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## Romania, surge in infections. The concerns of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches

Romanian authorities recently reported over a thousand cases of infection per day, with an upward trend. Many people have lowered their guard on masks, social distancing and other precautions, others no longer give credit to public authorities or to the press, some people think it's all an act and an attempt to control and manipulate the masses. The Constitutional Court ruling against imposing quarantine and isolation on people who tested positive to Covid-19, in early July, created a legislative vacuum in Romania, whose consequences are clear today. In fact, 24 hours after the Constitutional Court ruling, over 600 Covid-19 patients were released from hospital, over 30,000 left isolation and more than 1,200 left quarantine; after a week, Romanian authorities reported the highest number of infected patients, 555 infected in 24 hours, which doubled in the last few days. **Over one thousand daily cases.** Today Romania's Health Ministry announced 1,151 new cases of infection in the last 24 hours with 33 deaths. The death toll from the coronavirus since the outbreak of the pandemic now totals 2,239. Almost 7,000 patients are hospitalized, over 2,000 people who tested positive for the coronavirus are in isolation at home and about 5,000 in institutionalized isolation facilities. 13,890 people are quarantined at home and 15 are in institutionalized quarantine facilities. Consequently, warnings are repeatedly being issued against relaxing preventive and protective measures. **A divided country.** To date, hospitals in several cities are full, patients are cared for in corridors, in mobile healthcare facilities or transferred to other locations; in some cities local authorities imposed a quarantine or the obligation to wear a mask even outdoors. Furthermore, *several European countries decided to restrict entry of Romanian citizens: negative tests or 14-day isolation.* However, as an infectiologist from the infectious disease hospital in Timisoara notes, Romania now seems to be split in two: half of the country is enjoying vacation, ignoring the pandemic, while the other half is worried over the consequences of irresponsible behaviour with respect to the pandemic. In fact, while there are cities with about 100 new cases per day, five Romanian cities are seemingly cleared of the coronavirus, with zero infections for some time already.



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The Orthodox and Catholic Churches are concerned about the situation. There have been some cases of infection among the clergy, but only one death: the Orthodox Archbishop of Suceava, Pimen, aged 90. Holy Mass celebrations in places of worship have been allowed in Romania only a month ago, complying with established regulations and distances, but the steady growth in infections is an alarm signal for worship activities. **Some good practices.** In Bucharest - the city with the highest number of daily infections - there are 19 Catholic churches and about 200 Orthodox churches. "We are concerned about the latest reported numbers of Covid-19 infections," Fr. **Tarciziu Serban**, spokesman for the Roman-Catholic Archdiocese of Bucharest, told SIR. "Since religious services were resumed in the churches there have been no reported cases of contagion within the Catholic communities", but "we all know that if it happened in one of the churches, that church would be quarantined. We therefore constantly remind all attendees of liturgical celebrations, from church pulpits and through media channels, to respect 3 simple but vital health and hygiene rules: distance, regular hand-washing and face masks."

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