

*Attila Rákóczi – Anett Krizsán*

# The Activity of the Government Office of Békés County During the Period of the COVID-19 Pandemic



## *Summary*

In the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic, our country reacted immediately and is now implementing a coherent and coordinated defence strategy. It indeed means the synchronised activity of health care organisations, military, police and disaster management forces as well as territorial public administration bodies. It closely concerns the social field and educational directorate, however protecting the economy is also greatly focused on. Government offices on (district) county level as state public administration bodies of general competence carry out a number of tasks during the times of defence against the pandemic. Initially, they were assisting in handing out protective equipment for the health care sector, making pandemic-related decisions, implementing the testing of social institutions, teachers and health care staff and executing economy protection measures. Following the availability of vaccines, the responsible county working groups are organising the scheduled vaccination activities. The study presents in detail the activities of the Government Office of Békés County in the fight against COVID-19, besides just carrying out its core tasks.

**Journal of Economic Literature (JEL) codes:** F16, I13, I15, M21, O12, O38, P16, Z18

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## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 virus resulting in a pandemic, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus has unexpectedly struck the world and caused more than 98 million confirmed cases and 2.2 million deaths worldwide since January 2020, with rarely seen significant impacts on the World's countries (Fraser et al., 2020). Researchers, Botos (2020) and Bruckner (2020) examined the international effects of COVID-19 and set up correlations relevant to domestic epidemiology. The pandemic had negative effects on many sectors such as the health care system (Deák et al., 2020) and the operation of economy (Rakesh – Prabheesh, 2021; Posgay et al., 2020). Daniel's work (2020) also points out that changes were needed to apply in the educational system as well. Moreover, the consequences included in Domokos's (2020) research highlights that, although the pandemic had created a lot of uncertainty, it still resulted in an environment that draws the attention towards the importance of change/crisis management in a more emphasised way and accelerates digital development as well.

In Hungary, as world wide, immediate actions were needed to prevent the spread of the epidemic, reducing the number of diseases, saving human lives and keeping the economy functioning were of strategic importance. The protection process was therefore implemented in a complex, centrally controlled way via sharing the tasks among the designated bodies of health care organisations, law enforcement (military, police), national disaster management forces and the public administration. The researcher, Finta's work (2020) pointed out the important role of the local municipalities in the situation. In handling the pandemic situation, the territorial public administration bodies such as the Prime Minister's Office and the county government offices were implementing their protection activities while continuously carrying out their daily core functions as well.

## GOVERNMENT OFFICES

The capital and county-level government offices were established on 1 January, 2011 according to the Law CXXVI of 2010. They are managed by the Minister heading the Prime Minister's Office. Their basic operational rules are governed by Law CXXV of 2018 on government administration. The government commissioner manages the government office, the director general heads the government office organisation whose work is assisted by the director. The district offices of the government offices began operating two years later, on 1 January, 2013. The district offices are managed by heads of the district offices (Varga-Neszményi, 2013).

The capital and county-level government offices have several thousands of diversified rights of authority covering nearly all areas of life, including family allowances, social, agricultural, building constructions, land registry, employment, technical licensing and documentation matters, which literally concerns the entire territorial public administration (Gyurita, 2014).

The Government Office of Békés County has 14 general departments and nine district offices. The district offices are branch offices of the government office and, managed by the head of the office, which possess independent authority. They can be found all throughout the county and provide administration for the citizens. One of their most important tasks is to provide customer service, the government window and issuing legal documents. There are 16 government windows in the county, and 2 independent offices issuing legal documents. The district offices also perform employment, guardianship, public health, HACCP safety and animal health duties as well as general authority duties. The total staff of the Government Office of Békés County is 1,549 (BÉMKGH, 2021). The human resources base of government offices is mostly made up of civil servants dedicated to the public administration career. Researchers, György and Hazafi's (2018) work presents the characteristics of being employed in public service and civil service. As a result of the change in the field of defence administration in 2012, the chairmanship of the county defence committee is held by the government commissioner (Gyurita, 2014), which plays a key role in the protection against the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### THE PERIOD OF THE PANDEMIC OUTBREAK

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The first cases were detected in Wuhan, China in December 2019. On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak of the new coronavirus a public health emergency of international concern.

The first registered case of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic of 2020 was reported on 4 March, 2020 in Hungary, while the first death case was reported on 15 March 2020. The epidemic has so far struck the country in three waves. The first decree of epidemiological surveillance issued by the Government Office of Békés County was declared on 12 March 2020, and the one on the first quarantine was declared on 17 March 2020. In Hungary, the first wave of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic lasted from March to May 2020, the second one from August 2020 to mid-February 2021, and the third one from mid-February to early June 2021. The summarised study of researchers Uzzoli and his co-authors (2021) points out that the regional economical and developmental differences and health inequalities may also be key factors in the spread of an epidemic. In many of his researches, Egri (2017 a, b) as well studies such aforementioned differences.

#### MEASURES RELATED TO THE FIRST WAVE

After the outbreak of COVID-19, the Government declared a state of emergency for the entire territory of Hungary from 11 March to 17 June 2020 (98 days), based on section 53, paragraph (1) of the Constitution of Hungary. On 18 June 2020 the emergency situation was replaced by a health crisis situation based on the government decree 283/2020 (VI. 17.) on introducing epidemiological preparedness as special law.

At the beginning of the pandemic outbreak, during the first wave, government offices and the county defence committees were fighting with a number of issues. During this time, the Operational Management under direct supervision of the Prime Minister's Office surveyed the capacities of the health care system (human resources, number of beds, intensive care capacities, etc.) and the availability of protective equipment at regular intervals during the defence. Besides the above, the Békés County Defence Committee also took part in creating the appropriate availability of patient beds in accordance with the central instructions (Szerencsés, 2021) and in the relocation of the county hospital. At the same time, the distribution of care protective equipment (face mask and gloves) for GPs was also coordinated by the defence committees.

According to Uzzoli and his co-authors (2021), the spread of a pandemic and the features of its distribution are influenced by several factors, among which, is the implementation of protective measures. The defence related tasks and activities of the Békés County Defence Committee were regularly reported by the online and printed media (Behir, 2020).

#### *Distribution of Protective Equipment*

During the time of the first wave, it was a strategically important task to distribute the necessary protective equipment to the GP care system. Protective equipment was handed over to adults, GP care system professionals and to dental practitioners (primary health care). Disinfectants were provided to social institutions.

Between April and August 2020, a total of 586,000 face masks, 12,660 FFP2 medical masks, 320,000 disposable gloves and 1,622 litres of disinfectant were delivered to primary health care. Furthermore, 425,650 masks, 75,600 gloves and 350 protective clothing were also distributed to social institutions. Some of the protective equipment were donated by the People's Republic of China. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the Chinese government has been providing ongoing assistance to countries around the world, initially on protective equipment and later on the donation of vaccines. Such donations were documented by Kurecic and Haluga (2021) and by several authors's articles as well. In order to strengthen the bilateral friendship between the two nations, on most of the donation packages arriving to Hungary, the following bilingual quotes (Hungarian-Chinese), as a gesture, were written: 'God bless the Hungarian People', quoting from the lyrics of the Hungarian National Anthem and from the great Hungarian poet, Sándor Petőfi: 'Friendship is invisible by day, it shines only like a beetle at night.'

#### *Preparation for the 2020 Graduation Exams*

The pandemic also had a significant impact on education management (Nahalka, 2021), which was also true for the preparation for the 2020 graduation exams, as they were to be organised during the pandemic after implementing the distance learning period. These difficulties were also pointed out by an interviewed student in Keszthelyi's research (2021). Habony and co-researchers interviewed and listened to several students' opinions (2020). During

the preparatory phase, the advanced level examinations of graduation required from the government office to schedule the classrooms and the availability of supervising teachers with more emphasis, in accordance with the regulations. In addition, protective equipment and disinfectants were provided and distributed for the examinations. In order to ensure the successful and safe environment of holding the exams 23,715 protective masks, 15,850 disposable protective gloves and 376 litres of disinfectant (surface and hand) were handed out to the educational institutions during the first wave.

#### *Measures Protecting the Economy*

Effective health protection measures can stop the pandemic, and appropriate economy protection interventions can slowly eradicate the crisis (Evans, 2020). The impact of the pandemic on the world's economy is being studied by several researchers, including Martin A. Weiss (2020) and his colleagues, Taussef Ahmad and his co-researchers (2020) and Segal, and Gerstel (2020), too. The researcher Bagó (2020) analyses in detail the domestic situation from an international perspective. After the outbreak of COVID-19, the government also started to develop immediate plans against threats to the economy. In the framework of the Economy Protection Action Plan, from 16 April 2020 onwards, during the emergency situation, the employer was provided assistance with reduced working hours in order to preserve jobs endangered due to temporary economic difficulties. By this construction, in the event of economic difficulties related to the crisis, in case the employer employed its workers on reduced hours immediately after the declaration of the emergency, the employer and the employee could submit a common form of request to the government offices to avoid redundancies and preserve jobs. In Békés county, 363 requests were approved from a total of 5,559 people, for which nearly HUF 860 million was paid as support.

In order to protect the jobs of highly qualified employees working in the RDI sector, to maintain the wages of those working in the RDI sector, and for the permanent employment of employees in the RDI sector in the Hungarian labour market, it was first announced on 15 April 2020 and then on 4 January 2021 that in the framework of the Economy Protection Action Plan the employment of research and development workers during the crisis would be supported. In Hungary 22 requests were received, with a total of HUF 238.3 million to support the employment of 377 people.

#### EXECUTING TASKS RELATED TO THE SECOND WAVE

In order to take effective, rapid operational measures for epidemiological control, the Government declared the emergency situation again by Government Decree 478/2020. (XI. 3.) on 3 November 2020. During the second wave, the territorial public administration bodies and the County Defence Committees were to deal with further tasks. Among the previous task of distributing protective equipment, the calling for duty of medical and health science students, the implementation of the so called mass-testing, and executing economy protection measures were also continuously carried out.

### *Distribution of Protective Equipment*

As detailed earlier, during the second wave of the pandemic, the continued allocation of protective equipment was also an important part of the defence. Between September 2020 and January 2021, the Government Office distributed 59,294 litres of disinfectant and 1,425 thermometers to the public educational institutions of the county. The county hospitals were provided with 4,800 rapid tests and the social institutions with 15,500 rapid tests. For the so-called mass-testing 1,481 googles, 2,190 face shields, 14,800 protective gloves, 36,760 FFP2 masks, and 30,600 rapid tests were used.

### *Assignment of Health Care Workers*

For the operational start of the Kiskunhalas-based Mobile Epidemic Hospital of the Semmelweis Hospital and the University of Szeged's Medical Teaching Hospital, and for the reception of suspected and confirmed COVID-19 patients, health professionals were required to be called for duty. Based on Paragraph 14, Section (1) of Government Decree 521/2013 on health crisis management (XII.30.) in the event of a health crisis, health care workers may be assigned to institutions that provide primary care, or outpatient care participating in the elimination of a health crisis, or to such temporarily operating medical institution.

According to Section (2), the institution director of the inpatient care institution participating in the elimination of the health crisis situation shall request the assignment to the temporary medical institution from the county government office. The county government office then decides on the necessity of the assignment and obliges the head of the respective health care institution to carry out the staff assignment.

As a first step, on 27 April 2020, a decision was made to assign an anesthesiology and intensive care specialist and an anesthesiology and intensive care candidate-specialist from Orosháza Hospital to the Mobile Epidemic Hospital of Kiskunhalas Hospital. The assignment ended on 1 June 2020. On September 25, 2020, at the request of the National Centre for Public Health (NNK), a decision was made to re-assign the above speciality doctor and speciality doctor candidate to the Mobile Epidemiological Hospital. As a second step, five decisions were made assigning 57 people from the specialists working in the county to the Békés County Central Hospital according to the followings:

From 30 September 2020, three intensive care nurses, four auxiliary care nurses, two specialist nurses from the staff of Orosháza Hospital, one gastro-enterology specialist and two gastro-enterology nurses from the staff of the Békés Medical Centre were assigned to the Békés County Central Hospital. On 1 October 2020, three anesthesiology-intensive care specialists, one anesthesiology-intensive care resident, five intensive care nurses, 24 auxiliary nurses, three gastro-enterology specialists, one gastro-enterology specialist resident and six specialist nurses were assigned from Orosháza Hospital to the Békés County Central Hospital. Furthermore, one pulmonology specialist from the staff of the Sarkad Health Development Nonprofit Ltd., and one from the Szarvas Pulmonary Health Service were assigned to the Békés County Central Hospital. As a third step, by a repeated request of the NNK, 21

health care workers were assigned: two patient transporters from Orosháza Hospital, eight nurses, six deputy nurses and five patient transporters from Békés County Central Hospital to the Mobile Epidemiological Hospital.

*Assigning of Medical and Health Science University Students and Implementing Mass Testing*

According to the decision of the Operational Staff established by the Government to manage epidemiological control, it became necessary to assign medical and health science students coordinated by the government offices in accordance with Act XI (1991) defining Health Authority and Administrative Activities. The government office, as a public health administration body, takes direct actions in the field of health administration and coordination when required by exceptional circumstances (epidemics, natural disasters and other disasters, sudden medical shortages, etc.). According to Government Decree 521/2013 (XII. 30) on health crisis care an adult who is in full-time secondary or higher health vocational training, undergraduate or university-level basic health education, higher education, social basic education and health and socially accredited school vocational training may be reassigned for health crisis care tasks.

Based on the regulations cited above, for the first time in the period of the second wave of the pandemic - starting from November 2020 to January 2021 - the Government Office reassigned university students to perform the tasks of mass testing (on teachers, social institution employees, and health care workers). For the mass testing, 80 people were assigned to the Government Office, 49 to the Békés County Central Hospital and 49 to the László Elek Hospital and Clinic (formerly the Hospital of Orosháza).

In the war against the pandemic, the highest priority tasks were the testing activities. As part of the process, the screening of potentially infected individuals from large and crowded areas was an even more important process to implement against the spread of the pandemic. Ragó (2020) and co-workers in their research also pointed out the importance of mass testing in the case of health care workers. The Hungarian Government provided the legal base for the SARS-CoV-2 rapid testing of employees working in health care institutions, schools, nurseries and social institutions in accordance with the Government Decree 509/2020 (XI. 19). The scheduled and organised testing was coordinated by the government offices at county level, and the distribution of testing equipment, protective equipment, administrative sheets and disinfectants to the relevant institutions was ensured in their area of competence. The testing of educational institutions (nurseries, and schools) staff as well as government office staff was implemented with the involvement of the assigned medical students and their own staff, too. Besides dealing with its general official tasks, the available government office staff had to stand their ground dealing with the epidemiological defense related tasks, too, thus testing its ability to multiply workforce (Rákóczi, 2021). In order to carry out the testing tasks efficiently and smoothly and to determine its strategic steps, the first step was in November 2020 to assess the number of county institutions by district (regardless of their operators), and the exact number of employees needing testing (Table 1).

*Table 1: Data of county institutions involved in mass testing*

<b>Type of institution</b>	<b>Locations</b>	<b>No of employees to be tested</b>
Social institutions	103	2 805
Education institutions	385	6 949
Nurseries	50	480
County Total	538	10 234

*Source: Own editing based on BÉMKH 2021*

The implementation of the testing tasks required an increased, coordinated cooperation between the county's health, social and educational institutions, the local municipalities, the Government Office and its District Offices. Institutions, where the necessary qualified medical staff were available (social and health care institutions), testing was implemented by them. The testing sets and protective equipment as well as the necessary administrative sheets were provided by the Government Office. The testing of some of the nursery's staff was organised by the Government Office through the mobile nurse network. Schools, nurseries and in certain cases the creches were tested by a team (working group). The team consisted of the health science students assigned by the Government Commissioner, as the Chairman of the Defence Committee, a driver and an administrator of the Government Office. In the county 104 people were tested by 26 teams: to these 52 health science students from four universities were assigned to. From 23 November to 12 December 2020, 18,864 samples were taken from teachers, social institutions and health care workers.

Following the winter school break, on 2 and 3 January 2021, the organising of teacher's testing took place anew with six testing teams, assigning a further 14 students and involving the government officers. During the two days the total of 744 testings took place. On 16 and 17 January 2021 the primary social care workers were tested by ten teams dedicated by the Government Office with another 14 assigned students. A total of 444 people were tested.

#### *Measures Protecting the Economy*

At the time of the second pandemic wave, a supporting tool was the introduction of the Sectoral Wage Subsidy granted by the Government Offices, which was introduced by the Government for the event of temporary economical difficulties due to the emergency situation declared on 11 November 2020. The subsidy program is intended to preserve jobs by aiding the hospitality and tourism sectors and other leisure activity, passenger transporting, travel organisation businesses affected by the lockdown and its measures since 8 March 2021. This is done by providing a 50% wage subsidy to the gross salary of six months of the respective employees. In Békés County 1,058 requests were received for support, with a total of HUF 2.500 million in support for the employment of 4,797 people in order to keep job retention in the affected sectors.



## TASKS RELATED TO THE THIRD WAVE

### *Distribution of Protective Equipment*

The sets of protective equipment were continuously distributed during the third wave. Between February and June 2021, the Government Office supplied 60,907 litres of disinfectant to the county public educational institutions and 40,500 surgical masks, 14,300 FFP2 masks, 20,600 protective gloves as well as 19,080 rapid tests to the primary care. In addition to the above, similarly to 2020, the Government Office provided 5,150 face masks and 10,300 disposable protective gloves to the institutions in charge of implementing examinations in order to successfully organise the 2021 graduation exams.

### *The Calling of Medical and Health Science Students on Duty*

As described above, starting with March 2021, the Government Office also assigned 223 medical university or college education students to the Békéscsaba station of the National Emergency Ambulance Service (NEAS), and 98 of them to the county hospital, in order to carry out the increased testing tasks.

### *Measures Protecting the Economy*

In line with the emergency restrictions, the Government decided to introduce the programme called 'Compensation Support for the Self-Employed' financed by the national budget. A self-employed person who was not entitled to be granted any aid under certain economy protection measures during the emergency while pursuing an activity defined by the government decree related to the compensation aid for the self-employed may receive a non-refundable grant based on a claim submitted to the District Office acting as the public employment service body. The grant is financed from the national budget; it amounts to the guaranteed monthly minimum wage of HUF 219,000. So far, 2,672 applications have been received, for which the amount of HUF 527 million have been paid until the date of publishing the current study.

In accordance with the economy protection activities, the Government Office of Békés County issued a management directive. Its aim is to implement strategies defined in an action plan to solve virus emergency related economical problems. IT improvements were made as well in order to achieve a rapid and more accurate completion of application forms and financial clearance process. All tools were lined up to help the ones most in need (extended customer service, etc.). At the same time, with regards to the fact that subsidies were intended to alleviate the emergency caused economy problems, instead of the eight working days defined by the law, the decisions were made within an average of five days, which resulted in immediate actions to disburse.

## ACTIVITIES DURING THE FOURTH WAVE

### *Distribution of Protective Equipment*

Between September and December 2021, the Government Office provided 28,102 litres of disinfectant for county public education institutions, 75,900 surgical masks for the primary care, 46,200 FFP2 masks, 90,300 examination gloves and 56,675 rapid tests, 735 face shields, 490 protective googles and 3,900 protective suits.

### *The Calling of Medical and Health Science Students on Duty*

As described earlier, between September and December 2021, 43 students were assigned to the GP doctor's offices, 134 to the Békéscsaba station of the National Emergency Ambulance Service (NEAS) and a further 57 students to the county hospital.

### *Booster Vaccination of Social Institutions*

From 1 August 2021 onwards, the organisation of administering the third dose of vaccinations to the social care home residents and to the social institution employees started to be implemented. The vaccination process was continuously done by mobile vaccination teams and hospital physicians. Almost all of the residential county institutions signed up for vaccination, and a total number of 3,618 residents and care patients received the third dose of vaccination.

### *Expanding Vaccination for the Elderly over 60 Years of Age*

Following the moderation of the third wave, it was a further task to keep expanding the availability of getting vaccination. Starting in July 2021 and onwards, the aim was to reduce the number of non-vaccinated persons from the endangered age group (over 60 years of age). Mainly GPs were commissioned with implementing vaccination tasks, where it was possible to be vaccinated on site without prior registration. GPs weekly interviewed the respective persons by telephone or in person, therefore a continuous increase in vaccinating this age group could be reached.

### *Vaccination in Education Institutions*

It was a milestone in increasing the population's vaccination coverage that the vaccination over the age of 12 was also allowed during the summer. Vaccinating this age group could be started at the county vaccination stations and at the GP offices, too. Besides, the possibility of vaccination had to be provided in the county public education institutions at the starting of school in autumn, according to the decision of the National Vaccination Team. School vaccinations were performed by school physicians and mobile vaccination teams. In Békés county, between the end of August and the middle of October 2021, a total number of 1,632

students over the age of 12 were vaccinated within the framework of a school vaccination programme in three different periods. In addition, vaccinations were certainly further performed continuously at vaccination points/stations and in GP practices as well.

#### THE OPERATION OF TERRITORIAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION DURING THE PANDEMIC

The pandemic presented the territorial public administration with an unprecedented challenge, as the Government Office and its departments still had to continue performing its official tasks in addition to fully performing the vaccination tasks. During the pandemic situation, a managing directive was issued aimed at providing a framework for both employees and customers to ensure the smooth and secure operation of the Government Office. The necessary protective equipment and disinfectants were provided to the officers working directly with the customers, administration was exclusively available by appointments at the government windows (customer service) in order to minimise the personal contact. The legal regulation made it possible to avoid customer hearings with a large number of participants, on-site inspections were only made in the most justified cases, and hard-copy based case approval came to the fore-front instead. E-administration has probably never been as important as during the pandemic.

During the pandemic, the possibility of e-administration served not only customer convenience but their security as well, which, together with legal simplifications, made it possible for the administrative services to remain operational. The e-traffic of the [magyarorszag.hu](http://magyarorszag.hu) website and the number of applications and documents submitted by e-paper significantly increased; it also meant that the number of cases pending approval at the government windows did not decrease, while the number of walk-in-customers decreased significantly.

An impact of the pandemic is reflected in the growing popularity of e-administration, which in itself, apart from all other circumstances, is not necessarily a disadvantage, as the expectation of cost-effective, modern and fast administration is easier to provide.

#### ACTIVITIES OF THE BÉKÉS COUNTY VACCINATION TEAM

The coronavirus vaccination activities, the logistical process planning, the preparation of the implementation and the management of the national coordination of the vaccination process are performed by the National Vaccination Team established in accordance with the decision of the Operational Staff. In addition to the National Vaccination Team, both in the capital and in the counties vaccination teams were also set up, managed by the government commissioners (as being chairmen of the county defence committees). The county vaccination teams are to plan and organise the vaccination activities and to manage the coordination at the county level. On 20 January 2021, Dr. GYÖRGY, István, the Secretary of State of Territorial Public Administration of the Prime Minister's Office arranged for the establishment of vaccination teams for the capital and the counties. The Békés County Vaccination Team has been coordinating the county vaccination processes since January 2021, and executes the activities assigned to the chairman of the County Defence Committee, Dr. TAKÁCS, Árpád (Table 2; Figure 1) by the National Vaccination Team.

*Table 2: Members of the Békés County Vaccination Team*

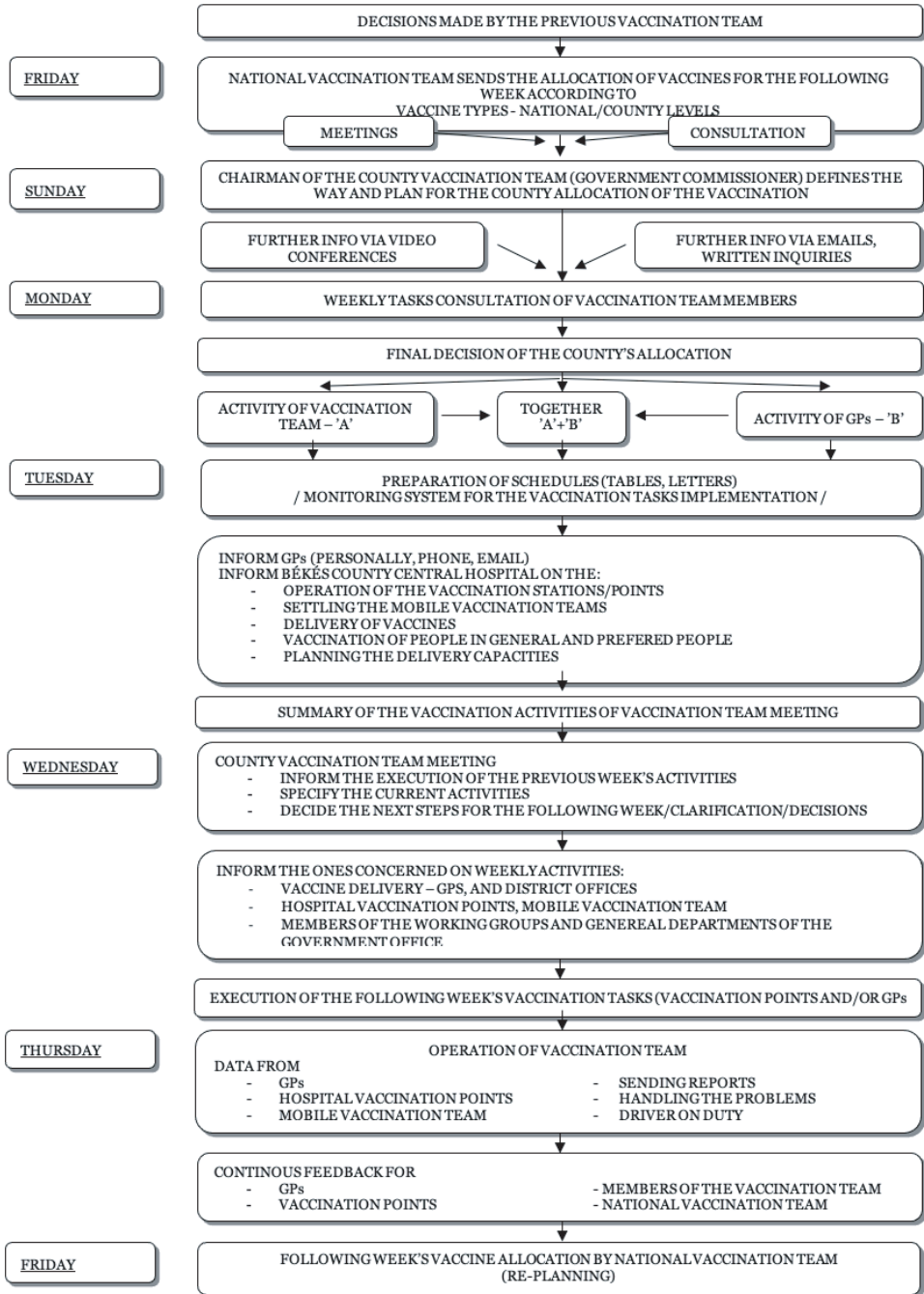
<b>Chairman</b>	<b>Government Commissioner</b>	
Members	Director General of Government Office	County Hospital Director General
	Defence Committee Deputy Director for Disaster Management	County ER Station Director
	Deputy Defence Minister of the Defence Committee	County Collegiate GP
	County Chief Physician	
Invited	Director of Government Office	Chief of County Police
	Commander of County Prison	Head of the County SZGYF

*Source: Own editing based on BÉMKH 2021*

Between 21 January (opening meeting) and 31 December 2021, the Békés County Vaccination Team had a total number of 21 meetings. Between the team meetings, employees on duty ensured the continuous and immediate information flow for the operational tasks. At the meetings, the Government Commissioner informed the participants on what had happened since the previous meeting, set out the tasks for the following week, listened to the questions and suggestions of the members and guests about specific issues. The team consulted the opinions before decisions were made, at the meeting tasks were agreed and recorded in a memorandum, which was sent to members and the leaders concerned.

According to Chart No. 1, the activities of the Békés County Vaccination Team were scheduled and synchronised. The allocation of the activities and the available amount of vaccines for a particular week (National Vaccine Distribution Plan) was registered weekly by the National Vaccination Team, it was sent every Friday nationally and county-wide, prepared according to the types of vaccines. In relation to that, following a short consultation, the Government Commissioner defined the county's vaccine distribution plan by Sunday. Every Monday with a weekly occurrence, following a consultation with the respective executive staff members, the final county vaccine distribution plan was decided. Hospital vaccination points, GP cabinets and mobile vaccination teams of social institutions took part in the implementation of vaccination tasks. On Tuesdays, the operational consultations took place between the public health and coordination departments of the Government Office, and persons concerned with the vaccination tasks, they then sent the necessary information for the implementation of the task. On Wednesdays, the Government Office, with the help of its district offices, arranged the delivery of the vaccines to the respective GP doctor's offices. The so-called vaccination week therefore began on Thursdays and ended on the following week on Wednesdays. This weekly repeated workflow allowed the continuous, efficient, fast execution of tasks. The team was continuously available 24 hours a day, thanks to the employees on duty, responding with prompt solutions to problems occurring during the execution of tasks.

Figure 1: Activities of the Békés County Vaccination Team



Source: Own editing based on BÉMKH 2021

*Monitoring System for the Vaccination Tasks Implementation*

The Monitoring System for the Vaccination Tasks Implementation has been developed for the accurate, professional monitoring of the COVID-19 vaccine administration on county level. The essence of the system is that even in any force majeure event, several authorised responsible persons have continuous access to it, ensuring the uninterrupted and smooth execution of the tasks. The operational principle of the system is a programme-controlled folder system stored on a common, secure drive. This control is based on a single A4-size document for long-term, easier overview of tasks with deadlines. In the document, one line represents one vaccination activity (for example, first or second round of vaccinations provided for social care homes or GPs, etc.). The lines included in the document are also active tabs, which, when clicked, display all the documents related to the given vaccination task, with tables, doctor correspondence, vaccine statements, and previous implementation reports, which serve as basic data and plans for repeated vaccination tasks. Using the system allows the continuous and uninterrupted planning of foreseeable tasks for planning both the vaccination teams and the required vaccines as well. By establishing and operating the system, the county vaccination tasks are carried out under continuous managerial monitoring and synchronisation, closely aligned with national guidelines and progress.

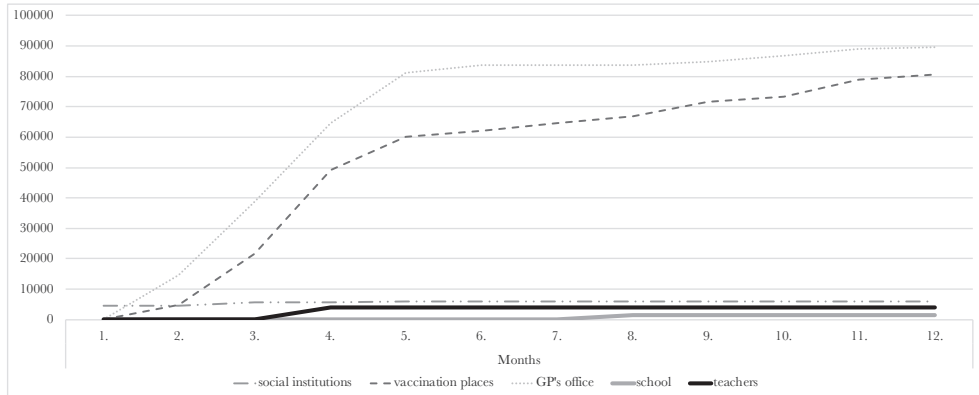
The uploaded data also provide the basis for creating the summary reports for the National Vaccination Team. The system also includes an interactive map, which contains the county-level data required for the logistical planning and execution of tasks, such as the location, address and capacity features of GP doctor's offices, specialist clinics, hospitals, designated vaccination points, ambulance stations, petrol stations, etc.

*Progress in Vaccination Tasks Implementation*

In the county, vaccination tasks were organised closely in line with the tasks issued by the National Vaccination Team. This synchronisation has continuously been important, as the national vaccine allocation arriving in the country on a weekly basis determined the use of vaccine types, the numbers, the age and the health status of the group to be vaccinated during a particular vaccination week in the county. At the beginning of the year, vaccination started with one of the most vulnerable groups, the in-house patients of the social institutions. This task was performed by mobile vaccination teams, staffed by the Békés County Central Hospital. Next, due to the special storage of the vaccine available at that particular time, it was only possible to get vaccinated at the vaccination points set up in the hospitals (Békéscsaba, Gyula, Orosháza) by appointing the persons to be vaccinated through general practitioners. The county municipalities provided outstanding assistance in the delivery. In a few weeks, there were the types of vaccine that could be distributed to GPs, allowing to expand the county vaccination points to roughly 189 GPs. After that, the number of central vaccination points were continuously expanded. Hence, a government office decree assigned the specialist clinics of Szeghalom, Szarvas, Mezőkovácsháza and finally Gyomaendrőd to carry out the vaccination tasks. Then the vaccination process continued in an organised and scheduled way simultane-

ously at the central vaccination points and the GP doctor’s offices, the county vaccination tasks progressed, and the vaccination increased (Chart No. 2). All this undoubtedly required intensely planned and implemented logistical background work, including the transportation of persons to be vaccinated, vaccines, and hazardous waste as well.

*Figure 2: Progress of vaccination tasks*



Source: Own editing based on *BÉMKH 2021*

## SUMMARY

During the defence period against the pandemic, the Government Office of Békés County continuously was executing the defence activities as well as smoothly carrying out its dedicated territorial public administration duties as well. Like Bagó (2020)– who quotes from the so called 'Extraordinary Appendix' of the Hazai's Foreign Reports (issued on 24 September 1831) in the March 26, 2020 issue of *World Weekly Economy*– we also express the following hope: 'Residents who have been so far terrified, find it now easier to breathe: the fainted cheeks turn red, the 'blurred eyes are starting to laugh,' the sad faces are starting to glow, 'the good neighbours are approaching their neighbours,' the true friends are visiting their friends, true brothers are shaking hands', 'parents in love embrace with their dear offsprings, people gather bravely in ordinary places', 'people of religion appear in sanctuaries in greater numbers', 'hospitals are getting emptied', 'patients are visited without fear', 'Trade is flourishing again', 'craftsmen receive wages', 'the temples of the Muses shall be opened; the terrible wail is completely gone.'

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## ACTS AND DECREES USED AS REFERENCES

### Constitution of Hungary

Act XI of 1991 on health authorities and administration.

Act CXXVI of 2010 Government Offices of the capital and counties and on the amendment of the law related to the establishment of the Government Offices of the capital and counties and territorial integration.

Act CXXV of 2018 on government administration.

283/2020(VI. 17) Government Decree on the state of pandemic emergency.

310/2021. (VI. 7) Government Decree on compensatory aid for the self-employed.

478/2020. (XI. 3) Government Decree on public health emergency.

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