

Information on COVID-19

Ljubljana, 27 March 2020

Slovenia declares coronavirus epidemic

On 12 March 2020 Slovenia declared an epidemic (in accordance with Article 7 of the Contagious Diseases Act) which entered into force at 6 p.m. At the same time, the national emergency response plan for COVID-19 was activated. On that day there were 96 coronavirus cases in Slovenia, and the number was growing. On Thursday, 26 March, there were 577 coronavirus cases out of 17,294 testings performed.

Slovenia limited social contacts to the greatest extent possible, in order to stem the spread of coronavirus infections in the most effective way and to keep the health system operational. Kindergartens, schools and universities were closed as of 16 March. Schools were given the necessary instructions on how to conduct distance education.

It is important to note that the new government was formed in parallel with the declaration of the epidemic. The first regular session of the new government, led by the Prime Minister Janez Janša, was held on 13 March. Two days later, in a call to mayors to take an active role in the implementation of measures necessary to contain the spread of the coronavirus, the government stressed the “indispensable workers in the energy industry”.

The earthquake and the Krško Nuclear Power Plant

In addition to the epidemic, on 22 March 2020 the national earthquake monitoring network recorded a magnitude 5.1 earthquake near Zagreb (Croatia), 115 km east of Ljubljana. The main earthquake was followed by several aftershocks. The strongest of them was at 7.01 am with a magnitude of 4.4. The earthquake was also detected by the seismic monitoring system at the Krško Nuclear Power Plant (NPP). The plant staff started inspecting systems and equipment as a normal preventive action.

The nuclear power plant continues to operate at full power. Power plant personnel have taken appropriate action. To date, there have been no environmental impacts. The Slovenian Nuclear Safety Administration (SNSA) monitors the developments and will keep the public informed about the results of the systems and equipment inspection and about the further actions.

Reliable energy supply crucial in a crisis situation

Key players in the Slovenian energy sector – being also members of the Energy Industry Chamber of Slovenia (EICS) – have recognised the spread of the virus as a threat to the uninterrupted supply of electricity and natural gas to end customers, and are therefore taking the necessary steps to ensure the smooth, safe and reliable operation of critical infrastructure systems and facilities. The measures taken will ensure the highest possible level of self-isolation and risk management to prevent the spread of infection.

ELES, the electricity transmission system operator and the critical infrastructure manager, has been through the Republic Control Centre in a constant coordination with other European system operators in the preparation of preventive measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus infections. They have paid special attention to the health of the operating staff, who are responsible and trained to operate the power system. Ongoing communication and daily exchange of relevant information is established with the Slovenian Ministry of Infrastructure. Due to the gravity of the situation, a team of six (6) operators is completely isolated and sealed at their workplace at the Republic Control

Centre for 14 days; the team manages and coordinates the operation of the Slovenian electricity system from the Centre day and night. After 14 days, the team of six operators will return home, and for the next 14 days, a second team of six operators, currently under quarantine, will take over.

The Electricity Distribution Economic Interest Grouping (GIZ DEE), established by five Slovenian electricity distribution companies, all members of the EICS, has taken over the coordination of the unification of measures to provide critical personnel in all five distribution companies. This is key to an uninterrupted provision of the public utility service of electricity distribution in Slovenia. The conclusion was reached that the electricity distribution companies temporarily exchange key personnel in case of shortages in any of the companies. The Grouping actively monitors the information and guidance given by the authorities regarding the coronavirus. They have taken the necessary preventive measures to curb employee infections and have drawn up a plan to ensure the smooth running of companies' work processes. They adapt the measures according to the developments and instructions from the competent authorities.

The Grouping's Assembly President Andrej Ribič, who is also a member of EICS's Expert Council, has been appointed as a contact person for Civil Protection for all electricity distribution companies.

SODO, an electricity distribution system operator in the Republic of Slovenia, says that there have been no confirmed cases of the coronavirus among their employees. Electrical energy is being supplied normally. The key operation and intervention processes are ensured. Back-up locations of distribution centers have been established, while a special management and protection of staff at these centers has been ensured. Investments and other services are limited to the most urgent tasks. Office buildings are closed to visitors. All the communication is done via electronic communication channels and telephones. Office employees work mostly from home, while others have been assigned to smaller groups, are on leave or on standby. Employees have been made aware of preventive measures to ensure protection against infections. Physical meetings are being held only exceptionally.

Since the announcement of the coronavirus epidemic in Slovenia on 12 March and up to 25 March 2020, there has been a 4.25% decline in electric energy consumption within the distribution system in Slovenia compared to the same period in 2019, and 8.58% compared to 2018. If the crisis continues and further measures are imposed, SODO expects at least 10% decline in consumption of electrical energy. There have already been pressures to extend payment terms and abolish energy supply disconnections, from the customers' side. SODO regularly informs the state authorities about the current situation and measures, which are being taken. Projections of various scenarios, which address the problem of declining consumption and loss of financial resources, consequently, liquidity, are being prepared.

The Krško Nuclear Power Plant (part of the GEN Group) is considered a critical energy infrastructure facility. With the declaration of an epidemic at the national level, they switched to providing only those functions that are necessary to ensure the safe and stable operation of the plant. A control of operations in shifts, urgent testing of safety equipment, urgent maintenance work, analytical chemistry of cooling media, radiological control within the plant and in the surroundings and physical protection of the plant have been introduced. All project work sites are temporarily closed, only entrances to the power plant are allowed for services that are necessary for the smooth operation and safety. Specific measures are intended for the self-protective behaviour of the staff that works in shifts and to provide conditions for reducing the risk of infection. They follow instructions to reduce the likelihood of virus transmission, self-isolation, separation and continuity of shift crews,

disinfection of common hubs and temperature control upon entry into the power plant. Clear instructions for self-protective behaviour of employees outside working hours have been issued, all business trips are prohibited, a two-week quarantine is required for all who have returned from holidays in Italy, and all meetings are conducted via digital links.

Plinovodi, the gas transmission system operator, closely monitors the spread of coronavirus infection and implements a range of risk management and prevention measures. Activities are regularly reported to the Ministry of Infrastructure. The natural gas transmission system is stable and functions without disruption. Special attention is paid to the control and management system; the team at the dispatch centre lives and works completely isolated from the external environment. In the process of preparing any measures, the company monitors the information provided by the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Gas (ENTSOG) and take the utmost care to ensure a safe and reliable operation of the gas transmission system and to ensure the safety and health of employees.

Electricity Production in Slovenia comes from the HSE and the GEN Groups

Electricity supply in Slovenia has been running smoothly so far. Power companies and institutions have ensured an uninterrupted operation of the critical functions of the electric power system, as well as all market functions of the electricity market.

The HSE Group produces around 65% of the total electricity produced in Slovenia. Its Šoštanj Thermal Power Plant (TEŠ) and the Hydro Power company Dravske Elektrarne Maribor (DEM) are listed among the critical infrastructure of Slovenia. The HSE Group immediately reacted to the potential risk of coronavirus infection. Upon receiving the first public information on 24 February 2020 on a potential infection in the Republic of Slovenia, they immediately adopted the basic measures for the prevention of the spreading of the virus in all members of the Group. In addition, they adopted certain security and protection measures in order to secure undisturbed production of electricity and heat. In order to secure the continued operation of the production units and companies of the HSE Group, they have prepared an action plan for the key personnel who will perform the necessary tasks in the event of extreme situation.

One month ago the TEŠ adopted the rules on infectious diseases and, based on the rules, a management and coordination plan to be put into operation in the event of an outbreak of infection. Numerous measures are taken on a daily basis in accordance with the plan. The management of the TEŠ has appointed a task force which has drafted an operational plan of protection and risk management and detailed instructions to employees and contractors or visitors.

Among other measures, appropriate protective masks and hand sanitizers have been provided for all employees, who are being updated on the website and the company's bulletin boards on the recommended preventive measures. All guided visits to the TEŠ (and to DEM), excursions and open days, which are being regularly organised by the TEŠ, have been cancelled. As the coronavirus is spreading fast, persons who have returned from trips abroad or from areas with a high risk of infection with the virus have been ordered to self-isolate or not go to work. All meetings have been cancelled, with the exception of internal meetings, which are held via conference calls. One of the preventive measures is the activation of thermographic cameras at the entrances to the TEŠ and the coal mine Premogovnik Velenje (PV).

In addition to basic measures, such as cough etiquette, hands washing, staying at home if sick, etc., the HSE Group has introduced the following additional measures until further notice:

1. Entry to the command room, control centre, data centre – safe cell, etc. is permitted only to the employees of the respective units.
2. The maintenance staff may enter the command room, control centre and data centre at the location only if they are picking up or returning the work permit.
3. Engineers may enter the command room, control centre and data centre at the location only in the case of necessary interventions.
4. Contractors are prohibited from entering the command room, control centre and data centre at the location.
5. Communication should be, if possible, conducted over the phone or by e-mail.
6. Before entering the premises, employees must sanitise their hands – hand sanitisers have been placed at visible locations.
7. Contractors who perform maintenance works are permitted to work only under prior agreement with the head of maintenance. They need to limit their presence within the perimeter of an individual company to the area where they perform their work.
8. Excursions and other visits have been cancelled until further notice.
9. Employees have been advised to rethink the urgency of their planned business trips abroad.

As a precautionary measure against potential infection, some of the employees have been working from home since 9 March 2020. As of last week, a majority of the HSE Group employees have been working from home, except for those performing essential work which could not be done from home (production).

The Velenje Coal Mine, which is closely linked to the Šoštanj TPP, is one of the companies that is also crucial for the functioning of the country. According to the instructions of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and the Civil Protection of the Republic of Slovenia, the coal mine organised its activity as to ensure the smooth functioning of the mine while following the recommendations concerning the coronavirus. The mine has two excavations in two different areas of the cave. Considering the daily consumption of coal from the past days (about 6000 tonnes daily), it is estimated that the current amount of coal at the landfill is sufficient for the uninterrupted operation of TEŠ for one month and that the landfill will increase with continued production operation.

There are three different scenarios in connection with the current developments regarding the coronavirus epidemic: the first one covers the smooth workflow as we are witnessing today; the second scenario involves a reduction in number of people in teams and a lower intensity of work in the event of a small number of sick workers; the third scenario foresees the cessation of the activities in the cave in case of a larger number of patients.

The second power production pillar in Slovenia is represented by the GEN Group. Its Krško Nuclear Power Plant is considered a critical energy infrastructure facility. The Krško NPP reports daily to all relevant authorities regarding the coronavirus. In the event of the coronavirus spread, they have six (6) shift crews at their disposal for 24-hour process control. These crews are now their biggest concern. All crew members are healthy at the time of writing this report, as are all employees of the nuclear power plant.

The nuclear power plant cannot and should not be left without operational control, therefore, they established a "healthy" quarantine near the power plant for two shift crews with the aim of preserving the health of licensed operators without whom the power plant cannot remain. Prior to moving shift crews to "healthy" quarantine, they perform preventive testing of healthy operators in order to be 100% certain that they are truly uninfected. The procedure has already been approved by the Slovenian Ministry of Health.

Other measures include:

- obtaining or purchasing sufficient quantities of protective and disinfectants for a longer period of emergency and in case of major emergency operations at the power plant;
- organisation of complete isolation of the shared households of critical shift staff;
- establishment of alternative communication methods among key coordinators of activities in the Krško NPP in the event of failure of the IT;
- psychological counselling for shift crews when on duty for 12-hour turnaround and when in quarantine to overcome stressful situations and maintain “fitness for duty”.

The Brestanica Thermal Power Plant (TEB), which is also a part of the GEN Group, introduced self-protective measures immediately upon the emergence of the coronavirus; moreover, some special measures were introduced to protect the staff of the production department for the smooth operation of the plant:

- employees in the production department enter and exit the TEB separately from other employees,
- only operating personnel are present in the command room, others are only allowed in case of emergency,
- hygiene and disinfection instructions must be followed before and during the shift.

At the end of public life on 16 March 2020, the measures were further tightened:

- the staff received instructions for the organisation of work in case of a pandemic,
- in the production department, they have divided the work into two groups and have a 12-hour work shift,
- other employees work from home or are on standby,
- external contractors may enter the TEB only with the specific approvals of authorised persons and are subject to mandatory use of masks and gloves,
- the TPP stopped all activities in relation to the a new Unit 7.

In the future, however, measures are foreseen for the complete isolation of operating personnel at the TEB site, for which they need an adequate legal basis (the classification of the TEB as critical infrastructure facilities) and the approval of the Ministry of Health to conduct testing of the operating crew before complete isolation at the plant's premises.

In Ljubljana capitol, the public energy company Energetika Ljubljana produces, distributes and provides hot water, steam and cooling (heating energy) and electricity from a highly efficient co-production. They operate in the area of Ljubljana, as well as eight adjacent municipalities. At the time of the COVID-19 virus threat, most of the nationally recommended measures as well as specific measures were adopted in the company. A part of the support and maintenance staff works from home, are on leave or on standby. They have also established a system of alternate workplace attendance, taking into account the professional coverage of individual work areas. The bigger problem is related to the group of employees who are most at risk – the shift crews in the Moste production unit. A part of the team is isolated in the command room for a total of eight hours. At the moment, they do not record any officially confirmed infected workers. The company closely follows stricter measures imposed in other infrastructure companies, which will be adopted in the event of severe health situation of operating personnel.

Lower electricity bills for household and small business customers

As part of measures to mitigate the social and economic consequences of the spread of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19), the Slovenian government issued a Decree on 20 March on temporary non-payment of contributions to provide support for the production of electricity in high-efficiency cogeneration and

from renewable energy sources for small business customers and household electricity customers. It is estimated the move will lower the average electricity bill by about 20%. According to the decree, small businesses and household consumers of electricity will not have to pay contributions between 1 March and 31 May 2020.

In addition, the Slovenian Energy Agency has introduced an extraordinary measure to change the network tariff, which will further reduce bills. For the period from 1 March to 31 May 2020, small business and household consumers will not be charged a tariff for capacity charge and the network charge for these users will be 33% lower. Together with the above-mentioned government measure, the bill for electricity should be reduced by about 27%.

Since the epidemic outbreak, the electricity suppliers have seen a decline in electricity consumption in Slovenia. GEN-I, an EICS member, has decided to cut the electricity prices paid by its household and small business customers by 15% for a period of three months. With the changes, the electricity bill for GEN-I's average user will be almost 30% lower.

Latest economic forecast: GDP to decline in range between –6 and –8%; the decline in energy sector will be less severe

- *Assessment of the economic situation on 23 March 2020: The depth of the GDP decline is crucially dependent on the further development of the spread of the coronavirus epidemic, its duration and the adopted and future measures.*

The Spring Forecast of Economic Trends 2020 published by the Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development of the Republic of Slovenia (IMAD) on 12 March 2020 was prepared in the first week of March. On the basis of facts and assumptions known at that time, IMAD projected that economic growth could be 1.5% this year. At the same time, they pointed to high uncertainty and a strong probability of a lower outcome given the worsening of the situation in connection with the spread of the coronavirus epidemic in Europe.

In less than two weeks since the forecast was published, the situation has changed substantially. The outbreak of the epidemic in the neighbouring Italy and its spread to other European countries have required urgent and comprehensive measures to protect health and people in Slovenia and most EU countries since the middle of March, and these measures are significantly affecting economic activity. "Even if we assume that the current aggravated situation and the severe disruption of production and service sector activities do not last longer than two months, we can expect gross domestic product (GDP) to decline by more than 5%. Based on this assumption, our estimates currently range between –6 and –8%," says IMAD in its latest forecast published on 23 March.

In the most exposed sectors, such as accommodation, catering and personal services and the sale of non-food products, significant revenue losses and possibly a decline in value added of up to 70% or more are expected during the period of the strict protection measures. In industry, trade, transport and some business services, the decline in orders and the disruption of trade routes and supply chains during this period are likely to reduce value added by at least half. In some sectors the decline will probably be less severe (for example, the energy sector), in some the impact will be minimal (agriculture), while in some others activity is even expected to increase as a result of the current situation (some telecommunication services).

Communication with the press

The energy companies regularly publish latest news on their website.

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The [Government of the Republic of Slovenia](#), [the Ministry of Infrastructure](#) on its [energy portal](#) and the [National Institute on Public Health](#) are informing the public on latest development on a daily basis.

- The EICS publishes the latest news on its website in Slovenian language: <https://ezs.si/>
- The news in English is available here: <https://ezs.si/en/home-2/>