



Weekly Briefing

Bosnia-Herzegovina social briefing:

The two pandemics: The emigration and the vaccination situation

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Summary

In this briefing we will be taking a look at two separate but equally pandemic situations. First is the situation of youth unemployment and constant emigration from Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is experiencing a gradual and significant decline of young and educated workforce, and thus of general population, especially since the opening up of the EU workforce market in 2011. The second is the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic in Bosnia and Herzegovina in regards to the vaccination process, having one of the lowest percentages of vaccinated people in Europe and discharging huge amounts of vaccine due to their expiry. Only 21 % of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina currently is fully vaccinated, as the number of infections had been steadily growing for months and are again reaching critical stages.

Introduction

According to the latest data of the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, approximately 777,000 young people between the age of 15 to 30 live in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The rate of unemployment among the young people is 60 % and half of them wait for the first job contract for more than two years. 25 % wait for more than 5 years for their first job, while only 13.4 % get a contract within a year.¹ It is estimated that from 2011, when the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina were able to travel the Schengen area countries with a biometric passport, around 200,000 citizens had left the country, including a high percentage of young and highly educated people.

According to the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, 260,837 were registered as infected, out of which 11,869 had died. Since October the country is seeing a fast and significant rise in infections.

¹ <http://www.mcp.gov.ba/?lang=en>

Emigration of the young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina

In 2013, according to the census, three and a half million citizens lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the same census, Bosnia and Herzegovina had a little over half a million young people aged between 19 and 29 years. Although there is no precise population data since the last census, considering the continuous demographic decline due to constant emigration and negative birth-death rate, one can assess that this number today already is significantly lower. Further more, if the current migration trend contributes, as projections show, by the year 2070 the country could be inhabited by only 1.6 million people. Recent research, published by the United Nations Populations Fun (UNFP)² at the beginning of this year, has shown that around 23,000 residents of Bosnia and Herzegovina, aged between 19 and 29, plan to leave the country within the next 12 months. The research also shows that almost every second interviewed young person plans to leave the country on a temporary or permanent basis. Unemployed young men between age of 18 and 24, with finished high-school education, are the most common groups that emigrate. As it is pointed out in the study, the young people are mostly motivated by the dissatisfaction with the quality of life, unfavorable socio-economic conditions, unemployment and lack of chances for personal growths and development. The regional director of UNFPA for Eastern Europe and Central Asia Allana Armitage stated that the migration process for the young people is good, unless the people are forced to it. The youth migration opens up new possibilities to study and gain professional experience abroad, learn new languages and meet new cultures. Armitage thinks that the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina should expand possibilities and improve the quality of life for the youth, as a key issue for the country is facing its horrific demographic challenges. The dominating reason for migration among the interviewed youth is the distrust in public institutions, with more than 70 % believing that the society in Bosnia and Herzegovina is systematically corrupt. Another strong reason for leaving are national tensions within the country. This opinion of the youth is valid for the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, regardless of the entity. The motivation for staying is constantly disrupted by the political division rhetoric. To put the situation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in a wider perspective of Western Balkans,³ the percentage of young people who are neither being schooled or are employed is 35 %, which is twice as much from the average of the European Union member states. According to the research on youth employment in Western Balkans by the Regional Cooperation Council in 2021, the reasons for this often lie in the inadequate

² <https://www.unfpa.org/>

³ <https://www.esap.online/docs/127/comparative-report-on-youth-employment-in-the-western-balkans>

employment policies as well as in the lack of work for the young people, which is usually only temporary employment.

COVID-19 vaccination situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The non-existent flow of vaccines to Bosnia and Herzegovina was finally changed in March this year. However, the rate did not reach satisfactory levels, which also resulted in an anti-government protest in Sarajevo. A group of medical workers even pressed charges to the State Attorney Office of Bosnia and Herzegovina, for the endangerment of public health. The donations from other countries the vaccine income to Bosnia and Herzegovina began on a regular level in June.

There are five approved vaccines in Bosnia and Herzegovina and, according to the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, until November 11th the country had received 3.27 million doses of vaccine in total. Due to the expiry date, more than half a million doses will be destroyed, the public health institutions in Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina had confirmed. 203,837 doses will be destroyed in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and 330,487 dose in Republika Srpska. Brčko District reported no such cases. From the start of the vaccination process in February until November 4th only 21 % (720,642 people) of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina had been fully vaccinated. The first dose was received by 833,233 people of 24,35 %. The situation on the ground, as the examples of the two largest hospitals show, is also worrying. The Infective Diseases Clinic in Banja Luka had so far inspected more than 17,000 patients out of which 4,000 were hospitalized. The doctors there keep repeating the same messages that there is no cure for COVID-19 and that the only secure therapy is vaccination. They warn that if stricter measures are not implemented very soon, the medical staff will again have severe problems. As the chief of the Intensive Care Department in the Banja Luka clinic Milka Jandrić explained, there is a significant number of younger people who are admitted and not vaccinated, and that the elderly are more conscious of the problem. She said that some get vaccinated in order to travel and some don't believe in the effectiveness of the vaccines. One of the doctors in the Banja Luka clinic, Saša Dragić, stated that they give condolences to family members on a daily basis, but are sometimes faced with replies that COVID-19 does not exist. The situation in the General hospital in Sarajevo is not much better. More than 90 % of the patients in the intensive care unit

are not vaccinated. As doctor at the hospital Ednan Drljević stated, more than 95 % of deceased from COVID-19 in Kanton Sarajevo had not been vaccinated.

Conclusion

The two pandemic situations Bosnia and Herzegovina are hurting the demographic of the country in a severe way, which next census will surely show. The constant flow of its citizens who are leaving the country due to economic reasons is not slowing down, particularly due to the very high unemployment rate as well as lack of work possibilities for the young, especially educated people. Considering that the state authorities are not challenging the problem with incentives for the young work force, this current emigration process is showing its effect on the Bosnian society, and will do the same in decades to come. After having problems with acquiring the vaccines in the beginning of the year, which even prompted protests from the health workers, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the midst of rising new COVID-19 cases, is facing quite an opposite problem with only 21 % of the population being fully vaccinated and more than half a million doses of vaccine being destroyed due to their expiry. It is easy to predict that, due to this, the country will again face another harsh COVID-19 winter with high numbers of infected and dead, also forcing the health system in general to focus all its forces to the pandemic, creating a lack of treatment in other health related areas.