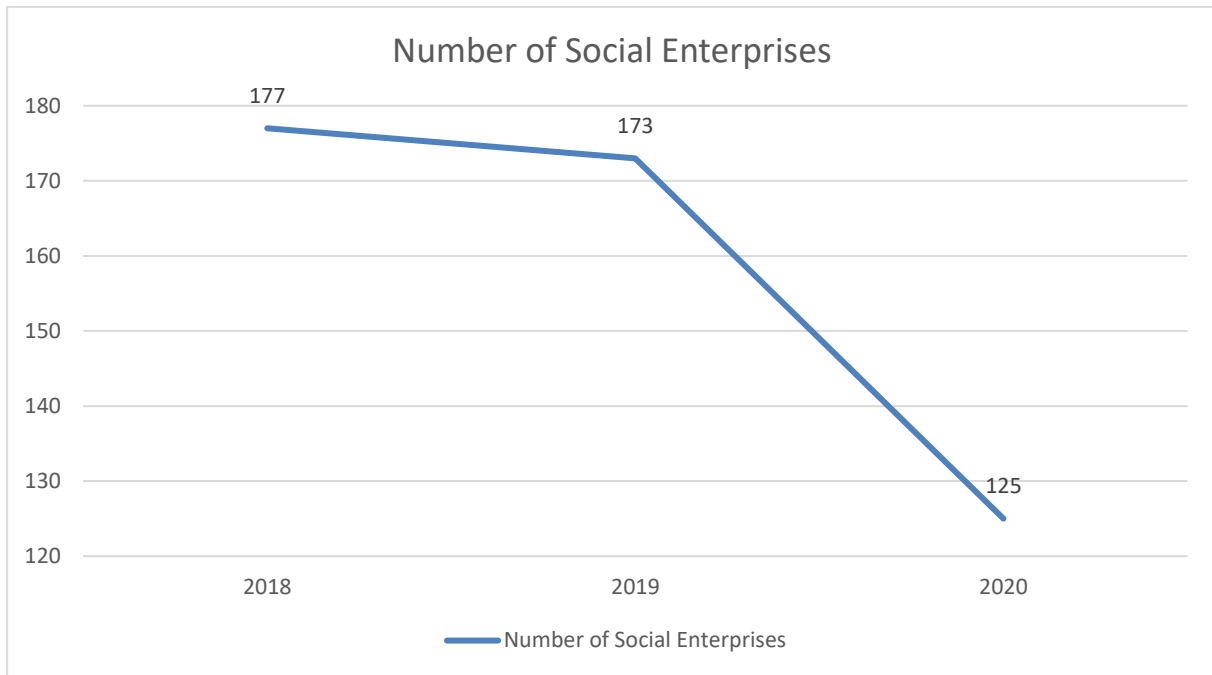
Source: Lithuania official statistic.

**Table 2: Spread of COVID-19 in social care institutions**



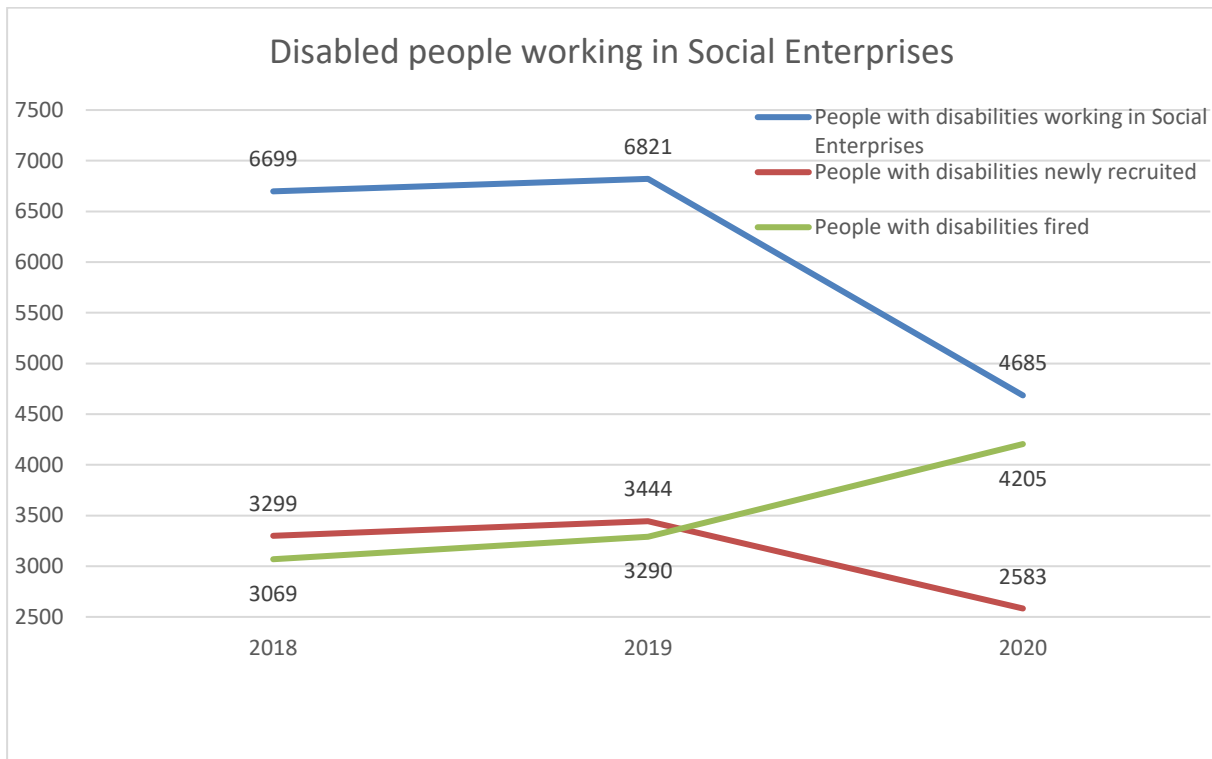
Source: Department of Supervision of Social Services under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

**Table 3: Number of Social Enterprises at the end of period**



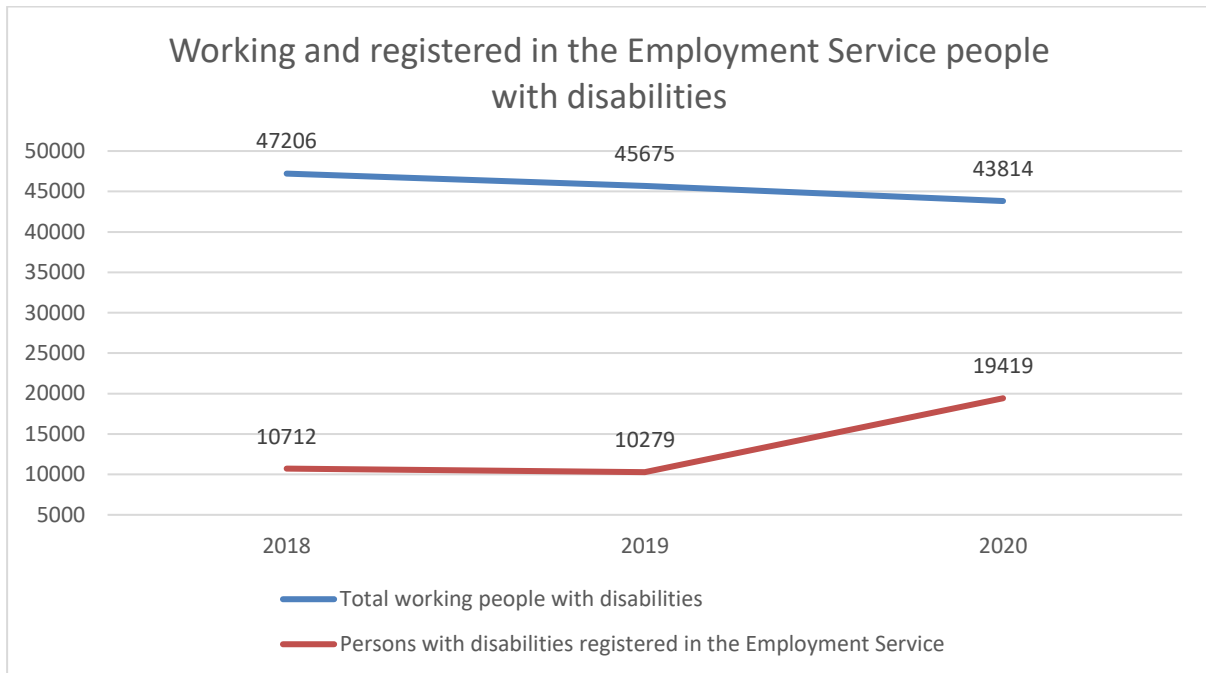
Source: Employment Service Under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, <https://uzt.lt/darbo-rinka/temines-darbo-rinkos-apzvalgos/socialines-imones/>.

**Table 4: Number of people with disabilities working in Social Enterprises at the end of period**



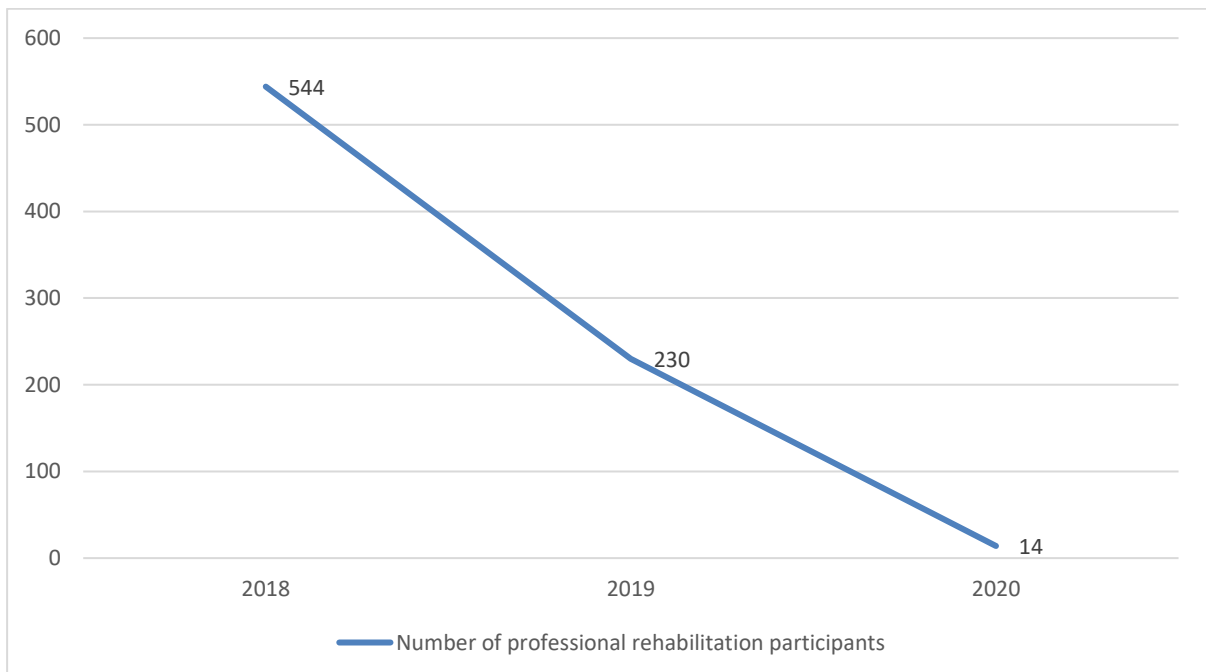
Source: Employment Service Under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, <https://uzt.lt/darbo-rinka/temines-darbo-rinkos-apzvalgos/socialines-imones/>.

**Table 5: Total number of people with disabilities working and registered in the Employment Service**



Source: Employment Service Under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, <https://uzt.lt/darbo-rinka/temines-darbo-rinkos-apzvalgos/socialines-imonės/>.

**Table 6: Number of people with disabilities who participated in rehabilitation programmes**



Source: Employment Service Under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

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