



No. 1496-1 / 2022

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Serbia to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and, in reference to the call for contributions for the Office's report on Ensuring equitable, affordable, timely and universal access for all countries to vaccines in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, has the honor to enclose herewith the response from the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Serbia to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurances of its highest consideration.

Geneva, 11 October 2022



Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Palais de Nations, 1202 G E N E V A

**Responses of Republic of Serbia to the Questionnaire of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on equal, affordable, timely and universal access by all countries to vaccines in response to the COVID-19 pandemic**

The Government of the Republic of Serbia recognized the importance and need of procuring vaccines against COVID-19 in order to suppress the pandemic, which affected the whole world during 2020.

The epidemic in the Republic of Serbia was declared on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, 2020, and in July of the same year, the Institute of Public Health of Serbia, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, the Cabinet of the Prime Minister, medical institutions and other competent institutions and bodies, started with activities connected to planning vaccination against COVID-19, and in accordance with the recommendations of the World Health Organization and international agreements and mechanisms (COVAX) that were already prepared during that period.

Because of fast response and reaction to the situation, **Republic of Serbia negotiated contracts with vaccines manufacturers, which put our country among first countries that started vaccinating its citizens, as well as foreign citizens residing in Serbia already on 24th of Decemer 2020.** (Serbia is the second country in Europe, after Great Britain, that received the Pfizer vaccine and the third that started vaccination in Europe, after Britain and Switzerland). **Vaccination is free and voluntary.**

In accordance with the adopted plans and priorities, **vaccination** started with the highest priority groups (users and employees in nursing homes and medical workers in all medical institutions in Serbia, elderly people over 65 years, members of the police, the Serbian Army and other security forces service, media). Global vaccination started on 19<sup>th</sup> Of January, thanks to the fact that sufficient amounts of vaccines were secured through the efforts of our state.

Republic of Serbia enabled to all residents to **express their interest and preferred vaccine** electronically, by computer or phone, which provided equal availability of vaccines for everyone. People who had priority in vaccination were able to schedule their appointment via phone messages or electronic messages. For citizens who were not able to register themselves, local governments, as well as, medical centers organized call centers and information services that helped citizens register and get information about appointments and places for vaccination.

Since March 2021. **vaccination without an appointment was enabled** for all citizens of Republic of Serbia, and later on, vaccination with same terms was provided for citizens from regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of North Macedonia. During that year, **all foreign citizens were able to get vaccine in the Republic of Serbia, regardless of their residence status, under the same conditions as residents of the Republic of Serbia,** regarding the availability of vaccination and choosing the place of vaccination.

Repulic of Serbia is one of the few countries that enabled to all citizens, including the foreign citizens as well, **five different options of vaccine against COVID-19** (Pfizer-

BioNTech, Synopharm, Sputnik V, AstraZeneca, Spikevax), with possibility of making their own choice of preferred vaccine, with provided assistance of doctor if needed.

Vulnerable groups, regardless of their national status (such as elderly, immobile persons, persons in remote rural areas, migrants and asylum seekers, persons serving prison sentences, etc.) were vaccinated with special care and intervention to increase the availability of the vaccine (mobile teams in the field, transportation of citizens to vaccination points, vaccination in households, vaccination in reception centers for migrants, vaccination in prisons).

**Republic of Serbia**, in addition to the above, was also a donor of vaccines, first to the countries in region, and later to other countries in the world. (The first contingent of 4,680 Pfizer vaccines was delivered to North Macedonia on February 14, 2021). Serbian Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with the Government of the Republic of Serbia provided free vaccination for entrepreneurs and their employees from the region.

As for the impact of access to vaccines on the right to enjoy the highest standards of physical and mental health, the fact is that citizens of the Republic of Serbia of all age groups for whom the use of vaccines was approved, vaccines were also available in the immunization process throughout the territory.

Accessibility, availability and universality in the application of immunization in the Republic of Serbia is a feature of the vaccination process from the beginning of the pandemic (as stated before, among the first in Europe) until today, creating a sense of security in the circumstances of the COVID-19 infection. Certainly, the broad-based distribution of vaccination points and the opening of covid clinics represented a **significant organizational mechanism** that provided capacities for the care of people with non-covid diseases and in the circumstances of the greatest challenges (peaks of pandemic waves), which made it possible to significantly correct the effects on physical health caused by covid, as well as the treatment of people with non-covid diseases significantly corrects in relation to the conception of full inclusion of all capacities, especially hospital beds, in the covid treatment system.

The right to vaccination, as well as health care, is provided to all citizens without distinction. Measures against the spread of the virus were applied without discrimination, i.e. without making a difference between citizens, based on national, religious or linguistic affiliation. Members of national minorities are provided with daily access to timely and easy-to-understand information important for health and life, and wherever possible, it is ensured that basic local services are available in the languages of minorities, especially in healthcare. The availability of information is adapted according to the same model for children, persons with disabilities and persons with developmental disabilities. All types of available **vaccines are promoted equally, and citizens are given the right to choose the vaccine.**

In order to further motivate citizens to vaccinate and thereby achieve collective immunity faster, which aims to suppress the epidemic, restore the basic functions of the health system and open up the economy, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted in May 2021 **the Decree on Incentive Measures for Immunization and Prevention and Suppression of the Infectious Disease COVID - 19.**

**Additional financial support** in the amount of 3,000 dinars each was provided for all citizens of Serbia who have been vaccinated.

In May 2021, the citizens of the Republic of Serbia were provided with the download of the Digital Green Certificate, i.e. the confirmation of vaccination against Covid-19 and the results of various tests for this infectious disease.

In addition to the above, a national survey on a representative sample conducted in 2022 by the Institute of Mental Health in Belgrade (Project CoV2Soul, link: [www.cov2soul.rs](http://www.cov2soul.rs)) using a diagnostic interview in personal contact with respondents (which is a special quality of research, because during the pandemic a large number of studies were conducted, but a small number on a representative sample and in personal contact with respondents), showed that the difference in the frequency of depressive symptomatology, as the most common internalizing type of disorder in the population (and potentially life-threatening) was easily increased, but statistically insignificant, especially for the severe depressive episode category. Similar results are obtained for the degree of suicidality. Both data support the theoretically known fact that major depressive disorder is most often a disorder that is less affected by exogenous factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Statistic:

In Republic of Serbia, which has a population less than 7 million, 3,354,075 first doses of the vaccine; 3,278,198 second doses and 1,902,412 third doses were given (data on June 23, 2022 from the website <http://vakcinacija.gov.rs>). According to information from the Office for IT and eGovernment of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, in regard to age, in the total number of vaccinated, elderly citizens (from 65 to 74 years old) lead the way with 78%, while the group of young people (from 18 to 30 years old) represent approximately 20%. The unfavorable situation refers to the number of vaccinated health workers (66% vaccinated), as a result of which the crisis headquarters for the fight against Covid-19 considered the introduction of mandatory vaccination for health workers.