

Prognosis

Thousands in the Balkans Flock to Serbia to Get First Covid Shot

By [Misha Savic](#)

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Patients wait to receive a dose of the Oxford-AstraZeneca anti-Covid-19 vaccine in Belgrade. *Photographer: Vladimir Zivojinovic/Getty Images*

Thousands of people from across the Balkans traveled to Serbia this weekend to get their first dose of a coronavirus vaccine as access to the shots in their homelands remains scarce.

As many as 22,000 people made the trip on Saturday and Sunday to Serbia, the nation with the fastest inoculation campaign in mainland Europe. Most visitors got AstraZeneca shots after being given the choice of a Western-made vaccine so they may more easily qualify for future vaccine passports.

The initiative included some 8,500 doses given to entrepreneurs from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania to help local and regional companies stay afloat in the pandemic, said Marko Cadez, the head of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce, who proposed the drive.

“It’s crucial to save your partners -- we’re all connected in the region,” he said by phone on Monday. “All our companies have very interconnected supply chains. They really depend a lot on each other. You can’t carry on producing anything if your partners have to shut down” because of infections, he said.

Serbia has imported more than 2.8 million vaccines for its 7 million people after President Aleksandar Vucic negotiated direct deals with multiple manufacturers, including China’s Sinopharm, Pfizer-BioNTech, AstraZeneca and Russian drug makers. The government also sent several thousand vaccines to neighbors as a donation earlier this year.

“We can’t be successful if people in the region are not vaccinated,” Vucic, who has criticized the European Union’s slow distribution of vaccines, told reporters. “We’re not an island.”

The drive to vaccinate businesspeople and their employees from neighboring countries will continue in the coming days, depending on the availability of vaccines and infrastructure, Cadez said.

More than 1.4 million Serbs have been vaccinated, including 920,000 with two doses. The pace may pick up if the government manages to start local production of Chinese and Russian vaccines as planned.

Though Serbia’s offer of shots mainly applied to its five neighbors that also aspire to join the European Union, some traveled from EU members Croatia and Slovenia.

“As a healthy 50-something, I estimated that my turn to get vaccinated at home will probably be in the fall,” Zinka Bardic, a public relations consultant from the Croat capital Zagreb, said after she went to Serbia to get inoculated.

– *With assistance by Jasmina Kuzmanovic, and Jan Bratanic*