

Overview of Covid-19 measures taken by the City of Vienna

as at April 3rd, 2020

The Austrian government decided to implement first measures to combat the Corona crisis by March 16th, 2020. Vienna has reacted at a very early stage, in close cooperation with all stakeholders in the city, our citizens and the national government, to prepare the city for the Covid-19-pandemia. Our first concern was to secure all services in the health and social sector and the provision of food and daily needs for all our citizens. Our public companies – energy, waste, water and transport – reacted swiftly to keep up securing the services for our citizens in high quality and maximum safety. Schools were not closed, but education was moved to home learning, however, schools remain open to care for children whose parents have to work, e.g. in critical infrastructure. In the third week of the measures in Austria, we see tremendous losses in jobs and problems in our local economy. As of April 1st, 2020 we have 1.456 positive Covid-19 cases confirmed, we regret the loss of 29 of our citizens, and 67 persons who recovered and are healthy again.

In the first days of confinement, the Mayor of Vienna, Michael Ludwig, addressed the population with a message of solidarity and hope:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Ufil5Bs4Qw>

Today, we are proud to see that there is a great spirit of standing together in the Vienna population, and a lot of community and neighbourhood initiatives which the city also supports, wherever needed.

Health and social care

- Vienna set up a 24/7 central medical helpline for all citizens to clarify health questions related to Covid 19.



- Already one day before the official beginning of confinement, Vienna hospitals introduced access checks and a visiting ban. Whoever arrives at one of the hospitals is first of all submitted to a medical examination by a team of doctors to clarify if a hospital treatment is necessary.

- In the first week of the nationwide measures, a care centre with 880 beds was set up by the city at "Messe Wien" (Vienna Fair) for people with moderate courses of the disease to relieve emergency units in our hospitals.
- Our women's shelters are prepared for possible additional demand, we see a moderate increase in counselling interviews, no increased requests for women's shelters. Telephone consultation is possible during the day; emergency calls can be made 24/7 as already before the crisis.
- Although our social welfare centres had to close for personal visits, expiring rent subsidies and social benefits are automatically extended. Requests and applications can be submitted by e-mail, post or fax.

Public services: energy, water, waste and transport

- Already in the first week, 53 staff members of the municipal energy company isolated themselves on a voluntary basis in the power plants to guarantee energy supply even in the case of a greater emergency.
- Household waste is collected as usual by our municipal waste company, but only four waste disposal sites remain open.
- Vienna waterworks has set up a crisis management team and informed citizens that safe, stable and clean water supply is guaranteed.
- Vienna public transport adapted their schedule and run on holiday schedule; passenger numbers dropped by 80 percent. Night underground trains are cancelled on weekends; night busses can be taken instead.
- The municipal cemeteries stay open and funerals can be held, however only a very limited group of mourners is allowed.
- Vienna's parks and green spaces stay open, although playgrounds have been closed.
- Short-term parking zones are suspended, garages offer cheaper rates.

Helping the economy and people to keep jobs

The City unleashed a budget of 40 mio. Euros for immediate measures in connection with the coronavirus, and another 20 mio. Euros are provided by the Economic Chamber to help sole traders and micro-enterprises via the Economic Chamber of Vienna.

- Our Vienna Business Agency supports setting up home offices with another 10 mio. Euro in a first round.
<https://viennabusinessagency.at/funding/programs/home-office-131/>
- 12 mio. Euros are provided in form of guarantees to boost liquidity for Viennese SME's by the "Wiener Kreditbürgschaftsgesellschaft WKBG".
<https://www.wkbg.at/buergschaftsbank-wien-kredite/>
- Vienna Business Agency acts as first contact point for business and offers advice on all support measures available for businesses. Viennese business people with Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian and Turkish receive information in their native language.

- Our Vienna Employment Promotion Fund has increased its budget by 3 mio. Euros to assist people who lost their jobs and companies in difficulties by e.g. setting up labour foundations.
- Additionally, Vienna has set up a platform for companies that offer delivery services, opportunities for artists to perform, taxi vouchers for the older generation, suspension of charges for pavement cafés.
- All 22 food markets including their farmers' corners as well as the weekly markets stay open and set up a home delivery service.

Housing and homelessness

- Our Mayor made clear that all tenants in our municipal housing dwellings will be able to stay in case they have problems with the rent. The cooperative housing sector followed this example. There will be no evictions in the public and cooperative housing sector in the time of the crisis in Vienna. In the meantime, also the national government stopped all evictions due to the Corona crisis in the private sector until June.
- For homeless people, emergency accommodations adapted their schedules and remain accessible all day, day centres also stay open.

Arts and culture

- The public funding for all theatres, concert halls and other cultural institutions will continue despite the closure of all event places. Individual artists are offered online stage acts in one of our theatres, Rabenhof, in the municipal housing block of the same name.
- All courses and lectures at the adult education centres (VHS) have been suspended; the course units are caught up on at a later time or changed to online courses.
- The public libraries started a series of online lectures of Austrian and Viennese authors.

Communication, citizen engagement and neighbourhood initiatives

- We adapt information about all our measures in an easy to understand and barrier-free language and translate our communication into the languages of all the communities living in Vienna to make sure that everyone receives the message.
<https://coronavirus.wien.gv.at/site/faq-english/>
- A "neighbourhood telephone" for **all our citizens** was set up **to organise help in daily life for those in need** in their neighbourhood.
<https://wien.volunteerlife.eu/home/freiwillig>
- Help for people without relatives and direct consultation and emergency aid for people in exceptional circumstances can be accessed by a special telephone number.
- Children are addressed in a special video that has been published to explain the Corona-virus and how to protect one self and others.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kU4oCmRFTw>

Administrative processes still possible

Although most of our staff who is not involved in securing critical infrastructure works from home now, the City of Vienna still allows for applications that guarantee the applicant a continued existence, e.g. the minimum benefit system, to be submitted to the respective department. A lot of administrative processes can be done online.

Life after the crisis

The political leadership in Vienna is well aware that after the crisis, we will have to re-boost our economy by making it resilient and circular, encourage job creation, secure our public, health and social services for future challenges and learn the lessons from what happens today. In this, we count on the principle of solidarity, with our city partners in Europe, the EU institutions and member states, social partners, stakeholders and citizens. We see with great concern that democracy and its institutions are in danger in parts of our continent; we must start today with the discussion about the future of urban society, our European economic and social model and democracy.

- Mayor Ludwig has therefore not only acted, together with social partners, to respond to the immediate needs, he has also tasked the Vienna Economic Council to develop strategies for “the day after” together with business, trade unions, academia and other stakeholders. It will also be vital to see what instruments the EU will provide to enable cities to reconstruct the economy, maintain strong and reliable public services and stabilize the health and social security networks that our citizens need.
- Our Vienna lectures (Wiener Vorlesungen) have moved online and debate the important issue of „Post-Corona Democracy in Europe“ with Professor Ulrike Guérot, political thinker and founder and director of the European Democracy Lab, head of the department of European Policy and the Study of Democracy at Danube University Krems in Austria.

<https://vorlesungen.wien.gv.at/site/wv-digital-die-post-corona-demokratie-in-europa/>

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