



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Slovakia social briefing:**

**The Coronavirus Crisis and the End of the Social Life?**

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## **The Coronavirus Crisis and the End of the Social Life?**

Coronavirus expands its claws around the world. With an enormous increase in the number of confirmed cases, national governments are taking more or less significant measures to keep the virus spreading to a minimum. Today, it is absolutely unquestionable that the crisis will plunge deep into the pockets of country budgets, and an economy that is subdued by strict rules will experience its worse times. As in other countries, these measures also apply to Slovakia. Quarantine measures, which mainly limit the gathering and contact of several people in one place, have also caused an absolute cessation of social life. The pandemic and the follow-up have given rise to several phenomena.

The first is social separation. Primarily, this problem is most pervasive in the group of elderly who belong to the most vulnerable people and it is therefore natural that they are the ones who stay at home the most. The government encourages seniors as well as their children and grandchildren to separate from each other, because only in this way their full protection can be ensured. The anxiety stemming from such separation is exacerbated by fear of contagion and uncertainty in the future, which has a negative impact on mental health.

The opposite pole is the so-called cabin fever. Rather, this is reflected in households where parents and children stay at home. However, parents must work while children usually have to fulfil their school responsibilities. One of the parents, usually (but not necessarily) the mother, thus plays the role of a teacher, a worker and, moreover, has to manage the household. The social separation of children, teenagers and the couple themselves from their usual social contacts such as colleagues at work, schoolmates or friends causes nervousness, disappointment, sadness, anxiety. Family time spent together can then bring feelings of nervousness, quarrel and disagreement after spending a few days at home.

However, this ridiculous phenomenon can give rise to quite serious consequences - domestic violence. At a time of quarantine, many people at risk of domestic violence find themselves isolated in a household with a violent family member. The coronavirus epidemic deepens social inequalities and significantly worsens the situation of many vulnerable and excluded groups, especially women and children. Conflicts also arise in normal families, but in the case of a family with an aggressor, the situations escalate (e.g. due to the rise of alcohol consumption and time spent together at home). In addition, in this period of home office and online schooling, a potential victim cannot escape to work or school. Therefore, special

telephone lines are also set up in Slovakia to solve psychological problems arising from quarantine as well as the issue of possible domestic violence.

Pandemics changes our perception of life. Social networks and online communication have become the main tools of mutual communication and meeting. The world has also faced pandemics in the past, but without the conveniences of today. In general, communication through social networks clearly reduces the feeling of anxiety associated with separation, and thus to some extent can be said to replace real contact with people. On the other hand, it can create the misleading sense that social media are sufficient means of communication. And so, the reality of these days is the children sitting behind the computers, the parents fully immersed in the home office, and somehow lost day by day in their own house.

However, social media provide a vital space for culture these days. Unfortunately, it was culture that the coronavirus touched as one of the most. Theatres, cinemas, museums and galleries have remained closed. Music concerts are cancelled. There are no exhibitions, and especially markets and fairs, which are traditionally part of the May spring celebrations. The artists remained jobless, so to speak. That is why the artists themselves, as well as the art institutions, have decided to bring culture closer to the people through the Internet. The form is diverse and depends only on individual creativity. You can listen to live online concert of your favourite band or even to an opera. Galleries and museums run online exhibitions.

In addition to the artists themselves, the organizers of cultural events or cultural centres also have a problem. Their income is dependent on live performances and cinema projections. There are already a number of initiatives in the world to help the cultural and creative industries. Throughout the world it is possible to follow initiatives like I lost my Gig where individuals can sign up with the option of asking the public for subscription services. These pre-painted services can then be imagined as an upcoming concert or theatre performance. Similar initiatives have been launched in Slovak sport - fans of the well-known football club can buy a ticket for the next game in advance in order to contribute financially to the functioning of the club.

The government in Slovakia has already taken several measures to alleviate the coronavirus crisis. Some also relate to culture. Among other things, the government is also helping out thousands of self-employed people working in the cultural sector. These are self-employed who do not have a parallel employment relationship. The state will provide a financial contribution based on a decrease in sales compared to the average in 2019. For 20 % decrease it will be 180 EUR, for 40 % decrease 300 EUR, for 60 % decrease 420 EUR and for

80 % and more 540 EUR (in April). Perhaps the biggest problem in terms of specifically supporting culture during this crisis is its absolute under-dimensioning in terms of statistical data. We assume that further measures will follow, as the crisis crew meets every day to gradually resolve the situation.

In addition to the cultural sector, there are other sectors directly linked to social contact, such as bars, restaurants, clubs, travel agencies, tourist accommodation that suffer a lot. Of course, the measures also apply to them. In addition, many restaurants have taken full advantage of the possibility of food distribution and delivery without direct contact. What is a positive is the fact that the use of online business opportunities has increased significantly in relation to the current situation.

It is said that the current pandemic will change people's behavior. We already know that environmental pollution has declined significantly with the decline in economic activity and human mobility. Increasingly, human relations, and especially their quality, come to the forefront. We reconsider the role of the family, regrouping our own values. We're reviewing our consumption. Do we need new clothes? Make-up? Everything is retreating into the background. Everyone wants health and quarantine returns respect and even desire for quite ordinary things. For example, the desire to go to school, go to work, go out for a walk.

Coronavirus reveals two faces in Slovak society. The better one and the worse one. The better one is represented by stronger feelings of belonging. This is reflected in everyday life. A lot of people in the household started to sew face masks, because they are highly scarce goods not only in Slovakia but currently in Europe. There are thousands in terms of numbers, because disposable masks or respirators are primarily intended for healthcare professionals or people directly at risk from contact with a large number of people. Face mask are then distributed amongst the older or lonely people, even face masks machines were created. Shopping for elderly or quarantined people is provided by students and volunteers. Suddenly we do care how our neighbor is. The initiative, which has its origin in Italy, has also gained its place in Slovakia. Friday is a big round of applause to the medical staff and doctors of our hospitals.

However, many psychologists also point out that the pandemic will show the worst out of us. Feeling threatened trigger in the body automatic response of "self-rescue". In such a situation, we cease to think rationally and we no longer care about other people. Such a manifestation, albeit in its finest form, is offensive posts and comments on social networks. No doubt, because on social networks we remain in a certain anonymity, which gives us an impression of strength, indifference and the possibility of expressing ourselves on everything,

even on qualified or scientific information. The Internet gives us the courage to tell others what we might never have been able to tell him or her personally, because empathy, morality, or simply respect and education would prevent us from doing so.

Only the future will show which pole Slovakia will be inclined to. Economic harm, fear and insecurity feelings affect our everyday lives. We do not see friends, grandparents, colleagues, pupils. In this period, everyone must learn how to live with themselves. But it can be a period of change that will make us better people for us and our planet. Let's believe we can do it together.