**Permanent Mission of Greece**

 **to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations**

 **in Geneva**

**Replies to the questionnaire on the theme:**

**“Re-imagining services to give effect to the right to live independently and be included in the community for persons with disabilities”**

***Input to question 1***

The principles of non-discrimination, fairness, equal opportunity and secularism are enshrined in the Greek Constitution and all its regulations. In particular, Article 4 of the Constitution states: “1. All Greeks are equal before the law. 2. Greek men and women have equal rights and equal obligations.” Moreover, Article 5 states, “All persons shall have the right to develop their personality freely and to participate in the social, economic and political life of the country” etc. More concretely, the basic principles that govern the provision of services to Persons with Disabilities in Greece are those of inclusion, prevention of institutionalization, elimination of discrimination on the grounds of disability and respect for the personality of persons with disabilities, in order to ensure a quality and adequate standard of living and promote their autonomy and their right to live independently and be an active part of the community.

In the same vein, the provision of free education to all citizens at all levels of the State education system is a principle of the Greek constitution. Education is compulsory from the age of 6 to 15. The aims of the education system, that are clearly set out in the Constitution (Article 16, § 2) are as follows: “Education is public and aims to the moral, intellectual, professional and physical training of all Greeks, the development of a national and a religious consciousness and the creation of free and responsible citizens”. Moreover, in accordance with Law 1566/85 (Article 1, § 1): “The purpose of Primary and Secondary education is to contribute to the overall, harmonious and balanced development of the mental and psychosomatic strengths of all students and to offer them the ability, regardless of gender and origin to become independent personalities and live creatively”.

Specifically, with regard to the education of children with disabilities/and or special education needs:

* Greek constitution (Article 21 § 6) states: “Persons with disabilities have the right to enjoy measures ensuring their independence, occupational inclusion and participation in the social, economic and political life of the country”.
* Law 3699/2008, (Article 1) states: the Greek State undertakes to preserve and invariably enhance the compulsory nature of special education for pupils with disabilities and/or special education needs as an integral part of a free and compulsory education system. It also undertakes to ensure their equal and full participation in society, independent living, self-sufficiency and autonomy, by fully protecting their rights to education as well as to social and professional inclusion.
* Anyone who has the custody of a minor and does not register him/her or supervise his/her attendance at school is punished under Article 458 of the Criminal Code (on violations of administrative provisions).

Regarding applicants for international protection with disabilities and reception conditions for international protection applicants with disabilities, the right to healthcare and support and special procedural guarantees in the asylum procedures, we note the following:

Greece, a Member State of the European Union, is bound by the EU asylum acquis and the Regulations of the European Parliament and of the Council and has transposed in its national legislation the legal instruments that provide the foundation of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The current asylum legal framework, Law 4939/2022 (Code on the reception, international protection and temporary protection), provides that persons with disabilities (including physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments) constitute a specific category of vulnerable persons and their specific situation should be taken into account by the authorities.

Identification, assessment, and adequate support are the three pillars of vulnerability case management. More specifically, following the arrival of a third country national or a stateless person in the country and his/her admittance in the Reception and Identification Center, a medical screening takes place, where the specific needs of the person are identified and assessed. In practice, different professionals are involved in identifying persons with disabilities including healthcare and social workers, as well as clinical psychologists. The reception of persons with special reception needs is a primary concern and such reception is specifically designed to meet their needs. Dependent adult applicants for international protection with special reception needs are accommodated in specific and accessible accommodation facilities together with close adult relatives responsible for them whether by law or by the practice. Specific provisions regulate the reception conditions of minors and unaccompanied minors with disabilities. The necessary medical and psychosocial assistance and support is provided throughout the duration of their reception. Their right to asylum and their efficient participation in the asylum procedures are ensured with the provision of special procedural guarantees and adequate support, including sufficient time, in order to create the conditions necessary for presenting the elements needed to substantiate their application for international protection. Basic assistive devices such as wheelchairs, canes, ramps and crutches are available in reception and detention centers, as well as the asylum offices. When granted the status, beneficiaries of international protection with disabilities are provided under the same eligibility conditions as Greek nationals adequate healthcare alongside with other rights such as social welfare, access to accommodation, education, integration programmes and employment. If not granted the status, a third-country national’s physical state or mental capacity may be considered as a potential reason for postponing removal, in accordance with the State’s international obligations and the principle of non-refoulement. The special needs of vulnerable persons are taken into account when removal has been postponed and these persons are entitled to certain rights including healthcare.

The Reception and Identification Service and the Asylum Service deliver regularly to their personnel trainings with respect to the reception of vulnerable persons, asylum interview techniques for vulnerable persons, international human rights law, and the Union asylum acquis. It should be noted though that training on the needs of people with disabilities often falls under the wider umbrella of training on vulnerable groups. Additionally, two tools are in place to help the personnel in their daily job, namely, the Tool for Identification of Persons with Special Needs (IPSN) and the Special needs and vulnerability assessment tool (SNVA).

***Input to question 2***

In 1992, Greece ratified the Convention on The Rights of the Child (Law 2101/1992). The articles of the Convention underpin Greece’s approach to promoting children’s wellbeing as described in a broad range of legislative texts. Similarly, in May 2012, Greece ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Law 4074/2012). Greek legislation reflects the objectives of this Convention especially after the adoption of Law 3699/2008 on special education and education for persons with disability or special education needs. This law codified and updated the laws, which had previously regulated special education; it is driven by the internationally recognized principle ‘a school for all’ and the EU principles on inclusion and equal opportunities. More, specifically, as part of its commitments under articles 7 and 24 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Greek Government is committed to inclusive education for disabled children and young people and progressive removal of barriers to learning, and participation in mainstream schools.

Indeed, in the Greek educational system a range of measures to meet the needs of all children, including students with disabilities and/or special educational needs exist. For example, Law 3699/2008 (Article 6, § 1) states that the education of students with disabilities should primarily take place within mainstream schools. Pupils with special educational needs may receive education in the following mainstream settings:

a) classes in mainstream schools, supported by the class teacher, who is also supported by the Coordinators of Educational Matters and by the Centres of Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counseling and Support (henceforth KEDASY, as they are known in Greece),

b) classes in mainstream schools with Parallel support provided by qualified special education teachers,

c) specially organized and staffed inclusion classes, operating in mainstream schools~~.~~

Only in exceptional cases, pupils with disabilities that are not able to follow the education programme of the mainstream schools or the inclusion classes are referred to the special education needs units.

In all the above instances, parents are free to choose the school of their child, taking into consideration the relevant recommendations of KEDASY.

Moreover, Law 4368/2016 (Article 82): article 82 stresses the need for educating all students in mainstream classes along with their nondisabled peers. It states that the main aim of the inclusion classes is full inclusion of children with special education needs and/or disabilities in the school environment~~.~~

In this context, teachers of inclusive classes support the pupils within the mainstream classroom context, in cooperation with the class teachers, targeting the differentiation of activities and educational practices and the adaptation of the educational material and the educational environment. Support is provided on a one-to-one basis, in a separate room, only if this is imposed by the special needs of the pupils. In this case, the main target of the teaching intervention is future full inclusion of the child in the mainstream class.

Moreover, the same law promotes the implementation of coeducation programmes between special and mainstream schools. As it states, the main targets of the coeducation programmes include the promotion of inclusion and equal opportunities in education, the development of the cognitive, learning, affective and social skills of children with disabilities and/or special needs as well as the development of awareness in mainstream education pupils as regards issues pertaining to human rights, respect for diversity and human dignity.

Overall, flexible individual support is provided through:

* The establishment of inclusive classes in mainstream schools at primary, secondary and vocational education level (Law 3699)
* The provision of one-to-one support services (“parallel support”) in mainstream classrooms (Law 3699)
* The establishment of free services for assessment and counselling, with an inclusive orientation (Law 4823/2021)
* The provision and implementation of Individual Education Plans (Law 3699)
* The provision of relevant in service training for teachers and other participants with special focus on issues of differentiation and accessibility
* The design of accessible educational and instructional material
* Provision of school nurses on a one-to-one basis (4186/2013) and special support

staff (Law 3699/2013)

* Tuition at home (Law 4186/2013, Ministerial Decision 279922)
* Participation in Co-education programmes (par. 3a, article 82, Law 4368/2016).

Hence, the overall principles and objectives have not changed. However, the way services are provided and the general perception of disability at the policy-making level have now focused on the social model, with a simultaneous move away from the medical-centric perception of disability.

***Input to question 3***

The objectives of the provision of services to persons with disabilities have been captured and specialized in individual actions in the National Action Plan for the Rights of persons with disabilities, which constitutes an "umbrella" of policy, which tries to cover all aspects of social and economic life, with the aim to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities and the enjoyment of all the advantages that derive from it.

During recent years, Greece has made considerable progress in addressing the right of children with disabilities and special educational needs for an equal access to an inclusive, quality education. In this context, several education policies and actions are planned and pursued consistently in line with the Convention of the Rights of the Child, article 24 of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with disabilities as well as the Global Education 2030 Agenda led by UNESCO. These education policies aim at the advancement of justice and equality through our education system and actively promote inclusive education, lifelong learning and training at all levels.

Two very important and pioneering initiatives that are currently being implemented and aimed at promoting equal access for persons with disabilities to the educational, work and social arena are the following:

A) the National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is coordinated by the Minister of State

B) the Strategic Action Plan for The Equal Access of Persons with Disabilities to Education, coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

In the field of education, both plans aim at contributing to:

a) the removal of barriers to learning and the creation of safe learning environment that can meet the diverse needs of children and young persons with disabilities,

b) putting into practice the constitutional requirement that guarantees that Persons with Disabilities "have the right to enjoy provisions that ensure their autonomy, professional integration and participation in the social, economic and political life of the country".

In other words, the National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Strategic Action Plan for the Equal Access of Persons with Disabilities constitute a ‘roadmap’ that provides a clear, coherent and systematic framework for action mainly for the period 2020-2023. Indicatively, we mention that the Strategic Action Plan comprises a series of operational objectives, which are further analyzed in projects and actions, with a clear implementation deadline in all key areas of intervention. Indicatively we mention the following key operational objectives:

1. Developing and supervising a Strategic Action Plan for the Equal Access of Persons with Disabilities to a quality, inclusive education.

2. Reviewing the current legal framework

3. Allocating adequate human and material resources

4. Improving environmental and learning accessibility, with benefits and adaptations to the environment, assistive technology, educational materials and social life in all educational structures of all levels of education

5. Strengthening early childhood intervention

6. Strengthening Vocational Education

7. Ensuring equal access to Lifelong Learning and Higher Education

8. Ensuring equal treatment of Persons with Disabilities in Higher Education

9. Developing pilot programs with regard to specific issues

10. Expanding the statistics data collection

11. Safeguarding equal access to education for students belonging to vulnerable social groups, e.g. refugee-immigrants with disabilities, Roma with disabilities

12. Ensuring the right to free expression/raising the voice of persons with disabilities.

With regard to the above strategic targets, Law preparatory committees have been set up to conclude laws in all areas anticipated in the Action Plan (primary and secondary education, life-long learning, vocational training and tertiary education). At the same time, several other committees consisting of representatives of several Ministries and Bodies function at different levels of the system in order to safeguard the implementation of the Plan (e.g. Physical Accessibility Committee, Digital Accessibility Committee, a Committee to implement a plan for the provision of assessment services and supportive interventions to vulnerable social groups etc.).

In addition, a Committee for Supervision, Monitoring and Assessment of the implementation procedures of the Strategic Action Plan has been set up, which meets on a monthly basis and monitors the evolution of the sub-axes of the Strategic Plan.

Towards this direction, several targets have been achieved as part of the process of increasing the capacity of schools to respond to the diversity of needs of all learners. Indicatively we mention:

First, the introduction of a new law on education (Law 4823/2021) which, among others:

* Promotes inclusive education as the main target of the educational system. Ιn the Law, inclusive education is defined as: “The educational approach, which takes into account the needs of the heterogeneity of the student population and aims to remove barriers to learning and ensure equal access to the educational system of all students, including students with disabilities and special educational needs”.
* Reforms the supportive educational structures with an inclusive orientation. Particular mention should be made to the fact that this law reformed the Centers for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support, the aims of which are: the identification of institutional (and not just individual) barriers to learning at all levels, the provision of psychosocial support to all pupils, including pupils with disabilities as well as the capacity building of mainstream schools so that they respond more effectively to all learners’ diverse needs.

Moreover, the same law further promoted the reorganization of the institutions of School Network of Education and Support (henceforth SDEY, as they are known in Greece) and Interdisciplinary Support Committee (henceforth EDY, as it is known in Greece), which were renamed and reestablished with a more inclusive orientation.

* The provision of wide ranging teacher training to 25,000 teachers in differentiated instruction as well as the provision of Introductory training to 11,700 newly appointed teachers with an inclusive focus.
* The elaboration of 166 new general education curricula which will be accompanied by inclusive education guides.
* The development of an Accessibility Plan which is currently being drafted by the physical and digital accessibility committees foreseen by Law 3699/2008.
* The equipment of the special schools with technological equipment and tools with the support of the National Reform Trust
* The elaboration of an Action Plan for early educational intervention in mandatory pro-school education
* the creation of a multidimensional legislative framework capable of promoting the inclusive goal in higher education (Law 4957/2022 )
* The implementation of a wide ranging pilot program for the creation of inclusive school communities within the context of the program ‘Implementation of the European Child Guarantee- Promoting Inclusive Education in Greece Phase II’, which has been selected for funding by the European Commission Reform Directorate.

In addition to the above, in terms of financing, in recent years there has been a constant increase in the expenditure for pupils with disabilities via:

* The increase in recruitment of special needs teachers and special support staff in special and general education. And more recently, the appointment of 4,500 teachers as permanent staff in special and inclusive education.
* The establishment of 570 new inclusive classes in mainstream schools of primary and secondary education. Within the following two months, more than one hundred inclusion classes will have been established, as the procedure is underway.
* The development of accessible digital material that can be used by students with disabilities in mainstream settings.

Moreover, in recent years the following innovative actions have been accomplished:

* The systematic collection of statistics concerning pupils with disabilities and/or special educational needs who attend mainstream schools as part of the transnational action of statistics collection on inclusive education, organized by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, of which Greece is an active member.
* The first systematic attempts to record refugee children with disabilities and/or special educational needs who stay in hosting facilities with a view to placing them in appropriate school settings, in cooperation with the Department for the Coordination and Monitoring of the Refugee Education of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs as well as the Ministry of Migration and Asylum.
* The design of a Website for Special and Inclusive Education that informs parents and teachers about legislation and all relevant issues. The development of the site is in the pipeline.

***Input to question 4***

Services for persons with disabilities are provided by State, regional and local authorities, as well as by bodies and associations representing persons with disabilities. The mix is ​​not expected to change, at least in the foreseeable future.

The provision of free education to all citizens at all levels of the State education system is a principle of the Greek Constitution. More specifically, the Constitution (Article 16, § 2) states that: “Education is public and aims to the moral, intellectual, professional and physical training of all Greeks, the development of a national and a religious consciousness and the creation of free and responsible citizens”. In this context, education for students with disabilities is provided by public schools and psychosocial support is provided by public support services.

Students with disabilities or/and special education needs can also be enrolled in private schools, on the same grounds. More specifically, according to par.2 art 71, Law 4485/2017:

 “Students with disabilities or/and special education needs can be enrolled and attend private schools on the same grounds, prerequisites and reasonable accommodations that apply to public mainstream schools of primary and secondary education. Refusal to enroll students on account of their disability or special education needs is forbidden”.

***Input to question 5***

The programmes are primarily funded either by the State budget or by resources from the EU Structural Funds and - lately - the Recovery and Resilience Facility. However, there are some Legal Entities of Private Law that provide services for persons with disabilities, which are only partially subsidized by the State.

The provision of free education to all citizens at all levels of the State education system is a principle of the Greek Constitution. Public schools and educational institutions are maintained by the State. More specifically, education is funded primarily through the State budget and resources of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. The State budget consists of two parts:

* the Regular Budget covering operating expenses
* the Public Investment Budget that ﬁnances the Public Investment Program (henceforth PIP) for the country's development policy with projects that contribute to its growth and modernization on a long-term basis, covering infrastructure costs (buildings, equipment, co-ﬁnanced actions, etc.). The PIP is divided into the national part ﬁnanced by purely national resources and the co-ﬁnanced part ﬁnanced by national and EU resources or other organisms. Law 4635/2019 established the National Development Program for the monitoring and control of the interventions financed from the national resources of the PIP. The Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs prepares the Sectoral Development Program in its area of responsibility and thus can plan on time the projects that correspond to its policies as well as finance them. The Sectoral Development Program of the Ministry was approved and activated on July 26, 2021 and its programming period has duration of five years.

The funding of special –inclusive education is associated mainly with the diagnosis of pupils and their individualized needs. In this context, eligibility of support in education is connected with an official decision of special educational needs.

***Input to question 6***

Service providers funded by the State are paid through general grants. Legal Entities of Private Law which provide community-based services and are partially funded by the State receive funds by other sources as well (e.g. donations) to cover their operation and wage costs. No changes are anticipated regarding this methodology.

Regarding education, the following services for assessment, counselling and support are community based:

a) Centres for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support (KEDASY).

b) Interdisciplinary Support Committee EDY (as already mentioned above).

The above services are free and maintained by the State.

***Input to question 7***

The general principles are reflected in laws and specialized in Ministerial Decisions. Each body draws up its own operating organization, which must be in line with the principles reflected in the relevant laws. Sanctions are foreseen in case of violation of these principles. Staff trainings are conducted whenever deemed necessary.

This applies also to the education system which, inter alia, is governed by:

1. Laws, Presidential Decrees, Ministerial Decisions and Circulars
2. Service standards and guides (e.g. Inclusive Education Guide)
3. Staff training, which is provided by:
* The Institute of Educational Policy, the Centres for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support (KEDASY)
* School counsellors
* Universities

***Input to question 8***

Articles 32-39 of Law 4837/2021 introduced the service of Personal Assistant for Persons with Disabilities in Greece. Personal Assistance is a key service to ensure deinstitutionalization and independent living and prevent the marginalization of persons with disabilities. Joint Ministerial Decision no 28458/23 March 2022, the terms and conditions as well as the necessary procedures and all related technical issues for the implementation of the pilot programme were defined and regulated. The pilot application of the service will be implemented in two phases, within selected geographical areas of the country. The first phase, which will be implemented in the Region of Attica, started on April 14, 2022 with the opening of the applications platform. The application period ended on June 26, 2022 and a total of 2,040 applications were submitted. The training of the candidate personal assistants and their registration in the relevant register will follow. The second phase will start in 2023 and it will be implemented in other Regions of the country which will be decided in due course. The funds needed to finance the pilot programme are covered by the budget of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the EU resources of the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

In August 2021, a new Law on education was introduced (Law 4823/2021) which, among others promotes inclusive education as the main target of the educational system and reforms the supportive educational structures with an inclusive orientation. Particular mention should be made to the fact that this Law reformed the Centers for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support , the aims of which are: the identification of institutional (and not just individual) barriers to learning at all levels, the provision of psychosocial support to all pupils, including pupils with disabilities as well as the capacity building of mainstream schools so that they respond more effectively to all learners’ diverse needs. Moreover, the same law further promoted the reorganization of the institutions of School Network of Education and Support and Interdisciplinary Support Committee (EDY), which were renamed and reestablished with a more inclusive orientation. The interdisciplinary Education and Support Committees are meant to promote the transformation of special schools into support structure. They operate in each school unit belonging to School Network of Education and Support as a competent body for the educational evaluation and support of pupils and the overall support of the school community. They have the following responsibilities:

- evaluate the difficulties and the educational and psycho-social obstacles to learning pupils face

- refer them to the Centres for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support (KEDASY) in case they keep having difficulties despite having been supported within school and attended a short-term intervention program

- specify the core axes of the Individualized Educational Plan of the pupil as they have been defined by the Centres for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support (KEDASY) and monitor its implementation in cooperation with the pupil’ s teachers

- support the school teachers to respond to pupils’ heterogeneity with pedagogical methods, such as differentiated instruction and other alternative forms of learning. They also support the whole school community on issues such as school drop-out, school violence and crisis situations

- organize special training programs for parents actions to raise awareness on relevant issues

- cooperate with the Municipality’s psycho-social and health services or the relevant judicial authorities in case of mental health problems or child abuse or parental neglect.

***Input to question 9***

In principle, the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs recognizes that accessibility to the entire education system and the implementation of reasonable accommodations is a vital precondition for students with disabilities so that they can fully and equally participate in education. In this context, Law 3699/08 provides that schools should ensure full accessibility for pupils with disabilities and special educational needs to the infrastructure (buildings, technical and electronic material), the services and the goods which the schools provide. In the same vein, the necessity of the introduction and implementation of the principles of "Design for All" in order to ensure the accessibility of persons with disabilities is mandatory both with respect to the design of an educational program and educational material, and the choice of any type of equipment (conventional and electronic).

With regard to digital accessibility, it should be noted that the key objective to the implementation of the Ministry’s inclusive education strategy is to make books and other types of learning resources available to all students in a readable and comprehensible format. Moreover, specific reasonable accommodations attending to the needs of individual children are also provided alongside addressing the general accessibility of schools.

In the course of the last years there have been important steps towards this direction.

Indicatively, we mention that the Institute of educational policy has up to now adapted and delivered several school books and teacher books in Accessible Digital Educational Material catering for various categories of disabled pupils. The Manuals mentioned have been delivered by the Computer Technology Institute and Press "Diophantus” and are made available to schools nationwide after application and depending on the needs of the school’s students. They are also available in digital form on the Institute of Educational Policy website.

Apart from the books delivered, educational software has also been developed for students with hearing, impairments, visual impairments, limited mobility, medium or mild mental retardation, ADHD disorders, autism and stammering. In total there are 38 different types of purpose-made software available.

Moreover, teacher training is available for Special Education teachers and Counselors as well as professionals in evaluation and support services in the new accessible educational material.

For reasons of better dissemination, a platform for “digital content accessibility” for students with disabilities has been developed, integrating all education material that has been produced. Relevant educational material that has been previously developed has also been archived. The collection of educational material and software produced was made in the context of the NSRF Act "Design and development of accessible educational and sensory material for students with disabilities - Horizontal Action".

Overall, the following were recorded:

• 12 Differentiated Interdisciplinary Unified Curricula Frameworks (DIUCF) and Curricula --- for Students with Disabilities

• 70 educational software programs

• 34 training presentations

• 19 guides on specific disability issues

In this platform one can also find the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, accessible in the following formats:

* 1. Greek Sign Language (GSL)
	2. Audio format by a native speaker of Greek
	3. Three (3) different font sizes
	4. Printed format in the Greek Braille Code
	5. Easy to Read format

Finally, developing standards and guidelines for the conversion of printed material into accessible formats and languages is also available.

It should be mentioned that many of the above have been implemented in terms of the Action: “Design and Development of Accessible Educational and Instructional Materials for Students with Disabilities - Horizontal Action” which is financed and supported by the Operational Program “EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING 2007-2013". The Action would not be so well implemented if it weren’t for the contribution of persons with disabilities. For example, the audio form, all forms of Braille and the production in Greek Sign Language was conducted by the National Association for the Blind and Deaf natural signers of Greek Sign Language (GSL).

This action is in progress and producing more software. In addition to all above, with regard to the blind students, the Computer Technology Institute and Press "Diophantus”, following subsidy by the Centre of Education, has transcribed and printed all school books of primary and secondary education in Braille code.

In the same vein, as regards the visually impaired students, all schoolbooks from Primary up to Upper Secondary School have been adapted. Students may choose the font that suits their needs (104 schoolbooks for the Primary School, 72 for the Lower High School, 98 for the Upper Secondary School = a total of 274 schoolbooks are available). This has become possible with the collaboration of the Institute of Educational Policy and the Computer Technology Institute and Press "Diophantus”.

Moreover, the Action “Teaching European Sign Languages as a first language” is in progress and aims at developing bilingual programmes in order to support the literacy of deaf and hard of hearing students (It includes teacher training for teachers teaching European sign languages as a first language (Language Acquisition) to students who are deaf or hard of hearing).

In addition, the Institute of Educational Policy developed in 2015 the first multimedia material for the teaching of the Greek Sign Language for kindergarten and the first and second grade of Primary school.

Last, but not least for the effective education of students with disabilities, the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs grants technical assistance free of charge, according to a recommendation of the Centers for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support on condition that they are not provided by the students' insurance institution.

***Input to question 10***

Such programmes are aimed exclusively at persons with disabilities while their families are supported indirectly, e.g. through financial aid schemes, personal assistant, caregiver allowance, Centers for Creative Occupation for Children with Disabilities, accommodation in a Supported Living Home, Day Care Centers.

According to Law 4823/2021, among the responsibilities of the Centers for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support are:

The provision of counselling support to students’ parents and guardians in relation to issues of school learning support, study organization and cooperation with the school unit.

In addition, students’ parents or guardians:

* have close cooperation with teachers and in in this vein regular meetings are foreseen
* are invited to the meetings of the Interdisciplinary Support Committees and especially to those concerning the decisions to refer their children for Evaluation to the Centers for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support.
* participate in the formation of the Individualized Education Program
* provide opinions on any other case which is deemed appropriate.

***Input to question 11***

According to Law 3699/2008, as amended by Law 4823/2021, educational and psychosocial assessment reports as well as the basic frameworks of individualized educational plans are devised for each student with disabilities by the Centers for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support, following interdisciplinary assessment of their educational needs.

The assessment reports describe the specific educational and psychosocial needs of all students as well as their aptitudes and interests and propose the appropriate school setting. These reports also identify any reasonable accommodations and specific support that may be required for each individual student, including the provision of assistive compensatory aids, specific learning materials in alternative/accessible formats, modes and means of communication and communication aids and assistive technology. Support can also be granted by a qualified special needs teacher on a one-to-one basis or in an inclusive class. Assessment reports also address the transitions experienced by the learners from separated to mainstream settings and between levels of education. Assessment reports are accompanied by the basic axes of individualized educational support.

It should be stressed that students with disabilities as well as their parents have a say over the drafting of their own individualized educational plans along with the interdisciplinary team of the Centre of Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support. In this sense, the children co design the educational plan that fits them best, along with parents and experts. The specification of the basic axes of the Individualized Plans are further analyzed in short-term and long- term goals at school level by the Interdisciplinary Support Committee or by the schools Educational Support team. The members of the educational support team along with the class teachers are responsible for the effective implementation of the goals of the Individualized Educational Plan.

In case that the parents of the child do not agree with the assessment report they have the rights to appeal to an Appeal Assessor committee of Interdisciplinary assessment. During this process, parents can select an expert to take part and express their opinion in the assessment procedure.

Meanwhile, the deinstitutionalization programme provides for the preparation of an individual plan for each beneficiary, by an interdisciplinary committee. In addition, in the Personal Assistant programme, the disabled person him/herself can choose the person who they wish to provide the service for them, as well as guide them, according to their own needs and wishes.

Within the Ministry of Justice, the following working groups have been established and operate:

- Working Group on improving accessibility to judicial buildings-ensuring full accessibility to judicial buildings.

- Working Group for the revision of the framework of legal guardianship.

- Working Group on the harmonization of provisions and terminology used in the Penal Code, the Civil Code, The Code of Administrative Procedure and procedural codes, with the methodological approach of the UN Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities and the drafting of a report along with conclusions.

- Working Group to review the conditions for providing legal aid to low-income citizens with the aim of introducing positive measures for people with disabilities.

***Input to question 12***

Persons with disabilities can choose their own personal assistant, among those who are registered in the relevant registry. Furthermore, they can choose to apply for accommodation in a Supported Living Home. They can decorate their residence according to their wishes and they can choose to devolve up to 80% of their disability allowance to the Home if they wish.

Several legal and regulatory provisions make it compulsory to give families a role at every stage of education and schooling. Most importantly, the parents' voice is heard granted that:

-Parents cooperate with the educators of both Centers for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support and schools in order to develop the Individualized Educational Plan for their child (Law 4823/2021).

-They are free to choose the school of their child, taking into consideration the relevant recommendations of Centers for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support KEDASY.

All parents participate equally in the procedures of the parents' association. In general and special education schools, they also have the right to get elected as members in the main governance body of administration of the parents' association, that is the administrative council. According to Law 1566/1985, the members of the latter take part in the school teachers' board which is a broader governance body of the school unit. In particular, school teachers, members of the administrative council of the parents' association, representatives of school communities and a representative of the local authority participate in the school teachers' board. Within this framework and according to Law 48237/2021, parents give their opinion regarding the planning and evaluation of the educational work in the school unit.

***Input to question 13***

As mentioned above, at a regional level, regional operational programs are implemented by the Regional Authorities for the funding of specific infrastructure projects.

“School Committees” are established at local level.  They are municipal or community legal entities entrusted with the management of appropriations allocated by the Ministry of Interior to cover operational costs in Primary Schools.  With regard to maintenance and repair expenses for school buildings, the Ministry of Interior distributes funds to Municipalities, which in turn, depending on the size of the action undertaken, either manage funds themselves or grant them to the school boards following the decision of the Municipal Council, so that resources are distributed on a needs basis.

The allocation by the Ministry of Interior to the municipalities takes place by taking the following criteria into account, i.e. the number of classes in school buildings by 30% and the number of pupils by 70%.  The funds allocated by the Ministry of Interior for the transfer of pupils are also managed at regional level.

Hence, overall, the State covers a portion of the cost of accommodation in some cases and grants disability benefits.

***Input to question 14***

As mentioned, the funding of special –inclusive education is associated mainly with the diagnosis of pupils and their individualized needs. In this context, eligibility of support in education is connected with an official decision of special educational needs.

Pupils with special educational needs may receive different types of support:

b) Parallel support provided by qualified special education teachers

c) Support in specially organized and staffed inclusion classes, operating in mainstream schools

d) Support provided in special schools by specialized support personnel

1. Support provided by school nurses or special support staff on a one-to-one basis

e) Home Tuition

1. Assessment and psychosocial support by free services for assessment and counselling
2. Accessible educational and instructional material
3. Supportive technology and tools.

Funds for the above provisions is mainly distributed by the Ministry of Interior in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs mainly to municipalities, which in turn, depending on the size of the action undertaken either manage funds themselves or grant them to the school boards following the decision of the Municipal Council, so that resources are distributed on the basis of needs.

Especially with regard to the supply and provision of the pupils' aids, a tender process is held by the Department of Technical Services of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, following a call for proposals.

***Input to question 17***

There is no central system for data collection at the moment. However, most entities collect their own data, which mainly concern the type of disability, age, gender and type of care they receive.

For example, since 2017 the Directorate of Education has launched a systematic collection of statistics concerning pupils with disability and/or special educational needs who attend both mainstream and special schools through the “Myschool” Platform of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. More specifically the following data is available:

a) the number of students who attend mainstream or special education schools and are supported by an inclusion class or parallel support or a school nurse or special support staff or a special assistant or receive home tuition. Regarding the level of analysis, it should be noted that the data are given at the level of country, Region, Directorate, type of school unit and special educational context, school and class. Additionally, all relevant data can be given broken down by gender and level of education.

b) the number of School Units for Special Education and inclusion departments. Data on the number of such structures and frameworks can be given at the level of country, Region, Directorate and type of school unit. In addition, data can be provided on the number of teachers and specialist teaching and specialist support staff working in the specific contexts.

c) with the staff working in structures and contexts of special education and inclusive education. As for the level of analysis, these data can be provided at the level of country, Region, Directorate, by type of school unit and specialty.

Additionally, quantitative and qualitative data have been collected in recent years by the Directorate of Special Education, in collaboration with the Independent Department of Refugee Education and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum and in relation to refugee students with disabilities and their education.

In addition to the above, it should be underlined that, as foreseen by the National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Strategic Plan for Equal Access to Education, the immediate priorities of the Directorate of Special Education include, inter alia, further upgrading of data collected by ‘Myschool’ regarding students with disabilities and /or special educational needs. Progress has already been made in this direction:

* by entering the type of disability parameter in the data collected
* by systematizing the way statistical data is collected for trainees in Lifelong Learning and students with disabilities at Universities.

***Input to question 18***

Standards are reflected in laws and ministerial decisions as well as in the operating regulations of each institution. They focus mainly on respecting the life and dignity of the beneficiaries and ensuring the provision of services under the best possible conditions.

***Input to question 19***

Yes, it is possible to disqualify those providers in breach of the standards from competing for future State support.

***Input to question 20***

The development of a high quality equitable education system has been one of the central missions the Greek State has undertakenthroughout the years. This is being reflected on a series of measures that have been taken in this direction. However, more recently the recognition of inclusion as the key to achieving the right to education has become even more prominent due to certain reasons:

1. Statistical data indicate a dramatic increase in the number of students with disability as well as students belonging to other socially vulnerable groups that attend mainstream schools
2. A number of European and international level recommendations, including the CRPD Recommendations and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, indicate that promoting inclusive education is necessary for the country’s sustainable growth
3. Empirical and research evidence indicates that despite the steps already taken, there are still various challenges. To mention just a few:
	* At policy-level, until recently there was no comprehensive educational sector plan with specific indicators and time frames that targeted inclusive education
	* At middle-level, a major barrier has been the fact that a rigid focus on diagnostic (health/medical) categorisations of “disability” in practice has undermined the focus on the inclusion of ALL students
	* At micro-level, there still is a mismatch between the discourse on inclusion and its implementation and a lack of confidence among teachers in their effort to respond to the diversity of needs of all learners.

Along with the above considerations, in September 2019 the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reviewed the educational policy of Greece regarding its compatibility with the Convention of the Rights of Students with Disabilities. Recalling its General Comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education, and taking into account Sustainable Development Goal 4, the Committee recommended that Greece increase its efforts to guarantee inclusive education. In particular the Committee recommended that Greece:

* + 1. Adopt and implement a coherent strategy on inclusive education in the mainstream educational system
		2. Ensure the accessibility of school and university environments, in line with the Convention, by promoting universal design, the provision of specific measures and individualized support, such as accessible and adapted materials, inclusive curricula, inclusive information and communication technologies for pupils and students with disabilities, and digital pedagogy
		3. Immediately ensure access to formal education for all asylum-seeking refugees and migrant children with disabilities, and for Roma children with disabilities
		4. Allocate effective and sufficient financial and material resources and adequately and regularly trained personnel, including persons with disabilities, to effectively guarantee inclusive education
		5. Incorporate inclusive education training into higher education curricula for trainee teachers, and into training programmes for current teaching staff, with an adequate budget.

In the light of the above concerns and recommendations, in 2019 a special technical group was formulated which consisted of members of the political leadership and competent officials of all Ministries. The committee reflected on the current situation in the Public Administration -at all fields of the State- and elaborated an extensive series of proposals aimed at establishing a National Action Plan for Disability. These processes resulted in the formulation of the first National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, drawn up under the coordination of the Minister of State. The National Action Plan was formulated in accordance with the United Nations guidelines, and finalized in consultation with the disability movement and civil society. The National Action Plan is currently being implemented and provides a wide array of actions in the field of education for students with disabilities and/or special educational needs.

Following the finalization of the National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Strategic Action Plan for the Equal Access to Education of Persons with Disabilities was formulated by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. The Strategic Action Plan, which was an extension of the National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, comprises 13 operational objectives, with a clear implementation deadline in key areas of inclusive policy and practice.

The above two Action Plans constitute a ‘roadmap’ that provides a clear, coherent and systematic framework for action on issues related to the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, mainly for the period 2020 - 2023. Therefore, their implementation is an absolute priority for the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs.

***Input to question 21***

In light of the pandemic’s aftermath, more emphasis was given to the digitalization of the relevant procedures. Moreover, there have been recruitments of support staff in many institutions, as well as increased funding for the purchase of equipment that will ensure the safety of services.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs has sought to be highly responsive to the changing needs of students, educators, system leaders and its partners. In doing so, several emergency measures have been implemented in response to crisis situation as early as March 2020. These included initial actions for learners with special educational needs and inclusive education. Indicatively, we mention the following types of measures which have been adopted as part of the emergency measures for Covid-19:

• Major investments have been implemented in the digital transformation of the education system and the upgrading of the digital skills of all students and staff, building on the universal implementation of synchronous (and asynchronous) distance learning (e.g. through the creation of innovative educational platforms

* Free Psychological e-counselling has been provided by the Centers for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support and Counselling Support for all students, including vulnerable learners, parents and/or teachers
* Additional psychologists have been appointed in mainstream schools to provide for the psychosocial health of the students
* Special provision has been provided to learners who belonged to the most vulnerable groups (e.g. learners with chronic illnesses have been provided with the opportunity to attend a specially designed digital school, special provisions have been taken for refugees with disabilities etc.)

• Several measures have been implemented to compensate for learning disadvantages (e.g. specific financial resources for computers and digital material for learners from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds)

• Recommendations have been provided to teachers in order for them to adapt pedagogies, design online classes that were accessible to learners with special educational needs, or improve communication with families (e.g. several circular letters have been issued which contained detailed instructions for the use of a variety of available digital teaching material for all educational levels, e-books, setting up accounts for e-classes, platforms and links. Especially in relation to the students with disabilities who attend mainstream schools, special circulars were issued which determined the kind of support received by the special education teachers during distance education).

* Teaching resources and material has been available at the website “prosvasimo” where accessible digital material is provided, adapted according to different types of disability and educational needs. On this website one could be informed about covid-19 in all accessible forms, such as: the Greek Sign Language with subtitles, zoom in for viewing and printing, Braille Ready format, audio format, and easy to read format. In addition, there is a Covid-19 protection guide in the form of social stories.

Against this background, several lessons have been learned during the Covid-19 pandemic which currently inform policy making and practice:

* the crisis has reinforced the need for adaptive, agile policymaking. Meeting the equity challenge depends on data, detail and deliberate action
* greater flexibility and resilience should be built into the fundamental organizing principles of our education system. This requires the adoption of a mind-set of flexibility and change, identifying and supporting approaches, both old and new, that can strengthen education and training
* an emphasis should be placed on developing and implementing inclusive education policies that ensure quality education provision to all learners, on-line and in person
* a holistic approach to education and socioemotional support of students should continue to be provided, combining targeted support to vulnerable groups while convincing the majority of the persons of the benefits of inclusiveness and diversity in schools and communities
* stakeholders at all levels of the system should be engaged in order to respond to the diverse needs of all learners.
* school leadership matters.
* teacher training programmes should be delivered in order to enhance teachers’ competences in child and youth-centered teaching and learning
* flexible continua of provision and resources should continue to be provided that support the learning of all stakeholders at both individual and organizational levels
* development of accessible educational tools and materials for students with disabilities and special educational needs should intensify
* promoting the integration of digital citizenship education and media literacy in school curricula is deemed to be necessary
* facilitating the sharing of best practices in the field of inclusive education through its inter-governmental bodies and the co-operation and capacity building programme is important
* parental and community resources must be harnessed to support learning.

The above lessons learned provided a reason for systemic change in education.

Each of these lessons has been explored in more depth, along with examples of promising practice from around the world. With regard to students with disabilities and/or special educational needs, all the above principles and practices have been integrated in the Strategic Action Plan for the Equal Access of Pupils with Disabilities to Education and constitute some of their main strategic objectives. In this context, several steps have been taken towards their achievement.

***Input to question 22***

Within the framework of the transition from the medical-centric model to the social one and taking under consideration best practices of other countries, the State would welcome service providers that apply new models that emphasize on person-centered practices. However, there is no relevant pro-active search.

***Input to question 23***

The human rights approach is a given as far as provision of services to persons with disabilities is concerned, so the State always tries to lead by example. Despite the fact that the private sector is also active in the area in Greece, the “business approach” is not encouraged by the State because it is not consistent with the provision of services to vulnerable groups, such as the disabled, but also with the concept of State welfare in general. Our Constitution states that it is the duty of the State to take steps to improve the lives of persons with disabilities, so encouraging a business-only approach in this area would be contrary to the basic principles of welfare.

***Input to question 24***

The incentives given by the State apply the same to every service provider.

***Input to question 25***

Τhe statutory minimum salary and the statutory minimum wage in Greece are paid irrespective of any other condition and without any discrimination to all workers in the country, given that individual labour contracts and collective labour agreements of any kind may not set a monthly regular salary or a full-time wage below the statutory minimum salary and wage or the corresponding resulting ratio for part-time contracts (Law 4172/2013 as in force).

Specifically, today, by virtue of Ministerial Decision No. 38866/21.4/2022, the statutory minimum salary and the statutory minimum wage are as follows:

1. For white-collar workers, the minimum salary is set at seven hundred and thirteen euros (€ 713,oo).
2. For blue-collar workers, the minimum wage is set at thirty one euros and eighty-five cents (€ 31,85).

***Input to question 26***

Every transition is difficult and barriers may appear, so the way a transition is communicated and explained to the people it concerns can make a big difference. The crucial thing is to establish that every change is aimed at promoting independent living for persons with disabilities and enhance their way of life.

***Input to question 27***

A task force was formed to draft the National Action Plan for persons with disabilities, with the participation of delegates from all Ministries, under the supervision of the Minister of State. The National Action Plan will be monitored, improved and enriched based on the result of ongoing consultation.

***Input to question 28***

The National Confederation of Persons with Disabilities (“ESAmeA”, as it is known in Greece) is always invited to express their opinion during the design stage of every new policy.

The Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, for its part, makes constant efforts so that the “voice” of persons with disabilities and family members is taken into account in all educational policymaking issues. In this context, in order for the Strategic Action Plan for the Equal Access of Persons with Disability to Education to be implemented, committees have been set up, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, in which the National Confederation of Disabled Persons and/or the Panhellenic Federation of Societies of Parents and Guardians of Disabled Persons participate. Indicatively we mention the participation of the above-mentioned Confederations in the following Committees:

* the Advisory committee of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs to monitor physical accessibility for persons with disabilities and for the educational and administrative structures of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs
* the Advisory committee to monitor the digital accessibility of educational materials and websites.

In addition, at the moment the following committees are being set up:

* an Advisory committee for the development and implementation of an Action Plan for the provision of integrated evaluation services and supportive interventions to students belonging to vulnerable social groups
* an Advisory committee for the development and implementation of an action plan for the provision of integrated assessment services and supportive interventions to vulnerable social groups (e.g. refugees with disabilities, Roma with disabilities) by public bodies.

It should be noted that several legal and regulatory provisions make it compulsory to give families a role at every stage of education and schooling. Most importantly, the parents' voice is heard granted that:

-Parents cooperate with the educators of both Centers for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support and schools in order to develop the Individualized Educational Plan for their child (Law 4823/2021)

-They are free to choose the school of their child, taking into consideration the relevant recommendations of Centers for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support.

All parents participate equally in the procedures of the parents' association. In general and special education schools, they also have the right to get elected as members in the main governance body of administration of the parents' association, which is the administrative council. According to Law 1566/1985, the members of the latter take part in the school teachers' board which is a broader governance body of the school unit. In particular, school teachers, members of the administrative council of the parents' association, representatives of school communities and a representative of the local authority participate in the school teachers' board. Within this framework and according to Law 48237/2021, parents give their opinion regarding the planning and evaluation of the educational work in the school unit.

Moreover, it should be noted that raising the voice of students with disabilities is the 12th operational goal of the Strategic Action Plan of the Ministry of Education entitled: ‘Ensuring the right to free expression of opinion/raising the voice of Persons with Disabilities’. Sub-action D2 of this operational objective provides for ‘Actions to strengthen and facilitate (in the form of reasonable adjustments) of students with disabilities in collective school bodies and in the House of Adolescents/Investigation of possible adoption of a specific quota for fixed representation of Persons with Disabilities in the above bodies.

***Input to question 29***

The Greek Strategic Action Plan comprises a series of operational objectives, which are further analyzed in projects and actions, with a clear implementation deadline in all key areas of intervention. Indicatively we mention the following key operational objectives:

1. Developing and supervising a Strategic Action Plan for the Equal Access of Persons with Disabilities to a quality, inclusive education

2. Reviewing the current legal framework

3. Allocating adequate human and material resources

4. Improving environmental and learning accessibility, with benefits and adaptations to the environment, assistive technology, educational materials and social life in all educational structures of all levels of education

5. Strengthening early childhood intervention

6. Strengthening Vocational Education

7. Ensuring equal access to Lifelong Learning and Higher Education

8. Ensuring equal treatment of Persons with Disabilities in Higher Education

9. Developing pilot programs with regard to specific issues

10. Expanding the statistics data collection

11. Safeguarding equal access to education for students belonging to vulnerable social groups, e.g. refugee-immigrants with disabilities, Roma with disabilities

12. Ensuring the right to free expression/raising the voice of persons with disabilities.

The overall simplification and digitalization of the relevant procedures (application for services, dissemination of information, eligibility decision, information and awareness campaigns etc.), as well as tightening the control framework of the services provided with special emphasis on tackling cases of abuse, are some of the strategic objectives aimed at.