

Greece calls for health volunteers to combat virus

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Greece on Monday put out a call for health volunteers to help combat the spread of the coronavirus as the health minister said hundreds of additional medical staff had been deployed.

"The volunteer programme is addressed to whoever can offer services, such as doctors, medical staff, psychologists, medical students and retired health scientists," acting government spokeswoman Aristotelia Pelsoni told reporters.

Administrative staff and technicians are also welcome, she said, adding that regional authorities will subsequently share out volunteers depending on local needs.

Seventy-one new cases were announced Monday, raising the total of officially announced infections from the coronavirus to 695.

But the projection is that between 8,000 and 10,000 people in Greece have been infected, said the health ministry's spokesman on the virus Sotiris Tsiodras.

There are 17 recorded deaths in the country of 11 million, most of them elderly men with prior health problems.

Health Minister Vassilis Kikilias on Monday said dozens of emergency care beds had been added in recent weeks.

"Today the national health system has 685 intensive care and high dependency beds...more are added daily," Kikilias told reporters.

An additional 176 doctors and 733 medical staff have been deployed at hospitals, and another over 2,000 staff of various categories including over 400 doctors will be hired in the next 10 days, Kikilias said.

Greece's public health system has been drastically weakened by a decade of dwindling spending and staff cuts.

"We know the long-running weaknesses of the national health system," the minister said Monday.

A quarter of Greek national output was wiped out and official unemployment soared to nearly a third of the workforce during the 2010-2018 crisis, originally sparked by reckless state spending and misreporting of fiscal data to the EU.

Thousands of trained doctors emigrated during the crisis, most of them to Germany and Britain.

The union representing public hospital staff has warned of a possible shortage in essential sanitary equipment, while other insiders say not enough people have access to test kits.

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