

# Covid Pass in Lithuania and throughout Europe:

## How recent vaccine mandate laws have upended my family's life

*10-Sep-21 (updated: 13-Sep-21)*

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I want to share the situation which my family and I are now facing because of Covid Pass restrictions.

We live in the small European country of **Lithuania**. In the last few months, strict Covid Pass restrictions have been introduced which represent a fundamental transformation in society.

In this article, I'll describe the details of how the Covid Pass works in my country and how it affects my family. As a start, we're banned from shopping centers, non-essential stores, and restaurants. And my wife and I were both were suspended from our jobs without pay.

But as I'll explain, it's not just Lithuania. Covid Pass restrictions are being imposed throughout Europe. By my count, at least 14 European countries now have different types of domestic restrictions based on the Covid Pass. And pretty much every country now has travel restrictions within Europe based on the Covid Pass.

Both the number of European countries with Covid Pass restrictions, as well as the severity of those restrictions, are increasing rapidly.

There hasn't been much reporting in English-language media about what has happened. So I thought a detailed first-hand account would be useful. I initially [posted](#) this report on Reddit, but it was banned after 11 hours.

### My family, my country

**Lithuania** is a small EU country of 2.8 million people, located on the Baltic Sea, bordering Poland, Belarus, Russia, and Latvia.

Currently, 69% of the population over age 12 are Covid vaccinated.

My wife and I have two children. She is in pregnant with our third child.

Neither my wife nor I are Covid vaccinated.

### The Opportunity Pass

Lithuania introduced a Covid Pass for domestic use at the end of May, 2021. It's called the "**Opportunity Pass**" (*Galimybii pasas* in our language). It's for all citizens and foreign residents aged 16 and over.

The Opportunity Pass allows you the opportunity to participate in society. Without it, you don't have opportunity: your rights are restricted.

You can get the Opportunity Pass in 3 ways:

- If you've been **vaccinated** (approved vaccines: Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, J&J).
- A **negative PCR test**. Valid for 48 hours after the sample is collected.
- **Proof of having had Covid** in the last 7 months. You must have had a positive PCR or antigen test result confirmed at the time by your family doctor and entered into your official medical records.

In the middle of August, our country added a fourth way to get the Opportunity Pass: "a sufficient level of antibodies" based on serological immunoassay for COVID-19 IgG antibodies or total antibodies test. Valid for 60 days after a test.

The Opportunity Pass is linked to your medical records in the national health system, all of which is organized under your national ID number.

The homepage of the government's Opportunity Pass website has a large illustration showing that you can have fun and participate in the opportunities of society if you have the Opportunity Pass:



There is no illustration of people who do not have the Pass.

## Restrictions for people without the Opportunity Pass

A law was passed on August 16 authorizing increased restrictions against people who do not have a valid Opportunity Pass. The restrictions were phased in over the last two weeks. All are now in effect as of September 13.

Some of the restrictions include:

- You cannot visit any cafes or restaurants.
- You cannot enter any non-essential stores.
- You cannot enter any store or shopping center which has a sales area larger than 1500 square meters (= *about 16,000 square feet*).
- You cannot receive beauty services (hair, nails, salons, etc).
- You cannot use repair services which last longer than 15 minutes.
- You cannot enter public indoor spaces, seminars, conferences, or cultural events.
- You cannot enter a fitness center, gym, or sauna.
- You cannot attend outdoor events which have more than 500 people.
- You cannot sit and read in libraries. You may only use the library to pick up and return books.
- You cannot travel by train. [*The government temporarily rescinded this restriction for now because it's unworkable and causing chaos.*]
- You cannot enter financial service providers (banks, insurance) unless the purpose is to receive pensions or social benefits for compulsory or essential financial services where the service lasts no more than 15 minutes.
- Students cannot enter university without the Pass. [*This requirement has caused chaos in universities because many students are not vaccinated. Last week, the government announced a grace period: until October, students may take free (i.e., government-paid) Covid tests to give them time to complete their vaccinations. Starting in October, students must have the Opportunity Pass*].
- You cannot visit patients in medical facilities or senior care/residential homes, except terminally-ill patients and children under 14 years of age at the permission of the treating physician.

- Regarding medical care:
  - You may receive emergency care without the Opportunity Pass.
  - For scheduled inpatient medical care, you must have the Covid Pass or Covid certificates.
  - For outpatient services, the medical care must be conducted "in a safe environment" and will require testing "depending on the epidemiological situation".

## Restrictions: what do they mean in practice?

There are many rules, with lots of convoluted and sometimes conflicting parts, so here's how it works in practice.

- For **shopping**, if you don't have the Opportunity Pass, you are only allowed to shop in small stores (<1500 m<sup>2</sup>) which have street entrances and whose main activity is to sell food, veterinary goods, pharmaceuticals, glasses and contact lenses, or farming supplies. You may not enter larger stores, or stores which sell products other than those.
- For **eating and drinking**, you cannot visit any restaurant, cafe, or bar. This includes outdoor areas as well as indoors.
- For **transportation**, local city buses do not require the Opportunity Pass. But political leaders have indicated all forms of public transportation might require the Pass if they can figure out how to make it work.
- For **medical care**, inpatient services require the Covid Pass. For outpatient medical care (e.g., doctors' offices, specialist clinics, dental offices), medical facilities may allow a patient to enter who does not have the Opportunity Pass. But in practice, many clinics require the Opportunity Pass except for emergency situations.

In my area, outpatient medical facilities require the Covid Pass or certifications. Four days ago, my family was turned away from a medical facility because we did not have the Covid Pass. The medical facility offered us the option to come back if we returned with a negative PCR test. In a separate incident, today we went to the dental office we've attended for years for an appointment for one of my children, but we were asked to leave when the staff discovered that I don't have the Opportunity Pass.

## Work

Employers may require that employees have the Opportunity Pass. Each company and industry is setting its own standards regarding if and how to implement the mandate.

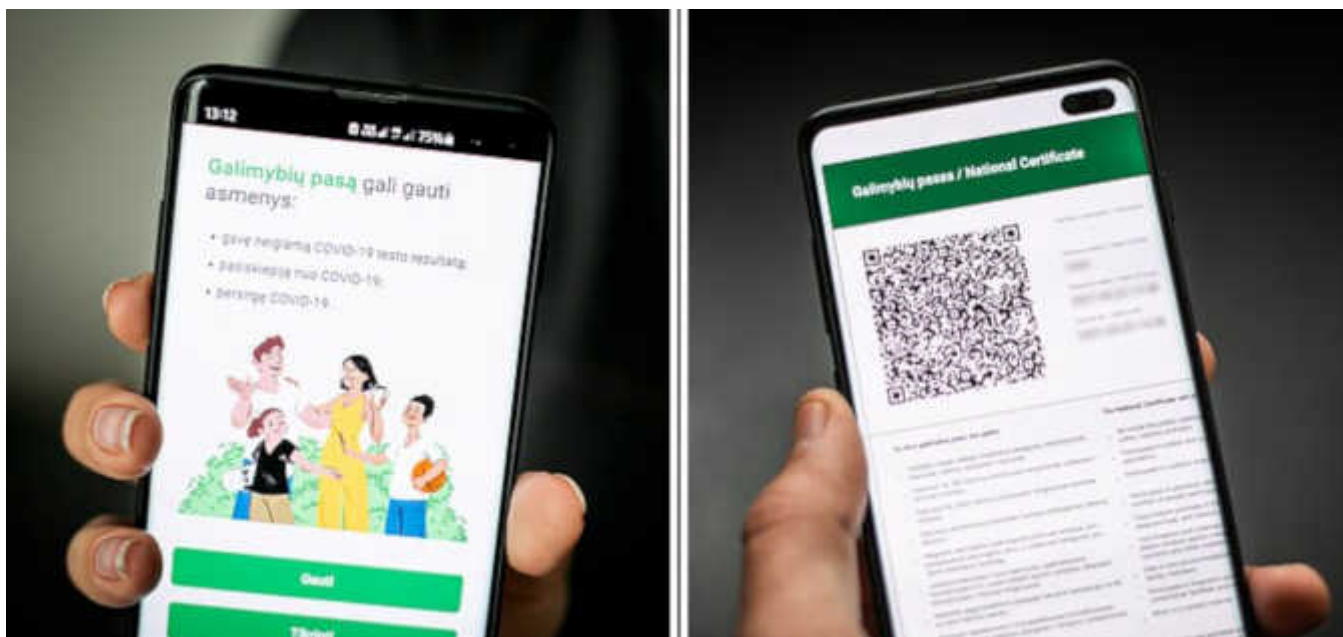
In the case of my wife and myself, we work in different industries and have different occupations. But both our employers have separately created the same policy. People without the

Opportunity Pass won't actually be fired, because that would create many legal issues, obligations, unemployment benefits, etc. Instead, **employees are suspended without pay**.

In our case, both my wife and I were suspended from our jobs without pay on September 13. We are allowed to return when we comply with the mandate to present a valid Covid Pass.

## Using the Opportunity Pass

The Covid Pass is in the form of a QR code. Most people get it on their phones through e-banking/e-signature (electronic signature which you can get by showing your national ID at a bank, telecom provider, or the Tax and Registry offices).



To use the Opportunity Pass, you show the QR code to a "verifier" (restaurant, store, building security, etc). The verifier scans your QR code. The scanner confirms that the Pass is authentic, verifies your safe health status, and displays your personal information (name and date of birth). You then show your ID to the verifier to confirm that the personal information in the Pass matches your ID and the Pass therefore belongs to you.



Those who don't use smartphones with e-banking may go to a government office to get a paper printout of the QR code.



## Enforcement

The rules must be enforced by all private and public entities which are affected, e.g. restaurants, stores, buildings, medical facilities, etc. Government inspectors will check to ensure compliance. Citizens may also report any businesses which are not complying. Any business which does not properly enforce the Opportunity Pass is fined.

Here's how it looks in practice (*pictures from 13-Sep-21 at the entrances of Lithuania's largest shopping mall and a large supermarket*).

At the entrance to shopping malls and stores are guards who check the Opportunity Pass of every person who enters:



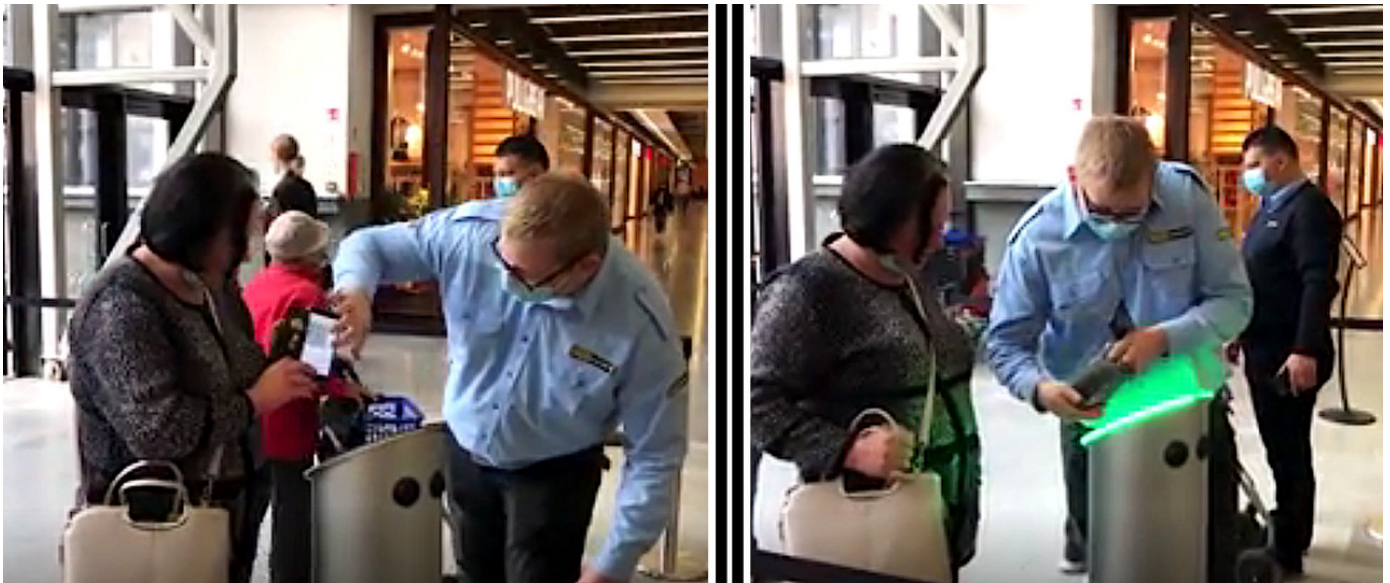
People queue in line to enter:





Larger stores and shopping centers have a machine scanner. When people reach the machine, they scan their Opportunity Pass. If the machine flashes a green light and beeps to signal that the Pass is valid, the guard allows that person to enter:





Most businesses don't have the machines. In these places, the guard uses a phone app to verify the QR code on the Opportunity Pass:



Both the machine and the phone app can also scan the paper printout for people who do not have a smartphone QR code:



People who do not have a valid Opportunity Pass may not enter. At larger shopping malls, police are present to handle complaints from non-Pass holders:



At stores without police, workers handle the complaints. A representative for a major supermarket commented: *"There have been conflicts because some people aren't happy with the new rules... Workers checking the Passes find it psychologically difficult to deal with all that negativity."*

Restaurants and bars also strictly enforce the Opportunity Pass. A small cafe doesn't have the manpower of a huge business to put guards at the door to stop you from entering. But staff are strict in asking for your documents when you try to order. For example, I've confirmed that every restaurant and cafe in my area requires the Opportunity Pass and refuses service to non-Pass holders.

Most enforcement is done by private businesses, but government inspectors also conduct spot checks. For example, a local restaurant owner told me that inspectors unexpectedly entered his place one night last week. Using a scanning app, the inspectors went from person to person within the restaurant to verify that everyone there - customers and staff - had a valid Opportunity Pass and matching ID. Fortunately for the restaurant owner, he's strict about barring non Pass holders, so the inspectors found that every person did indeed have a valid Opportunity Pass. If anyone didn't, the owner would have been fined.

*(The owner told me this story when we bumped into each other on the street. We're friendly with each other, but I'm no longer allowed to go into his restaurant to speak with him, so we could only speak outside.)*

## **Coercion to vaccinate**

The government contends that the vaccine is not mandatory because you can still get the Opportunity Pass if you have immunity from infection or if you do tests.

However, it's a fig-leaf to mask the pressure to vaccinate.

Our government pays lip service to immunity from prior infection, but in practice makes it difficult to use as a basis to receive the Opportunity Pass. Officials explain that they've made it burdensome because they don't want citizens purposefully infecting themselves in order to avoid vaccination.

As for the testing option, it is similarly designed to be difficult. Before the introduction of the Covid Pass regime, people could get tests for free at various places through the government health plan. Now, it's mandatory that testing for the Opportunity Pass must be done at a private lab or medical institute - no mobile labs or home tests - and be paid privately. A negative result is valid for only 48 hours from the time of the sample. So you would have to do a test every 1-2 days in order to live your life freely. The money and time make that very difficult for the vast majority of people.

### **Only PCR tests allowed**

Even more vindictively, our government recently decided to allow only a PCR test to get the Pass, rather than the cheaper rapid antigen test. Government leaders explicitly created this requirement in order to increase the burden of testing.

The burden of the PCR test is the time and money. Labs offer PCR tests for 60-75 eur and give results in 12-24 hours. The government only recognizes the test as valid for 48 hours from when the swab sample is taken, not from when you get the result from the lab. With the wait to get the result, that means you would need a test almost every day in order to maintain a valid Covid Pass and continue your life without restrictions.

That number of tests would cost more than 1000 eur in lab fees per person per month, plus the time of going to the lab.

Additionally, if you get a positive test result, even if you have no symptoms, you and all your contacts must isolate for 10 days, which for many people means the loss of income from work.

The government explicitly created this burden of time and money, as well as the risk of being forced into isolation, in order to promote vaccination instead of testing.

There's been a lot of controversy about the PCR-only requirement because it's obviously vindictive, so the Cabinet has indicated that they are changing the rules to also allow the cheaper antigen test.

But whatever form of a test they allow, the intention is clear: the government is putting maximum pressure on us to get vaccinated. **Our freedom has become conditional on vaccination or daily testing.**

We oppose this coercion.

## **Why don't we want the Pass?**

My wife and I are not opposed to Covid vaccinations. Vaccination can be beneficial for the right people. It's a personal medical decision which should be made by each individual in consultation with their doctor.

**What we strongly oppose are vaccine mandates.** The government should not force us to undergo a medical treatment against our will. Our rights as citizens should not be restricted because we do not undergo this medical treatment.

## **Medical exemptions: only allergies**

We oppose the Opportunity Pass out of principle. We believe that Covid-vaccine mandates are wrong in all circumstances.

But in our own case, we have a further issue.

My wife has a long-term progressive disease. Based on data from both the vaccine trials and countries which publish real-world side-effect statistics, we are worried that the vaccine could trigger serious side effects in the short-term, or worsen her condition in the long-term.

Adverse Event	BNT162b2 (N <sup>a</sup> =21,926) n <sup>b</sup> (%)	Placebo (N <sup>a</sup> =21,921) n <sup>b</sup> (%)
Any event	6617 (30.2)	3048 (13.9)
Related <sup>c</sup>	5241 (23.9)	1311 (6.0)
Severe	262 (1.2)	150 (0.7)
Life-threatening	21 (0.1)	26 (0.1)
Any serious adverse event	127 (0.6)	116 (0.5)
Related <sup>d</sup>	3 (0.0)	0
Severe	71 (0.3)	66 (0.3)
Life-threatening	21 (0.1)	26 (0.1)
Any adverse event leading to withdrawal	32 (0.1)	36 (0.2)
Related <sup>d</sup>	13 (0.1)	11 (0.1)
Severe	10 (0.0)	10 (0.0)
Life-threatening	3 (0.0)	7 (0.0)
Death	3 (0.0)	5 (0.0)

**Table S3 | Participants Reporting at Least 1 Adverse Event from Dose 1 to 1 Month After Dose 2 During the Blinded Follow-up Period.** The population included all ≥16-year-old participants who received ≥1 dose of vaccine irrespective of follow-up time. a, N=number of participants in the specified group. This value is the denominator for the percentage calculations. b, n=Number of participants reporting ≥1 occurrence of the specified event category. For 'any event', n=number of participants reporting ≥1 occurrence of any event. c. Assessed by the investigator as related to investigational product. d. Shoulder injury related to vaccine administration, right axillary lymphadenopathy, and paroxysmal ventricular arrhythmia (as previously reported). Adverse events for 12–15-year-old participants were reported previously.<sup>11</sup>

Reported Cause of Death <sup>a</sup>	BNT162b2 (N=21,926) n	Placebo (N=21,921) n
Deaths:	15	14
Acute respiratory failure	0	1
Aortic rupture	0	1
Arteriosclerosis	2	0
Biliary cancer metastatic	0	1
COVID-19	0	2
COVID-19 pneumonia	1	0
Cardiac arrest	4	1
Cardiac failure congestive	1	0
Cardiorespiratory arrest	1	1
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	1	0
Death	0	1
Dementia	0	1

Additionally, she's pregnant with our third child.

We discussed our concerns with the specialist doctor who has treated her for years. The doctor researched the topic and reached the opinion that vaccination of my wife creates a small but possible chance of triggering severe adverse effects. We presented to the authorities a note written by the doctor detailing my wife's situation and the conclusion that vaccination is therefore not worth the risk for her. However, it was rejected, and my wife was told she would not receive an exemption from the Opportunity Pass restrictions.

We received no explanation. As far as we know, there is no appeal.

We don't know what happened in her case. But in general, **our government is opposed to medical exemptions**. The authorities have announced that they only allow medical exemptions in cases where a certified allergist doctor finds, through extensive documented testing, that a person is severely allergic to the substance within the vaccine (anaphylactic reactions). In an interview, an official of the Ministry of Health stated that such an allergy is the only allowable



exemption and the Ministry dislikes "*the tendency to use medical excuses as a justification to not vaccinate*".

## The politics

When Covid vaccines began in December 2020, political leaders in Lithuania emphasized that vaccination was voluntary.

As vaccination rates increased in spring 2021 and development began on the Covid Pass, mainstream political views changed. Now, the consensus among all major politicians is that unvaccinated people should not have equal rights.

Here are some representative quotes said by our leaders in the last two months:

- "People who do not get vaccinated are **a threat to our health, to the country's economy, to business, and to human life.**"
- "I urge you to **avoid associating with the unvaccinated**, because associating with the deliberately unvaccinated is the same as getting into a car with a drunk driver."
- "If you don't get vaccinated, then **go prepare your grave.**"
- "The Opportunity Pass will allow us to live as freely as can be possible during a global pandemic... **The Opportunity Pass is the only way** to not shut down our economy and to let people enjoy their favorite restaurants, cafes, and shops."
- "To not vaccinate yourself means that you will spread it, because anyone who does not vaccinate is a potential spreader. **Not vaccinating yourself, and encouraging others to not vaccinate, are not yet crimes.** We are - still - gentle and polite. But therefore, **we suffer because we do not stop the unvaccinated with the force of law and order.** However, it can be done. We are at war. Let us reflect among ourselves and the coalition government on whether the state is really doing everything it can to **fight the virus that is the anti-vaxxers.**"

In a publicity move, the Economics Minister (*left-most in picture below*) visited cafes and bars to show off the Opportunity Pass. She wrote on her Facebook page:

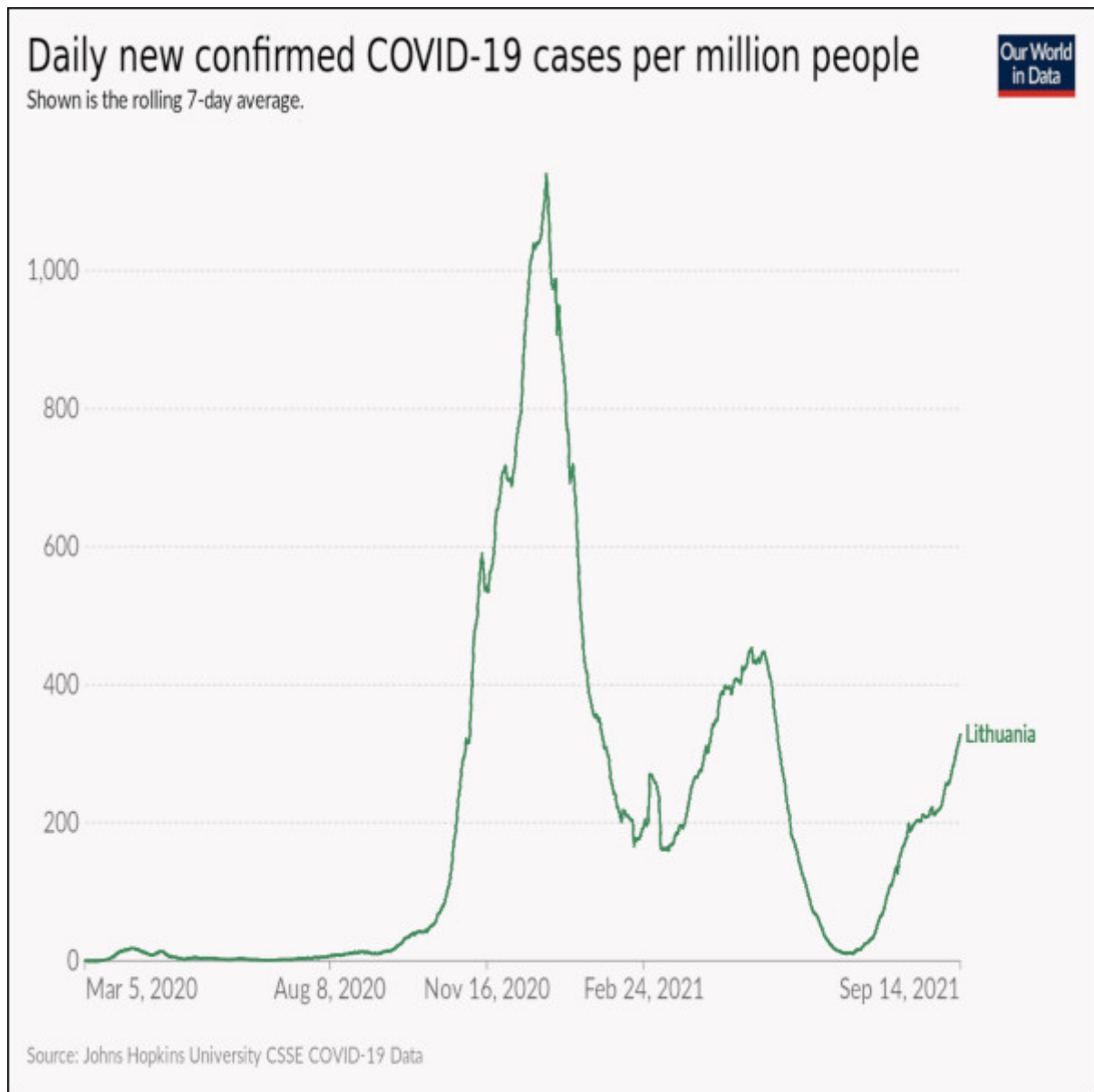
- "With 634 cases per day, it was impossible to imagine recently we could have 'normal life'. Yet today, we can enjoy the autumn and return to many of our activities without any restrictions... Our goal is that vaccines and the Opportunity Pass will help keep businesses open and operating. I am very pleased that businesses are helping us in this difficult hour."



## Increasing restrictions

It seems that restrictions will get stricter as winter comes. The health bureaucrats are worried by the situation in Israel and several European countries, where cases and hospitalizations rose in August despite high vaccination rates.

Lithuania has also started to see a sharp rise in the last month. The pattern this year is the same as 2020: the number of new positive tests reached a low with the peak of summer heat at the beginning of July, then started rising as the weather became colder in late July and August.



Hospitalizations and deaths are rising in a similar pattern.

The political leaders aren't happy that the Covid restrictions haven't eliminated the virus.

Despite vaccinations, the rise in case numbers since mid-August is particularly acute among people over 50. So officials started a booster program at the beginning of September. People will get a third injection of Pfizer or Moderna six months after their last injection.

As they roll out boosters, politicians blame the unvaccinated for the rise in positive test results. Our president said last week: "***Compulsory, or forced, vaccination is the sole possibility if we want a smooth process to face the challenge of the burden imposed by the Delta variant***".

To further encourage vaccination, our government is drafting a **law to deny sickness benefits** to people who have not been vaccinated against Covid and become sick from the virus. Currently, workers pay a mandatory health insurance fee. This funds a sickness benefit program where the government pays 62% of salary if a worker becomes seriously ill or incapacitated. But there are several very limited exceptions: a person receives nothing if the sickness is the result of alcohol

or drug abuse, fraud, or criminal activity. The new law will add refusal to get Covid-vaccinated as another reason for an ill person to not receive benefits.

## Opposition

In our country, opinion polls show that 70-80% of people support vaccine mandates and the exclusion of unvaccinated people from various aspects of society.

There isn't a unified opposition to restrictions. The only socially-acceptable opposition has been reduced to nitpicking about the details of each particular regulation.

That's led to some specific points in the Covid Pass rules being lightened, e.g. temporarily rescinding the ban on using trains.

And some people try to cheat the rules individually. Because of long queues of people waiting to enter stores, guards only infrequently verify that a person's ID matches the Covid Pass. News reports indicate that non-Pass holders have taken advantage by borrowing the QR code of other people in order to illegally gain entrance to stores. Other people have bribed doctors to fake vaccination - pouring the vaccine into the garbage - for 250-500 eur. The government treats these cases as crimes and is investigating.

But in general, there isn't much mainstream condemnation of the entire Covid Pass regime as a fundamental violation of human rights. Voices staunchly opposed to vaccine mandates are rarely featured in our country's media. Opposition is usually ignored by the mainstream, and when mentioned, those who oppose mandates are caricatured by both the government and the media as far-right, anti-LGBTQ, conspiracy theorists, and neo-Nazis.

## Social stigmatization

This social stigmatization of opponents works.

Opponents of vaccine mandates are muted with the label of "anti-vaxxers", which in our post-Soviet society is seen as a person who is irrationally fatalistic, mystical, illiterate, selfish, anti-modern, and anti-science.

That's driven away most mainstream people who might oppose the restrictions on principle. And that leaves as opponents mainly rabble-rousers and kooks that mainstream people don't want to be associated with. Which makes mainstream opponents even more queasy to join. Which leaves even crazier people as the sole opposition. And so on, in a vicious spiral to the bottom.

Given the political situation in our country, the result is that many of the loudest voices against the Covid Pass - the ones who dare to speak publicly - are people who explicitly conflate opposition to vaccine mandates with anti-LGBTQ views. So the few protests which have

occurred against the Covid Pass have devolved into a battle over gay rights. Which - again - drives away mainstream people who would otherwise join in opposition to the Covid Pass.

As an example of the absurdity of the situation, the only major politician against most Covid restrictions, the founder of the opposition party Labor (*pictured*), is such a nut that he and his children started selling mineral water that he claims gives you immunity against the virus:



The government and media seize on this to characterize all opposition to Covid restrictions as loonybin cases like him. Or crazed far-right anti-LGBTQ activists. Or anti-Semites. Etc. And that successfully stigmatizes opposition even further so that more mainstream people think that there is no basis for principled opposition to vaccine mandates.

The result is a wedge that has cleaved society in two: the Good and the Bad. Covid policy in our country has become a signal that you're Good and do not belong to the inferior group of mystical, crazed people.

### **1980s: Fight for freedom. 2021: apathy.**

There is not much protest in our country against the vaccine mandates. In France and Holland, there have been large demonstrations by diverse groups. Not enough to stop the restrictions, but at least something.

But in our country, protests have been small, dominated by anti-LBGQT activists, and limited in many ways by government restrictions and police.

We're not unusual among the European countries in the apathy and lack of protest of the broad population. In the last 18 months, it's been rare in most of Europe to see massive, broad-based opposition to Covid measures.

That's surprised me very much. It's staggering to me that large numbers of people, in my country and throughout Europe, don't seem to care much about individual rights and liberty.

The contrast with recent history is stark. In my country, we were occupied for decades by the Soviet Union. We fought for - and won - a revolution of independence 30 years ago. Hundreds of thousands of people took real risks to oppose the oppressive communist regime. In the most famous incident, in August 1989, 30% of the entire population of the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia joined hands to form a human chain of 675 kilometers in support of freedom and independence from the authoritarian Soviet occupation.



But now, three decades later, our current population is apathetic about losing freedoms which the previous generation fought for.

Covid restrictions are introducing a more authoritarian form of government in Europe. The Prime Minister of our fellow Baltic state of Estonia explicitly warned of the danger in June this year: *"What we have seen in this Covid crisis, this urge for a strong hand or an authoritarian way of governing, is deep in our societies, even in some countries you would never believe."* Mexico's president has similarly warned many times in the last year about Europe's increasing Covid authoritarianism.

Yet few people in my country take a stand in opposition.

**We battled against the government-led propaganda and "*Show me your documents!*" authoritarianism of the USSR, only to now acquiesce meekly to a new regime of media-led propaganda and technocratic, fear-driven health authoritarianism of "*Show me your Covid QR Code!*".**



### **Can't talk to officials.**

I've tried to meet with government officials to explain our situation.

However, they won't meet with us because we're not vaccinated.

They require the Opportunity Pass to enter the offices where they work. As non-holders of the Pass, my wife and I aren't allowed to go inside to meet them.

I suggested we could instead meet outside. But they won't agree to go outside to meet us.

So we have no way to meet the relevant government officials to discuss our situation.

### **No legal options.**

We have no chance in court if we sue. The judges in our country support the vaccine mandates. There is some judiciary review about the details of certain restrictions - for example, if it's legal under current law to cut off sickness benefits for non- -vaccination. But by and large, the court system finds that the mandates do not violate any rights.

As for higher appeals, our only option would be the EU courts, but we think we don't have any chance there either. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg [ruled in a case](#) in April this year by 16-1 that vaccine mandates are legal when the mandates accomplish "a pressing social need".

## **Constant tests to maintain freedom?**

In theory, we could do PCR tests every day in a private lab in order to maintain our freedoms.

But in our case, it won't work. We can't afford to do the PCR tests every 1-2 days. Together, my wife and I earn about 3000 eur (net) per month. We calculate that the testing for both of us necessary to have the Pass for workdays only, not on weekends, would cost around 1500 eur per month, or half our income. Plus more than an hour of time each day to get to the lab, wait, do the test, leave.

That's not viable for us.

## **What to do?**

My wife and I don't know what to do. We've never been involved or interested in politics. We don't like to fight. And we don't want publicity. We like our privacy.

We've thought of moving countries to somewhere less restrictive, but it would be difficult.

There aren't many countries to choose from.

Since my wife and I both speak reasonable English and want our children to learn the language, the restriction-free parts of the U.S. might be a possibility. But we can't because we don't have visas for America.

Within Europe, most countries have restrictions, so a move wouldn't improve our situation.

The main restriction-free countries in Europe now are Denmark and Sweden. As EU citizens, we could legally move there and live in those places. But it would be difficult. Both my wife and I have jobs which are tied to our country and language, so we would need to find new work in a country where we have no connections or language skills. Additionally, Denmark and Sweden are very expensive countries; our savings would only pay for a move and the first 2-3 months, so we'd have to find jobs quickly. Such a move would be a huge change for our children which we don't want to inflict on them.

And there's no guarantee that the governments of those countries won't impose new Covid Pass restrictions in the future.



Moreover, we love where we live. It's our home, our culture, our language, our nature. We're not important people, but we have deep roots in the area: both my family and my wife's family have lived here for hundreds of years. We're part of this place. We want to continue to raise our children here. We don't want to leave.

So what will we do?

Honestly, we don't know. We really don't know.

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## Covid Pass in other EU countries

I've shown the details of the Covid Pass in my country of Lithuania because that's where I live and what I know best.

We're definitely one of the more restrictive countries in Europe right now. And some of the rules we have are uniquely crazy.

But we're not the only one with a Covid Pass. By my count, 14 of the 27 European Union countries have begun imposing domestic Covid Pass restrictions. Here's a sample of a few of those countries, showing in which situations they are requiring the Covid Pass as well as a link to an official government site with the details:

- **Austria**

Restaurants. Hotels. All indoor and outdoor events. All leisure and sports facilities, both indoors and outdoors.

*Age limit: 12 and over. In the capital of Vienna, the age limit is 6.*

([source](#))

- **Cyprus**

Restaurants, cafes, bars. Churches and other religious services. Outdoor and indoor events. Shopping centers and department stores. Funerals, weddings, baptisims. Indoor leisure and sports. Hotels.

*Age limit: 12 and over.*

([source](#))

- **France**

Restaurants, cafes, bars. Shopping malls. Hospitals except for emergency care. Retirement homes and residential care homes. Long-distance travel by plane, train, or bus. Campsites and other holiday accommodation.

*Age limit: 12 and over.*

*In addition to the above restrictions for the entire population, the Covid Pass is mandatory*

*for all workers and staff in medical fields and in public-facing service jobs such as restaurants, bars, and tourism.*

[\(source\)](#)

- **Italy**

Restaurants, bars, cafes for indoor dining. Intercity travel by plane, train, ship, ferry, or bus. All outdoor and indoor public events, including sporting events. Museums and shows. Swimming pools, gyms, spas, fitness centers. Weddings. Festivals and trade fairs. Conventions.

*Age limit: 12 and over.*

*In addition to the above restrictions for the entire population, vaccination is mandatory for all medical workers since July. At the start of September, the Prime Minister said that his government could expand this mandate to the entire population, making vaccinations compulsory for all citizens once the European Medical Agency (EMA) gives full approval to the vaccines.*

[\(source\)](#)

- **Portugal**

Restaurants on weekends (starting Fridays at 19:00) and on holidays. Hotels, tourist apartments. Group classes in gyms. Weddings and baptisms with more than 10 people.

*Age limit: 12 and over.*

[\(source\)](#)

On the other hand, there are European countries with no domestic Covid Pass restrictions, for example Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Poland, Romania, and Sweden. They all have different Covid restrictions - masks, capacity limits, curfews - but no Covid Pass for domestic use.

Note that the measures above refer to *domestic* regulations.

For travel, every European country currently limits cross-border travel based on **vaccination/Covid Pass status**.

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## **Censorship on Reddit, censorship in the world**

I initially wrote this article as a [post](#) on Reddit. It was banned. Here's what happened.

I posted this article on Reddit on September 6.

It was banned 11 hours later after it was published.

I made the post so that English-language speakers can know about the profound changes that are happening in Europe. In the short time that the post existed, it seemed that English speakers were

indeed interested. With 46,000 members, the subreddit where the article was posted, [r/LockdownSkepticism](#), is not huge (in comparison, the subreddit r/Coronavirus has 2 million members). But the post struck the interest of readers and was quickly a top new post of the sub.

## True = Fake

But several commenters claimed my post was fake. It's not possible, they said, that such rules are happening. No country could possibly have such crazy restrictions. Can't be real. My post was "fabricated", "fishy". I'm an "idiot" and people who believe my post are "low IQ". Many people attacked the post, both in the comments and to me.

And then Reddit banned my post:



I sent a message to the moderators. They responded: "*We received a few reports that your entire post was made up and we are being extra careful about misinformation at the moment.*"

Huh? "*Entire post was made up*"...?

I explained that everything I describe can be verified on the [official website](#) of the Health Ministry of my government. I included the link. To save you a click, here's an excerpt of the government site:

As of 13 September	Without National Certificate*
<b>Goods and services, cultural events</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ to visit non-essential goods stores;</li> <li>✗ to visit shops whose main activity is the sale of food, veterinary items, animal feed, pharmaceuticals, optical goods and orthopaedic technical devices, plants, seeds, fertilisers, if their trade area exceeds 1,500 square meters.;</li> <li>✗ to receive professional beauty services;</li> <li>✗ to visit library reading rooms (it shall only be possible to pick up and return books);</li> <li>✗ to order minor repair services when the contact between the service recipient and the provider lasts longer than 15 minutes;</li> <li>✗ to attend indoor events, and to attend open-air cultural, entertainment, sporting events, celebrations, fairs, festivals, when more than 500 persons participate.</li> </ul>

All the facts in my post are stated clearly on the government website, so I wasn't sure what more the mods wanted. I offered to send the actual legislation, news articles, and even internet registry information to satisfy them that the link I sent is indeed the official website of our government and not a fake page I created (!).

## Cannot verify

But they responded: "*We have decided that at this time we are going to keep your post down... We cannot verify the claims in your post.*"

The law of my country is the law of my country. You can see the rules yourself on the official government website. They are facts, not claims. Maybe you like them, maybe you don't. But their existence is incontrovertible.

But having made their decision, Reddit blocked me from contacting them. "*Sorry. This is too much now.*" Good bye!

At that point, my post had disappeared. But people were still sending me messages. So I responded.

The mods didn't like that. When they realized what was happening, they locked the post and blocked me completely.

Apparently, they decided that all information from me about what's happening in my country should not be allowed.

*[I welcome any Reddit people to contact me with their comment. I'll post it here, unedited and in full.]*

## Why censor true facts?

It's interesting why Reddit banned my post.

Where is the misinformation in describing the laws of my country?

For me, the case is a window into the effects of self-censorship, not just on Reddit, but in the real world as well, illustrating why people in my country and throughout Europe have so passively accepted Covid restrictions.

## Fear of the mob

Since my ban, several people explained to me the details of a brouhaha on Reddit in August about Covid and censorship. The story has been covered extensively in media. If you're not familiar with it, here's the quick summary:

- Two weeks before my post, the mods of more than 1,000 Reddit communities made a [public plea](#) for Reddit to police misinformation related to Covid.
- Reddit executives didn't change the policies, arguing that the site should support free speech.
- Reddit mods and users were not satisfied with this response. So mods staged a blackout where they restricted subreddits to private access. This decreases traffic to the site and thereby reduces ad sales. The subs had millions of members, so that's a big deal for Reddit.
- Reddit acquiesced to the demands. Reversing position from days before, Reddit banned one subreddit and quarantined 54 others.

The subreddit where I had posted, r/LockdownSkepticism, was also targeted by some protesters for banning, but it was spared. Seeing that they had narrowly avoided a ban, the mods quickly issued a statement that vaccinations "*should be the way out of the pandemic*" and said they would be strict about policing any vaccine topics.

That's when I walked in with my post.

So the mods of the subreddit where I posted my message were hyper-sensitive about vaccine issues, scared of inciting the mob and getting banned.

They banned me out of fear of getting banned themselves.

No one made them ban my post. They censored themselves.

## Self-censorship

The same type of self-censorship that happened to me on Reddit has been happening for months in my country regarding the Covid Pass.

Opposition to the Covid Pass isn't treated here as a political or philosophical view which people can disagree about. Instead, it's considered to be an opinion so dangerous that it must be banned.

It's sad to me that we've reached that situation here in Lithuania, of all places. Under the Soviet occupation from 1944 to 1990, political dissent was suppressed, news was censored, and neighbors spied on neighbors (*the image below shows a 1972 protest against Soviet repression and censorship*).



Yet now, **we've returned to a regime of censorship**. It's encouraged by the government, but - at least so far - it's not directly enforced by them. Instead, the main force is a social movement that oppresses dissent so much that people censor themselves.

The combined effects of the social environment, media, and groupthink are powerful. In the spring of last year, it made adults terrified of getting Covid. In the winter of last year, it whipped many people into being deeply scared for their children to get Covid.

But 18 months into this crisis, **people now are more afraid of the social stigma than of the virus itself**. Outright bans are often unnecessary because most normal, not-wacky people who oppose the policies censor themselves.

## Othering: Public shaming and death wishes

Many people go even further, delivering effusive praise for the Covid Pass regime and hatred of anyone opposed.

On Facebook, many Lithuanians I see have posted a sticker on their profile - "*Educated. Vaccinated.*" - together with long posts raging that "*we would be finished with this pandemic if only the stupid anti-vaxxers would either get vaccinated or die!*".

There's no opposition to these messages. Most people just push 'like' and cheer on the death wishes. Anyone opposed presumably says nothing out of fear of the mob. That's certainly what I do.

At my work, we had to indicate whether we have the Opportunity Pass. The next day, a list was posted publicly of everyone's Pass status. Turns out I'm the only one in my area who doesn't have the Pass, so the only reason to post that list was to shame me.

The public shaming worked. Most colleagues avoided me afterwards.

But one colleague pulled me aside. Whispering in my ear (literally), she told me that she thinks the Opportunity Pass is a crazy violation of human rights and despises the fact that she was forced to vaccinate against her will, particularly because she plans to have another child soon. But she feels that she doesn't dare oppose it, because she already has one child, is scared for her job, and needs to shop and otherwise continue life.

**We've re-entered into a world where you have to whisper to talk about your opposition to government policies. Where you have to scan your documents to eat in a restaurant. Where you're suspended from work without pay for non-compliance. And where fear compels you to undergo medical treatments you don't want.**

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## Boomerangs and the Streisand effect

I was surprised to find that my English-language Reddit post - and the fact it got banned - boomeranged back and actually attracted attention here in my country.

The message got passed around in Europe, forwarded with comments of disbelief that a free, democratic country could have such restrictions. People mentioned the Reddit ban, surprised that factual information would be censored by a well-known U.S. site that they thought was open and free.

My message eventually was passed to people in Lithuania, including people in the government. Since there's so little pushback in our media against the Covid Pass restrictions, it can be

surprising - even for people here who are (quietly) opposed to the rules - to realize how crazy our restrictions seem to outsiders. My post - and the reaction to it by people abroad - opened eyes here within our country.

The Streisand effect is real. By censoring my post, Reddit ended up making it even more interesting and click-baity: "**10 facts about what's happening in Europe that Reddit censors don't want you to know!**".

What a crazy world.

## **How to help: please amplify this message**

When I posted my writing on Reddit, my goal was to inform English-language readers of the Covid Pass changes happening in Europe.

But as I've seen that my post bounced back and got attention in my country, I've thought that maybe this message can have an impact here as well. So I cleaned up the formatting, added further information and pictures, and then put the post up online - not on Reddit, obviously - so that people can see it and pass it around.

We're a small country and dependent on the outside world. Our politicians care how we're perceived by the EU, the US, and the world. No one talks about us much, so any outside attention we do get is discussed endlessly.

It'd be a big deal here if the rest of the world starts talking about the craziness of our new Covid Pass rules.

My country is much too invested - both literally invested with money and technology, as well as politically and emotionally invested with laws and media focus - to just flip immediately and kill the Covid Pass. And as I've described, about half of the other EU countries have some restrictions based on their own Covid Passes, so my country can try to hide in their shadow.

But Lithuania has many rules that are uniquely crazy. And no one in our country wants to seem extreme compared to other countries.

So although there's little chance for now of completely scrapping the Opportunity Pass, I do think that attention from abroad can have a very positive impact in forcing politicians here to reduce and eliminate some of the spite and craziness of the rules. In a small country like ours, it doesn't take many people to hear this message for it to have an effect.

And most importantly, outside attention could open room for actual debate in our country about the Covid Pass. When people here see how these rules are perceived from the outside, they feel



less need to censor themselves and can instead enter into a real discussion about the profound changes that are happening in society.

So here's my request to you, English-language reader:

**Please forward this message on. Let people know what's happening.**

Sunlight is the best disinfectant.

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## References

You can verify on the official websites of our government every rule which I've described in this article. The law and full details are in our language, but the government created English-language pages which have descriptions of the main restrictions:

<https://sam.lrv.lt/en/>

*The Health Ministry main page.*

<https://koronastop.lrv.lt/en/>

*The coronavirus page of the Health Ministry.*

<https://koronastop.lrv.lt/en/covid-19-related-restrictions-1>

*The Health Ministry's official description in English of Covid restrictions. For the details of the Covid Pass, look under "National Certificate (Covid Passport)." For the restrictions against people without the Covid Pass, look under the heading "Additional measures to manage the pandemic as of 13 September".*

<https://gpasas.lt/?lang=en>

*The official government website about the Opportunity Pass. The site is made by the Ministry of the Economy and Innovation.*

<https://eimin.lrv.lt/en/important-information-for-business-on-coronavirus-3/national-certificate>

*FAQ about Covid restrictions, made by the Ministry of the Economy and Innovation.*

I've tried to be scrupulous in reporting the Covid Pass rules in our country. But the rules are convoluted and changing rapidly. If you find something wrong, or something which I should include, please let me know.

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## Contact

Comments, questions, ideas, corrections? Feel free to email me.

I read every message and try to respond. It's easier now that I'm suspended from my work.

Lastly, many people have written to offer money. It's very kind, and I'm humbled by the goodness and generosity in these messages. But I don't want money or recognition. All I want is to get the message out. I'm not social media savvy. I have zero platform. So I'd be deeply grateful for any help you can give to draw attention to this message.

--- Gluboco

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[txti](#)