**Information on Persons with Disabilities**

Ministry of Health and Social Protection monitors the policies at the national level for Persons with Disabilities, aiming at social inclusion and integration without distinction for all categories of Persons with Disabilities. Based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Law No. 108/2012, dated 15.11.2012, "On the Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities", have been approved Law No. 93/2014 "On the inclusion and accessibility of persons with disabilities" and the National Plan for Persons with Disabilities 2021-2025 (DCM No. 276, Date 12.05.2021).

After the declaration of State of Natural Disaster on March 24, 2020, immediate measures were taken to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, such as response and emergency services. These measures extended in a specific objective of he National Health Strategy 2021-2030.

The cooperation between the central and local governments for the needy strata was developed through the establishment of the Inter-institutional Working Group for the implementation of VKM no. 236, dated 19.03.2020 "On taking measures to provide housing assistance to the needy, in the conditions of the epidemic caused by COVID-19" to assist the needy categories.

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection, during the Covid-19 Pandemic, has supported the provision of online social services for children with disabilities through an online network of professionals from development and community centers during COVID-19. Children with disabilities have benefited from specialized social services, online services and home visits. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection offered free psychological counseling online, through the green line 0800 40 40.

It is estimated that about 233,000 families in need received food and non-food assistance, such as: providing housing assistance, including home delivery of payments benefited from the social protection program for families on economic assistance and Persons with Disabilities, disabled workers and pensioners.

During the natural disaster situation, measures were taken for the non-interruption of disability payments and disability pensions until the moment of reassessment after the reactivation of the evaluation commissions, which resumed work in September 2020. Preventive measures for social distancing in public residential social care institutions and non-public were aimed at preventing infection by COVID-19 in accordance with Order no. 157, dated 10.03.2020 of the Minister of Health and Social Protection "On taking measures to prevent infection by COVID-19 of beneficiaries of social care services" (as amended).

With Order No. 386, dated 23.06.2020 of the Minister of Health and Social Protection was approved "Protocol for the operation of public and non-public, non-residential centers that provide services for persons with disabilities, during and after the period of the natural disaster, until the end of the measures of physical/social distancing due to the COVID 19 epidemic". This guidance ensures continued support for children/youth with disabilities by providing psycho-social support to parents of children/youth in general and in particular, under conditions of increased stress due to COVID-19 and physical/social distancing measures companion.

The Ministry of Health and Social Protection, following the implementation of the Social Fund program, carried out, in April 2020, the disbursement of funds for 14 municipalities in the amount of 61 ml ALL, thus providing financial support for the establishment or expansion of services, mainly community services for different beneficiary categories. In the conditions of the COVID-19 epidemic, the beneficiary municipalities were asked to enable the provision of family service to the beneficiary individuals/families, taking into account the observance of strict protocols: such as social distancing, the use of protective equipment and other hygiene-sanitary measures. The Social Fund continued to operate from 2019-2022, supporting social services for people with disabilities.

Financial support was offered with the first Social Resistance Package from which persons with 70 thousand people with disabilities benefitted in the amount of ALL 9000 for three months. With the Second Package of Social Resistance approved, disability payments increased by 7.5%. Also, the electricity compensation measure for the category of paraplegics, tetraplegics and blind persons was increased. At the end of 2022, financial support has been distributed to 71 thousand persons with disabilities of 8000 ALL at the end of 2022, as well as 20,000 ALL for women heads of families benefiting from the economic assistance scheme and 8,000 ALL for every other family benefiting from economic assistance.

Regarding access to psycho-social and mental health services, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in cooperation with the WHO and the UNICEF office in Albania conducts online training "Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Situations". These trainings aimed to equip 1800 frontline professionals with a basic understanding of the concepts, knowledge and tools to protect and improve people's mental health and psychosocial well-being during an emergency situation with a focus on the emergency and the post-emergency period.

Access to sign language information during COVID-19 for the hearing impaired community in Albania was accompanied by materials for daily press releases from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection with sign language interpretation. Further will continue the identification of areas of emergency support, with the aim of reducing the impact on the poorest and other vulnerable groups, continues by all actors.