

# EDITORIAL PREFACE

## Introduction to the Special Issue of the periodical Hungarian Journal of Disability Studies & Special Education: Support mechanisms and independent living during and after the COVID-19 pandemic

*'The COVID-19 experience may offer contextual experience of the prepandemic lives of persons with disabilities and in doing so foster greater social responsibility and opportunities for change and a more inclusive society'. (Ebuenyi et al., 2020, p. 1.)*

As Guest Editors of the Hungarian Journal of Disability Studies & Special Education, we are pleased to share the last Special Issue of 2022: Support mechanisms and independent living during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 experience has shaken our society and presented us with many challenges. However, as the authors (Ebuenyi et al., 2020) cited above point out, it is precisely the experience of this crisis that has brought us all much closer to the sense of isolation, loneliness, and vulnerability that people with disabilities often experience. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, heavy pressure has been put on people, families, communities, and service systems. Among others, the everyday lives of children, adults, elderly persons with disabilities, and their support network has changed considerably. As social distancing and the closure of social institutions were considered primary forms of protecting people from infection, several elements of formal and informal relationships and mechanisms of support have been challenged. The usual social activities built on personal contacts needed – and still need – to be reorganized.

Underlying the human rights mediated by the UNCRPD are the barriers that pervaded the daily lives of people with disabilities before the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, the situations that many people are experiencing in the difficult days of the pandemic are very similar: quarantine, curfews, and reduced, impeded or non-existent social interactions have all evoked the institutional conditions that have been fought for decades in the process of deinstitutionalization around the world. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 experience has created a new perspective in many people, contributing to a broader understanding and appreciation of the social and human rights model of disability (Armitage & Nellums, 2020; Ebuenyi et al., 2020).

This special issue of the Hungarian Journal of Disability Studies & Special Education brings us closer to understanding what characterized the everyday lives

of people with disabilities during the pandemic. The issue presents Hungarian and international empirical research articles and case studies on good practices on support mechanisms and independent living for people with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The first two studies of the Special Issue deal with the COVID-19 challenges in the field of education. *Ryan O. Kellems, Alex W. Wheatley, Doug Petersen, and Elizabeth A. Cutrer-Párraga* examine how the provision of special education services for students with disabilities was implemented in the context of remote learning in the USA. This study is based on the perceptions of teachers and parents, similar to the article by *Katalin Mező* who aimed to present the impact of the pandemic on teaching students with learning disabilities. In this article, not only challenges but alternative support mechanisms are addressed that special educators used, in order to deal with the challenges of distance education.

*Viktória Pázmány, Ágota Barabás, and Renáta J. Erdei* introduce an online pilot program for young athletes – with and without intellectual disabilities – to compensate for the lack of face-to-face sports activities during the pandemic. Their preliminary focus groups highlighted the need for continuing training so that young people could maintain their physical fitness and, at the same time, reduce their sense of isolation.

*Sára Csillag, Jácint Farkas, Zsófia Fekete-Frojimovics, Adrienne Nagy, and Csilla Petykó* interviewed restaurant owners who employ persons with disabilities. While the hospitality sector was severely affected by the pandemic, the authors found that disability is a “controversial issue” in the owners’ narratives. The challenges in supported decision-making of persons with intellectual disabilities are represented in the Special Issue in an article by *Rita Farkasné Gőnczi*. The author describes how professionals and NGOs published easy-to-understand content on COVID-related information.

There are two articles in the Special Issue based on surveys with larger sample sizes. *Barbara Czeizel, Boróka Fehér, Krisztina Hajtó, Gabriella Safcsák, and Réka Vályi* conducted an online survey among families on access to early intervention services. In their article, the Early Intervention Centre Budapest operation is described as a good practice. On a sample of 1500 persons, *Julianna Boros, Edmond Girasek, Bence Döbrössy, Anna Susánszky, and Zsuzsa Györffy* analyzed whether there is a difference in the use of digital health solutions between persons with and without disabilities.

We highly recommend all of the articles to our Readers.

Budapest, November 2022.

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Guest Editors of the Special Issue

## References

- Armitage, R. & Nellums, L. B. (2020). The COVID-19 response must be disability inclusive. *Lancet Public Health* 2020;5:e257. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(20\)30076-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(20)30076-1)
- Ebuenyi, I. D., Smith, E. M., Holloway, C., et al. (2020). COVID-19 as social disability: the opportunity of social empathy for empowerment. *BMJ Global Health* 2020;5:e003039. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-003039>