

BULLETIN

Power, Politics & Policy

Vincit Omnia Veritas

No. 12

April 19, 2021

Editorial Board: Vlad Lupan, Victor Chirilă, Liubomir Chiriac, Veaceslav Berbeca, Sergiu Lipcean, Carolina Ungureanu, Eduard Țugui, Veaceslav Ioniță, Ion Tăbârță, Mihai Țurcanu

SCHEDULING THE IMMUNIZATION: BETWEEN SUPERFICIALITY AND INCOMPETENCE

Veaceslav BERBECA

Vaccination of the population is an effective tool for the prevention and control of COVID-19. Given that the vaccine development process was in its final phase in the second half of 2020, obtaining the anti-epidemic serum should have become a national priority for the authorities. Since July 2020, the Republic of Moldova is part of the COVAX platform which supports the research, development, and production of a wide range of vaccines and ensures equal access to these sera. Subsequently, by decision no. 41 of January 13, 2021, of the Extraordinary National Commission for Public Health, the National Immunization Plan against COVID-19 was adopted. This document describes the process of the organization of the vaccination that includes several elements: from authorizing and obtaining the vaccines, to the stages of immunization and monitorization of vaccinated persons.

On March 2, 2021, the Republic of Moldova began the vaccination of the population against Covid-19, with workers in medical institutions as target group. According to official data, until 12.04.2021, 64,179¹ people were vaccinated, representing approximately 1.9% of the general population – a value calculated based on the population of 3,465,285 people. Considering the number of 64,179 people immunized in the mentioned period, we find a vaccination rate of 1,565 people per day. If this trend continues, we will need 1503 days – almost 4 years – to vaccinate 70% of the population (2,425,700 out of 3,465,285 people) so as to reach a collective immunity level. However, given that the process could take more than a year, it is very likely that collective immunity will not be reached in the short term, as it depends very much on the duration of the protection provided by the vaccine.

We assume that, subsequently, and once more doses are obtained/procured, the immunization process will proceed faster. Also, the number of immunized people is slightly higher, due to the fact that a number of people have been vaccinated in Romania and the Russian Federation. However, we understand that these figures show that the state authorities have failed to provide the public healthcare system with the necessary number of doses to obtain a higher rate of immunization of the population. In fact, the issue of the dependence of the vaccination program on the availability of vaccines underpins the whole National COVID-19 Immunization Plan. This means that the blame for the slow vaccination process in the Republic of Moldova does not fall on the healthcare system. It also means that the Plan is a document of intent that is not based on a detailed schedule of the

¹ The vaccination against COVID-19 in the Republic of Moldova. <https://vaccinare.gov.md/>

deliveries of vaccines and of the vaccinations. Because of this, the immunization steps are to take place over relatively long periods of time. If in the first stage it takes between 1.5-2 months to vaccinate more than 70,000 medical workers, then the second stage (immunization of about 988 thousand people) would take place during a period of 3-6 months.²

Doses of vaccines imported by the Republic of Moldova until 06.04.2021

27.02.2021 Romania	4.03.2021 COVAX	19.03.2021 COVAX	27.03.2021 Romania	Total as of 6.04.2021
21,600 (AstraZeneca)	14,400 (AstraZeneca)	24,570 (Pfizer)	50,400 (AstraZeneca)	86,400 – AstraZeneca 24,570 – Pfizer

Source: Compiled by the author based on public data.

The Republic of Moldova obtained 72,000 doses of AstraZeneca from Romania and 24,570 doses of Pfizer and 14,400 doses of AstraZeneca through the COVAX platform. The continuation of the immunization program depends on the availability of vaccines. As we continue to use two-stage vaccines, we need about 4.5 million doses to immunize 70% of the population. The Moldovan authorities, including the presidency of the Republic of Moldova, are currently negotiating with the vaccine manufacturer Pfizer BioNTech, and are at the stage of drafting the contract and establishing the delivery schedule. A tranche of about 100,000 doses is due to be delivered in June. Negotiations are also being conducted with the European Commission and EU countries to enable the option of reselling vaccines to third countries by EU states. In April, the other 128,000 doses of AstraZeneca from Romania will arrive in the Republic of Moldova. Also in April, 180,000 doses of Sputnik V would arrive, out of which 60,000 will be delivered to the Transnistrian region.

In March, the Government allocated 60 million lei from the Government Reserve Fund for the purchase of about 330,000 doses of vaccine³, confirming that the 2021 budget did not provide sufficient sources for the purchase of vaccines. Estimates from the National Agency for Public Health show that 4,851,403 doses are needed to reach the target of 70% vaccination rate among the population. Given that 1,386,115 doses (for 20% of the population) will be obtained free of charge through the COVAX platform, 2,079,173 doses (for 30% of the population) will be necessary to be purchased at a preferential price through the same instrument, and the remaining 1,386,115 doses (for 20% of the population) will need to be purchased directly from the manufacturer.

The way in which the COVID-19 vaccination process started suggests the idea that the former executive did not make enough efforts to get vaccines. This is also demonstrated by the uncertainty surrounding the procurement of vaccines. Immunization began much later, compared to other states, due to the lack of vaccines. The late adoption of the National COVID-19 Immunization Plan also demonstrates a superficial approach to the immunization process, as the delivery of vaccines is also conditioned by the existence of this document. We understand that the production capacities of the companies do not cover the demand for vaccines, but we find that apart from the Covax platform, no negotiations has been carried out with the producers in order to acquire vaccines. The

² How long would each vaccination stage last. <https://www.covidinfo.md/vaccinarea-impotriva-covid-19>

³ The government has allocated 60 million lei for the purchase of 330 thousand doses of COVID vaccine.

<https://gov.md/ro/content/guvernul-alocat-60-de-milioane-de-lei-pentru-procurarea-330-mii-doze-de-vaccin-anti-covid>

experience of other states in the process of immunizing the population shows that they have concluded contracts (providing payment in advance) with companies that were in the process of developing vaccines.

Moreover, the vaccination campaign was not very well prepared, neither from an organizational point of view nor from an informational point of view. Skepticism about the immunization process is very high, accounting for about 31% of the population of the Republic of Moldova⁴. An effective campaign is needed to persuade the population to get vaccinated. Vaccination is not mandatory, but the authorities must impose conditions on those who, by virtue of their activity, communicate with other persons. If, for example, in middle and high schools the vaccination target of about 70% is not reached, then there should be no return not return to physical presence in classrooms. As we obtain the required doses of vaccines, similar conditions should apply to providers of services.

All these findings, together with the almost entire lack of stipulated financial resources in the 2021 budget for the procurement of vaccines, suggest that the immunization process has not been given the necessary attention. The urging of the Acting Prime Minister for citizens to look for any possibility of getting vaccinated⁵, if they are not part of the first or second stage of vaccination, confirms that a good part of the citizens have been left to fend for themselves.

⁴ Decision no.41 of January 13, 2021, of the National Extraordinary Public Health Commission on the approval of the National Immunization Plan against COVID-19../

https://gov.md/sites/default/files/hotarire_cnesp_nr_41_din_13.01.2021.pdf

⁵ Aurel Ciocoi: "I urge our citizens to look for any possibility of vaccination"../ <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/a-ciocoi-%c3%aei-%c3%aendemn-pe-cet%c4%83%c8%9benii-no%c8%99tri-s%c4%83-caute-orice-posibilitate-de-a-se-vaccina-anti-covid/31190809.html>