



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Slovakia social briefing:**  
**Children Back in School and (Un)Traditional Easter**  
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# **Children Back in School and (Un)Traditional Easter**

## **Summary**

*The briefing connects two central topics, namely the celebration of Easter and the re-opening of schools after months of home schooling. Both topics are analysed with regards to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, certain improvements concerning the pandemic situation can be observed. However, the impacts of the measures such as children's comeback to schools, stores re-opening and the celebration of spring will be possible to assess only after several days or weeks.*

## **Introduction**

It has already been a year since the first case of the coronavirus was reported in Slovakia. In spite of all the economic or social impacts of the pandemic, and the unprecedented change of our lives' directions, there are events or traditions that are still strictly adhered to. An example of this is Easter, or for some rather a celebration of the coming spring. Additionally, a few aspects of our lives seem to be restoring, such as children coming back to school. These two issues are the topic of the current Social Briefing.

## **Easter in the COVID-19 times**

Easter is generally referred to as the most important time for the Christians. Attending churches, family gatherings, and traditional customs are an inseparable part of it. Those deeply believing cannot imagine Easter without holly masses dedicated to remembering the sacrifice of Jesus and his resurrection. In Slovakia, however, Easter is celebrated not only by Christians; by many it is considered the beginning of the spring season. The end of winter and the beginning of spring used to be celebrated already in the pre-Christian period, which was accompanied by various customs and rituals that could have varied from region to region. In some places of the country – mostly in rural areas – a few of these activities are still carried out. The Christian tradition has adopted and adjusted some thereof, but many are popular also among people who do not claim to be belonging to any religious group or church. Traditional customs and rituals were mostly aimed to ensure favourable agricultural conditions and health of both people as

well as farm animals. The symbols accompanying this time of a year are eggs, water, green colour, etc. – old symbols of spring.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and measures in place in Slovakia during the Easter time, it could not be celebrated according to the usual format. Same as in case of Christmas, also Easter and several days off linked to it are often used by families living in remote areas of the country to get together. This, unfortunately, was not possible due to the restrictions and lockdown. Hence, instead, many families spent this time within a small household „bubble.” Nevertheless, it is highly possible that many did not respect the restrictions and visited their relatives or friends anyway. This could lead to further worsening of the pandemic situation, possibly even to a third wave. When writing this briefing, the data are not available to support this hypothesis, but we will find out momentarily.

Since Easter indeed is a highly significant time for Christians, many cannot imagine it without attending holy masses. For some time now, these have not been taking place with the believers being physically present. Many believers perceive holy masses not only as a chance to get closer to god, but especially for those alone-living elderly it is often the only social engagement they have. Closure of churches may, to a certain extent, cause serious psychological problems as the believers lack the interaction they are used to.

The majority of the Slovak population are Christians. Catholics constitute approximately 68,9% of the population; Lutherans 6,9%, and Greek Orthodox around 4,1%,<sup>2</sup> whereby the data may slightly differ among various sources. Up-to-date information will be known in the course of the coming months, as the country is currently in the process of a regular census (every 10 years). As a result of this, Christian - particularly Catholic values are frequently supported also by some politicians, currently also several members of the Parliament. Before Easter, they had proposed a change to the anti-pandemic measures in force, namely making the church buildings accessible to the believers due to *individual spiritual care*. Under this expression, we do not understand organisation of holy masses – neither for a limited amount of people – but individual encounters with the representatives of the church, for instance for the purpose of the holy confession or a dialogue. Eventually, the proposal had been accepted.<sup>3</sup> To undergo a visit of this kind, even travelling across regions was allowed. The whole situation resulted in a broad

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<sup>1</sup> Ondrejka, K. (2003): Malý lexikón ľudovej kultúry Slovenska.

<sup>2</sup> SlovakiaSite (2021): Náboženstvo.

<sup>3</sup> SITA - TASR (2021): Vláda počas Veľkej noci povolila individuálne návštevy kostolov. In: SME.

criticism in the society. Those not being in favour of this were mostly citizens who despite being constantly negatively tested for the virus were not allowed to see their family members, as well as owners of small business that had to remain closed.

### **Children's comeback to school**

As the pandemic situation is slowly getting better, some new measures have been implemented, also regarding education. After several months of home schooling, pupils returned to school as of 12<sup>th</sup> April. However, this does not concern everybody. Starting on 12<sup>th</sup> April, kindergartens open for all children. On the contrary, primary schools open only for the first level classes (first four years of the compulsory education). Furthermore, schools remain open for pupils that do not have the possibility to learn from at home, for instance due to no access to the Internet or not being in possession of a computer. These learn in the pattern of five children plus one teacher.<sup>4</sup>

Even more students will return to school as of 19<sup>th</sup> April. The next round of school opening should concern students of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade, i.e. children finishing their primary studies.<sup>5</sup> In regions with favourable pandemic situation, schools may re-open for the whole second level of primary education, that means 5<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> grade.<sup>6</sup> Obviously, the long-time-expected comeback to school is accompanied by strict hygienic measures. Whether the schools will remain open until the end of the school year at the end of June, will depend on the development of the pandemic situation.

In our Slovakia Social Briefing for May 2020, we pointed out how challenging it was not only for teachers, but also for children and their families to suddenly switch to online learning, as education in Slovakia is under normal circumstances conducted in person, considering the importance of socialisation and teachers' guidance.<sup>7</sup> Even though we have already become

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<sup>4</sup> TARS (2021): Školy sa otvárajú. Hygiene pripomenula, ktoré deti nepotrebujú respirator. In: Hospodárske noviny.

<sup>5</sup> In Slovakia, the primary education usually takes 9 years. However, some study programmes at secondary schools allow for children to enrol after they successfully finish the 8th grade of the primary school.

<sup>6</sup> Dvořáčková, M. (2021): Sľuby vlády a odborníkov sa naplnili. Od pondelka sa do škôl vráti 80-tisíc žiakov. In: Hospodárske noviny.

<sup>7</sup> Čiefová, M. (2020): Slovakia social briefing: Education Challenges in the Time of Pandemic. In: CEE Weekly Briefings.

more skilled at teaching and studying remotely, it is exceptionally complicated as for some study programs, personality types, and probably mostly for the first-year pupils and their parents as they partially need to substitute the teacher. Households with children learning from at home with the parents on home office must sometimes face difficulties concerning lack of physical space for work, disturbances of any kind, and last but not least, scheduling and time management issues. We suppose, throughout the last months, many have become accustomed to the new set up and have found their own way of doing things effectively.

Online studying is probably equally demanding for university students. Although there are students that do not mind staying at home, saving time as they do not need to commute to schools, and money as they are not accommodated at dormitories, many miss the possibility of a face-to-face discussion an exchange of ideas and opinions with their professors, they are missing their classmates and the whole concept of students' live. At the time of writing this text, no information has been revealed about potential return of university students to auditoriums.

## **Conclusion**

At the moment, the pandemic situation in Slovakia seems to be getting slightly better, even though the effects of the Easter celebrations may not be visible yet. In spite of that, some measures have been loosened, such as children are allowed to come back to school. Moreover, on Monday, 19<sup>th</sup> April, churches, shops, beauty salons and similar services may re-open for those with a negative test. Of course, face masks, limited number of customers per shop and strict hygiene of the premises are a must.<sup>8</sup> Although most of the concerned businesses have been waiting for months to let their customers in, some are still thinking whether they will open or not, as it might be not financially worth it. This is for instance the case of in-door swimming pools. As for ski resorts, these are affected by the lack of snow in most of the areas.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, the businesses still have some time to evaluate the situation and prepare for opening their doors for the shoppers. Hairdressers, nail artists and other shop owners have lost substantial amount of their normally regular income, hence we are convinced that most of them will not hesitate and they will open their facilities, although they may fear the infection.

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<sup>8</sup> Kuzmány, A. (2021): Uvoľňovanie opatrení proti Covid-19: Otvoria sa obchody, služby i kostoly (prehľad). In: SME.

<sup>9</sup> Hajčáková, D. (2021): Kaderníctva majú objednávky na týždne. In: SME.

Whether this was a right step to do, as well as children's return to schools, will be possible to properly evaluate in the following weeks.

## Sources

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