



Weekly Briefing

Slovakia social briefing:
“Normalisation” of Social Life in Slovakia
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“Normalisation” of Social Life in Slovakia

Summary

The presented Social Briefing aims to provide an overview of the most recent developments and changes in the anti-pandemic measures in the Slovak Republic. We are mostly focusing on the vaccination strategy and re-opening of diverse stores and services. Out of the total population of approximately 5.46 million, 1.43 million people have already been given at least the first dose. We believe vaccination should nowadays be one of the top priorities not only in Slovakia, but equally on the global level.

Introduction

The social life in Slovakia is still being impacted by the pandemic and the measures implemented to tackle it. However, a trend towards improvement of the situation can currently be observed, having experienced a substantially exhausting second wave. This is probably thanks to the vaccination, and perhaps also linked to the rising temperatures after the winter months. The decrease in numbers of positive cases has resulted in a removal of certain restrictions. For instance, people are allowed to enjoy some quality time at a coffee shop’s terrace, go to a gym, or visit a gallery or a museum. Of course, all of it is dependent on the current state in the respective region. Moreover, adherence to hygienic measures remains to be a must.

Vaccination as a powerful tool

The historical experience shows that it is thanks to vaccination that numerous serious diseases have been eradicated or their effects mitigated. Despite obvious scientific evidence, a significant part of the population ignores the positives vaccines have brought. This is also the case of vaccination against coronavirus, which has its opponents amongst Slovaks, too. The arguments against vaccination against COVID-19 vary. Some people are afraid of the side effects; others take into account their health condition and the medication they take, and are not convinced that getting vaccinated would be safe for them. Another group is formed by people convinced that these vaccines were created “on the green field”, hence cannot be reliable as no

comprehensive study analysing the side effects could have been published so far. Some arguments, however, lack any logical reasoning and are based on a subjective standpoint, deeply rooted within the individual, with no willingness to listen to the experts' advice.

Slovakia as a Member States of the European Union should adhere to the vaccination strategy as agreed by the whole Community. This includes using the vaccines that have undergone the testing process by the European Medicines Agency. In Slovakia, however, also the Russian vaccine Sputnik V has been purchased. Since then, it has been a rather controversial topic in the country, because the whole process of the vaccine acquisition was not completely transparent. On the contrary, the public was not even well informed about what had been planned. The information was revealed only at a press conference organized by Igor Matovič - at that time the Prime Minister. Welcoming Sputnik V at the Kosice airport was not at all perceived as positively as probably hoped for. Surely, many people received the news highly enthusiastically, but the whole situation resulted in hostility in the society and, eventually, a governmental crisis. The government finally managed to find solution to overcome the crisis, although several ministerial positions have been reshuffled. Igor Matovič, who had been the Prime Minister when signing the contract with the Russian vaccine producer, resigned from his function and became Finance Minister instead. Nevertheless, Sputnik V is still not being applied in the country, but this should change, soon.

The overall vaccination strategy has already been amended several times. The registration is done online. After registration, the interested person is "moved" to a so called waiting room, so the vaccination date is not provided right away. On the 19th of May, there are approximately 220,000 registered people waiting for their first round of getting vaccinated.¹ Getting a date may take several days, even weeks, depending on the person's age, health condition, etc. Prioritized are the elderly and individuals with a serious or middle-serious disease. Currently, those interested can indicate the regions which are feasible for them to be vaccinated in. Previously, even concrete locations could have been selected.²

What we perceive as an especially reasonable idea is the possibility to get vaccinated for the people accompanying the elderly (citizens older than 70). This concerns the people who have reached the age of 18. As accompanying people, they will be given the same vaccine as

¹ Kováčik, M. (2021): Nová kampaň na očkovanie nezaberá. Ešte mesiac a nebude komu pichnúť vakcínu. In: Hospodárske noviny.

² korona.gov.sk (2021): Informácie k novému prihlasovaniu sa na očkovanie. In: korona.gov.sk.

the elderly, i.e. either Moderna or Pfizer. Obviously, each elderly person can be accompanied by one individual only.³

The vaccines used in Slovakia had been distributed mostly according to the age. When finalising this briefing, however, information was published that the age limitation for the vaccines by Moderna and Pfizer had been removed, meaning even the young aged from 18 and 16 respectively, may be given one of the two products.⁴

In Slovakia, the objective is for 60% of the population to be vaccinated. As of 19th of May, more than 1.43 million of people have gotten the 1st dose; and more than 682,000 people have been vaccinated by both doses.⁵ As for the number of Slovakia's inhabitants, we can calculate with the number of 5.46 million, which was the state at the end of 2020.⁶ Nevertheless, we hope that those not decided yet will get vaccinated eventually, as it indeed is the only way for us how to win over the virus.

Social life slowly getting back to normal?

After months of strict anti-pandemic measures, lockdown, closed shops, home schooling and the emergency state in force, some of these measures have been removed or amended. Walking down a street, people can be seen enjoying their coffee and other refreshments on a restaurant's terrace. It has been about time, as deliveries and "to-go" purchases could not cover the standard income of these services. Unfortunately, many coffee shops or bars had to close their doors as they had not been able to compensate for the financial losses.

In the following part, we will briefly describe the measures in force when writing this text, i.e. in the middle of May.

The state of emergency was abolished on 15th of May. By that, the prohibition of gatherings ceased to be in force, and the freedom of movement was restored.⁷ Until then, people had been obliged to return to their place of residence by 9 PM; earlier it had even been by 8

³ korona.gov.sk (2021): Spoločné očkovanie seniorov nad 70 rokov a ich sprievodu. In: korona.gov.sk.

⁴ red (2021): Veľká zmena v očkovaní. Zrušili vekovú hranicu na Pfizer a Modernu. In: Hospodárske noviny.

⁵ Slovensko proti Covidu (2021).

⁶ Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2021): Stock of population in the SR on 31st December 2020.

⁷ korona.gov.sk (2021): Aktuálne opatrenia. In: korona.gov.sk.

PM. One of the removed measures relates to special shopping hours designated for the seniors. Before, during the time period from 9 AM to 11 AM, only the elderly had been allowed to stores. We can say, this measure was not really popular among people, as it seemed to lack logic – on the one hand, the seniors had designated shopping hours, on the other hand they could shop any other time, too.

What remains to be compulsory at shops or other services is the face mask or a respirator, disinfection, social distancing, including limitation concerning the number of customers based on the m² of the shop. Some services remain closed, though.⁸

The possibility to organize an event – of course, in accordance with the valid measures in the respective region – has been welcomed for instance by brides-to-be, many of which had to postpone the date of their big day several times. Attending holy masses has been allowed for a while now, too. Again, measures are to be strictly adhered to.

Similarly, the education process has been restored in its usual in-person form, and thus almost on all the levels of education. At universities, the spring term is mostly being finalised remotely, but several higher education institutions have decided to hold their state exams with the physical presence of both the students as well as the committees.

Despite the improving situation in the country as for the cases, and the increasing number of those vaccinated, we are convinced that a certain level of caution from the people is needed, so the last year's scenario will not be repeated, when the second wave hit us after a relatively calm summer.

Conclusion

In spite of the fact that the percentage of vaccinated population grows every day, it will undoubtedly take some more time till the collective immunity is reached. Although the life seems to be normalising slowly, let us not forget that some discipline and responsibility are still at the core of the success.

⁸ korona.gov.sk (2021): Prevádzky, služby a hromadné podujatia. In: korona.gov.sk.

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