Nordic Welfare, Baltics Austerity and COVID-19

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Abstract

The Nordic countries and the Baltic States are in geographic proximity and are a well-integrated region, however, their economic and social policies are dramatically different. The Nordics are welfare states whereas the Baltics have followed neoliberal austerity policies after reclaiming independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. If one considers indicators of poverty, social exclusion, and income inequality it is perhaps not surprising that the Baltics do not perform as well the richer Nordics. However, the Baltics also perform poorly as compared to the Visegrád countries that have similar per capita GDP.

If one considers healthcare expenditures as percentage and of GDP and health care expenditure in EUR per capita the Baltics are far behind the Nordics both because they spend a smaller amount on healthcare as a percent of GDP, but also because their GDP per capita is much lower. When it comes to COVID-19 cases and deaths the Baltics do not perform as well as the Nordics except for Sweden. However, the Baltics perform well compared to the Visegrád countries in spite of less generous welfare programs than in the Visegrád group.

Keywords: *economic and social policy, welfare and healthcare expenditures, Nordic countries, Baltic States, Visegrád group.*

JEL Classifications: I38, H51, H53
DOI: 10.24818/RMCI.2021.4.542

1. Introduction

The Nordic countries and the Baltic States now form a well-integrated region in terms of trade, labour mobility, and investment. The Baltics and the continental Nordics are too integrated in terms of their financial sector cross-border interlinkages, with risks of regional contagion (Hilmarsson, 2020 and 2014). This became evident during the 2008/09 financial crisis. As citizens of European Economic Area and Schengen member states, Nordic and Baltic citizens can travel freely across each other's borders. The Nordic countries and the Baltic States also cooperate closely within various international organizations where their representatives share offices, such as the Bretton Woods institutions in the shape of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank Group.

The Nordic and Baltic peoples are in many ways like-minded and despite interruptions – most recently Soviet occupation of the Baltics – these countries have been in contact for centuries. During the 17th and 18th centuries, large parts of Estonia and Latvia formed part of the Swedish empire. Nevertheless, today, 30

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years after their separation from the Soviet Union, the economic policies, welfare, and tax systems of the Baltic States remain far away from the Nordic welfare model. Post-independence, the Baltics went from one extreme to another: from communist central planning to neoliberal free market economies and were – at least in Estonia – influenced by Milton Friedman Chicago economics. Post-Soviet Union wealth and income became concentrated in the coffers of a relatively small elite. It is questionable whether this system is sustainable.

The famous British economist John Maynard Keynes once commented that 'Capitalism is the astounding belief that the most wickedest of men will do the most wickedest of things for the greatest good of everyone' (Keynes, n.d.). When discussing the 2008/09 financial crisis in his book *The Price of Inequality,* Stiglitz (2013) states that 'The wealth given to the elites and the bankers seemed to arise out of their ability and willingness to take advantage of others' (Stiglitz, 2013, p. xliv). This comment seems to fit the Baltic situation. Government assets were captured by the Baltic elite and for many of them Swedish banking interests were more important than the wellbeing of ordinary Baltic people.

But capitalism is a useful system – if governments can successfully and democratically intervene for the common good. The Nordic countries are known worldwide as welfare states and, while their welfare systems are undergoing constant review and reform, these systems remain one of the key characteristics of Nordic societies and the Nordic welfare model (see further Hannibalsson, 2017). According to Ingebritsen 'Scandinavians remain committed to the provision of universal benefits and to playing a role in international society consistent with the golden age of welfare capitalism' (Ingebritsen, 2006, p. 12). For the Baltic States the question arises whether or not they are likely to become members of this group of like-minded northern European social welfare states or whether they will remain on the other end, as neoliberal societies with high income inequality and weak welfare systems, implementing austerity programs during recessions.

The Nordics certainly allow market forces to play a big role in their societies, but governments intervene to correct what they perceive as market failures, redistribute income through progressive income tax, tax property owners and maintain social safety nets to help the most vulnerable. This is what they call welfare capitalism, not as wicked as the capitalism Keynes talked about. In contrast, Baltic capitalism – founded on flat income taxes and low taxes on wealthy property owners – seems wicked in the sense Keynes talked about, in that burden-sharing seems unfair. The Nordics have learned how important economic and social justice is and perhaps it is now time for the Baltics to consider steps towards becoming more inclusive societies. This will be a challenge especially since many of their young and best educated inhabitants, who could have become taxpayers, have chosen to immigrate to other countries partly because of the weak welfare systems and income inequality.

2. The Nordic Welfare Model

As pointed out in a comprehensive report by Torben M. Andersen, et al. 2007 entitled: 'The Nordic Model - Embracing globalization and sharing risks', the Nordic model is widely regarded as a benchmark for other countries (See

Andersen, et al. 2007). As the authors state, the Nordics are often seen to have succeeded better than other countries in combining economic efficiency and growth with a relatively peaceful labour market, a fairly even distribution of income, and social cohesion (See Andersen, et.al. 2007). The Nordic model could thus be a source of inspiration for other nations in their search for a better economic and social system, including perhaps the Baltic States.

In a meeting between the author of this article and the IMF a few years ago, where economic and social progress in the Baltic States was discussed and compared with the Nordic countries, one senior IMF official commented that 'it is hard to look good if you are compared with the Nordics.' This is often how the Nordic countries are seen. As Christine Ingebritsen notes: 'Scandinavia provides examples of how power and wealth can be distributed more equitably; how gender and class differences can be minimized; and how state authority can be used in a positive way to temper markets and social injustice' (Ingebritsen, 2006, p. 2).

Scandinavians have not hesitated to intervene with market forces and have used government institutions and systems to produce results that are seen as more equitable than neoliberal, hands-off policies would achieve. To correct the wickedness in capitalism that Keynes spoke of, Andersen, et al. argue that the Nordics have embraced both globalization and the welfare state, and that the security offered by collective mechanisms for sharing risks has been instrumental in enhancing a favourable attitude to globalization and competition (See Andersen, et al. 2007).

Collective risk-sharing can thus continue to offer a safety net that helps workers and their families cope with risks and adapt to new requirements during times of crisis, transition and change. At the same time, the Nordic welfare model is widely seen as consistent with a good business and investment climate with a vibrant private sector and foreign investment, research and innovation. This can, for example, be seen in the World Bank 'Doing Business' reports, which constantly rank the Nordic countries among the top performers worldwide for creating a favourable investment and business climate (World Bank, 2020).

Furthermore, as Anderson et al. point out: 'Professional economists have often been puzzled by the relatively good economic performance of the Nordic model, given its high taxes and its generous social protection systems as well as the role of strong labour unions and wage coordination' (See Andersen, et al. 2007, p. 16). Clearly, some losses of economic efficiency must be caused by some of the characteristics of the Nordic welfare model, and numerous studies have been devoted to analysing the economic costs of a large welfare state.

But, equally clearly, numerous factors appear to have made up for those disadvantages. Arguably, the Nordic model has become a venue for generating political support for growth-enhancing technical change, free trade and open markets by creating systems through which the winners from structural transformation compensate the losers, at least to some extent (See Andersen, et al. 2007, p. 18). In the future, the pressure will be on European countries to deliver their preferred mix of public and private goods more efficiently. As Eichengreen (2007) points out, the Scandinavian countries are widely cited as examples of societies that have already begun moving in this direction by successfully maintaining essential social protection while enhancing the efficiency of their provision (Eichengreen, 2008, pp. 421-422). A reasonable degree of social and political cohesion would also seem of importance in the Baltic States for their political stability and growth sustainability. It could reduce ethnic strife and political tensions, while improving their security profile.

3. The Baltic neoliberal approach

Although the Baltic States have sought international cooperation with the Nordic countries in international organizations, also engaging with them in trade, investment, and financial sector cooperation, they have to a lesser degree followed them in terms of economic policy. Moreover, they do not follow the Nordic welfare model in the design of their tax and welfare systems. Since their resumption of independence in 1991, the Baltic States followed a very different political, economic, and social path from their richer Nordic neighbours. Adopting the Nordic welfare model on a full scale would be out of reach and unsustainable at their current income level. Nor is there reason for them to copy the Nordics on every account. Nevertheless, they could attempt to approach the Nordic model if that was their wish and move closer to the welfare systems of some of the other richer European countries, perhaps with European Union (EU) support. This could also have help them keep a higher portion of their young people within their borders. Currently the Baltics are closer to the free-market neoliberal Anglo-Saxon model (see different categories for country groups in Table 1).

Comparator Country Groups

Table 1

Baltic States	Nordic Countries	Anglo-Saxon Countries	Visegrád Countries	South Eastern European Countries
Estonia Latvia Lithuania	Denmark Finland Iceland Norway Sweden	Australia Canada Ireland New Zealand UK USA	Czech Republic Hungry Poland Slovak Republic	Bulgaria Romania

Source: IMF, 2014. Constructed by the author

Mart Laar became prime minister of Estonia in 1992 and served in that capacity to 1994 and again from 1999 to 2002. In an interview with the *Brussels Journal* during the Baltic boom in 2005 and before the crash in 2008 he commented as follows: 'It is very fortunate that I was not an economist,' he says:

> I had read only one book on economics – Milton Friedman's *Free to Choose.* I was so ignorant at the time that I thought that what Friedman wrote about the benefits of privatisation, the flat tax and the abolition of

> all customs rights, was the result of economic reforms that had been put into practice in the West. It seemed common sense to me and, as I thought it had already been done everywhere, I simply introduced it in Estonia, despite warnings from Estonian economists that it could not be done. They said it was as impossible as walking on water. We did it: we just walked on the water because we did not know that it was impossible (Laar, 2005).

Mart Laar thus decided to implement neoliberal policies in Estonia in a more orthodox way than any other country in the world had ever done, assuming, according to himself, that this was common practice "in the West."

The neoliberal era started in the eighties as a revolt against the welfare state and was based on a belief in market infallibility. Markets self-corrected, the government should get out of the way. The results of this policy on a global scale became clear in 2008, including in the Baltics.

We should keep in mind that this happened in a country that had been a republic in the Soviet Union and Estonians were not well-informed about economic and welfare policies in other countries when Laar took office, not even in Scandinavia in spite of close geographic proximity. This shows how isolated the country had been and how ill-prepared it was during its early days of independence. Nevertheless, Estonia is often seen as the Baltic State that initiates reforms which the other Baltics, Latvia and Lithuania, follow.

And so it happened that from the date of re-establishment of independence, Baltic reforms were characterized by the creation of an ultra-liberal business-friendly environment that was to help attract foreign investment. A balanced fiscal budget and strict monetary policy with fixed exchange rates was to give the Baltics a strong reputation as reliable borrowers. A fully open trade regime led to rapid reorientation of foreign trade towards the West, especially the common EU market. The social system should on the other hand inspire 'people to assume responsibility for their own future' (Laar, 2007, p. 9, see also Bohle and Greskovits, 2012).

4. Social (in)justice in the Baltic States

Solidarity, social inclusion and safety nets for the most vulnerable were not on the agenda when the Baltic States became independent from the Soviet Union. It was the survival of the fittest and the fittest had accumulated wealth that in some cases was based on privatization of government property in a corrupt environment. The World Bank diplomatically talked about state capture. Some of the wickedness that Keynes spoke of flourished.

Free market, fiscal discipline, fixed exchange rates and economic integration were among key priorities. The Baltic States' reforms were not to be soft with a human face. It should not come as a surprise that, in terms of indicators such as the at-risk-of-poverty rate, the Gini index or the income quintile share ratio, the Baltics do not have a have a favourable record in the EU, the euro area as well as the European Economic Area. Income inequality is especially staggering in Latvia and Lithuania (see Table 2). Estonia is close to the EU average on this account.

The Gini index is a standard measure of inequality. If income were shared exactly in proportion to population, for example, with both the bottom and top 10 % getting 10 % of the income, then the Gini index would be zero. If on the other hand all the income went to the top person, the Gini index would be 100. So the lower the Gini index, the greater the income equality. More equal societies – like the Nordics and the Visegrád countries (see Table 2) – have a Gini index of 30 or below. In more unequal societies such as the Baltics and the South Eastern European countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Gini index is above 30 and close to 35 in Latvia, Lithuania and Romania and in the Case of Bulgaria above 40.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (current prices, US$) and selected social indicators 2019

Table 2

	GDP per capita (current prices, US$)	**Proportion of people at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion[2]**	**At-risk-of-poverty rate[3]**	**The Gini index/ coefficient [4]**	**Income quintile share ratio[5]**
			Baltics		
Estonia	23720	*24.3*	*21.7*	*30.5*	*5.08*
Latvia	17739	27.3	*22.9*	*35.2*	*6.54*
Lithuania	19552	*26.3*	*20.6*	*35.4*	6.44
			Nordics		
Denmark	60299	*16,3*	*12.5*	*27.5*	*4.09*
Finland	48749	*15,6*	*11,6*	*26.2*	*3.69*
Iceland	69572	*13.3**	8.8*	n.a.	*3.21**
Norway	75700*	*16.1*	*12.7*	n.a.	*3.81*
Sweden	51443	*18,8*	*17.1*	*27.6*	*4.33*

[2] See further: http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do
[3] See further: https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do
[4] See further: http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?query=BOOKMARK_DS-053230_QID_-4D802869_UID_-3F171EB0&layout=TIME,C,X,0;GEO,L,Y,0;INDIC_IL,L,Z,0;INDICATORS,C,Z,1;&zSelection=DS-053230INDICATORS,OBS_FLAG;DS-053230INDIC_IL,GINI_HND;&rankName1=INDIC-IL_1_2_-1_2&rankName2=INDICATORS_1_2_-1_2&rankName3=TIME_1_0_0_0&rankName4=GEO_1_0_0_1&sortR=ASC_-1_FIRST&sortC=ASC_-1_FIRST&rStp=&cStp=&rDCh=&cDCh=&rDM=true&cDM=true&footnes=false&empty=false&wai=false&time_mode=ROLLING&time_most_recent=true&lang=EN&cfo=%23%23%23%2C%23%23%23.%23%23%23
[5] See further: http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_di11&lang=en

	GDP per capita (current prices, US$)	Proportion of people at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion[2]	At-risk-of-poverty rate[3]	The Gini index/ coefficient [4]	Income quintile share ratio[5]
Anglo- Saxon					
Ireland	80481	*20.6*	*13.1*	*28.3*	*4.03*
UK	42416	*24.8**	18.6*	*33.5**	*5.63**
Central Europe - Visegrád + Slovenia					
Czech Republic	23539	*12,5*	*10.1*	*24.0*	*3.34*
Hungary	16725	*18.9*	*12.3*	*28.0*	*4.23*
Poland	15689	18,2	*15.4*	28.5	*4.37*
Slovenia	26036	*14.4*	*12.0*	*23.9*	*3.39*
Slovak Republic	19281	*16.4*	*11.9*	*22.8*	*3.34*
South Eastern Europe					
Bulgaria	9863	*32.8*	*22.6*	*40.8*	*8.10*
Romania	12867	*31.2*	*23.8*	*34.8*	*7.08*
EU28		***21.4***	***16.8***	***30.7***	***5.09***

Source: IMF, 2021 and Eurostat, 2021
*) Data from 2018

It should perhaps not be a surprise that when compared to the Nordic welfare states the Baltics have an uneven income distribution, weak safety nets and weak welfare systems, which in combination made their citizens extraordinarily vulnerable during the 2008/09 crisis. However, poverty, social exclusion and income inequality remain serious problems, even if they are compared to countries at similar income levels, such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Measured by the Gini index income distribution in the Latvia and Lithuania is also more uneven than in the Anglo-Saxon countries in Europe: Ireland and the UK, see Table 2.

Public spending in the Baltics is low and their governments remain small, particularly with respect to transfer payments. Expenditure is lower than in the Central European four peers or the Nordics, and the share of GDP devoted to social benefits is substantially lower. According to the IMF, the Baltic States are closer to the Anglo-Saxons than the Nordics in the structure of their private sectors (IMF 2014, p. 4). In fact, in terms of poverty, social exclusion and income inequality Latvia and Lithuania are close to Romania, a less advanced and at much lower income levels and in fact not that far away from Bulgaria, see Table 2.

The Baltic States have had a relatively high labour taxation and low profit taxation. In contrast to weak performance on social indicators, they rank relatively highly on business indicators according to the World Bank's 'Doing Business' Report (World Bank, 2020). In fact, as stated above, low taxes and a liberal economic regime introduced following restoration of independence in the 1990s aimed at attracting foreign investment and promoting investment growth and thus GDP growth. Social cohesion was not a priority.

EU overemphasis on fiscal discipline made matters worse during the 2008/09 crisis. Extreme austerity was implemented with cuts in healthcare and education. Internal devaluation was enforced since depreciation of the local currencies would result in the exclusion of the Baltics from the euro area, which these countries perhaps wanted to join for reasons of security more than economics.

Had the Baltics wanted to implement more Nordic policies they could, for example, have introduced more progressive income tax, instead of a flat-rate tax and a higher tax on property/capital gains tax, in order to have the rich carry some of the burden. It should be noted that progressive income tax has been introduced recently in the Baltics e.g. in Latvia. The Baltics could have used this revenue to help the most vulnerable, including their young people, who as a consequence might have stayed home instead of fleeing the horrific policies of incompetent governments. It is a sad story for states that became independent, but lost the opportunity to become inclusive and more humane. The Baltics had very low public debt when the 2008/09 crisis hit. That subsequently increased, not to create some social safety nets, but rather to enable foreign bank recovery. This is not the first time unregulated capitalism was saved from capitalists by the state. A bailout of the financial system by taxpayers. A welfare system for banks, not the poorest, most vulnerable segment of the population. Neoliberalism and monetarism for the Baltics but Keynesianism for the richer Nordics.

5. Healthcare expenditure and COVID-19

During times of COVID-19, it is interesting to know how much is being spent on healthcare by country. The most recent statistics from Eurostat on current healthcare expenditure (public and private) show how this varies across some EU/EEA states, see Table 3.

On average in the EU, healthcare expenditure amounted to 9.9% of GDP in 2018 and 3076.80 EUR per capita. Among the EU countries considered healthcare expenditure in EUR per capita was highest in Denmark and Sweden in 2018, while it was lowest in Romania and Bulgaria. The EFTA/EEA countries, Iceland and Norway, spend more on health care per capita than any of the EU countries considered, see Table 3.

It is perhaps not surprising that healthcare expenditure as percentage of GDP is higher in the Nordics than in the Baltics given that the Nordics are welfare states whereas the Baltics have pursued neoliberal austerity policies. Health care expenditure in EUR per capita is also much higher in the Nordics than in the Baltics reflecting both the fact that they spend more on healthcare as percentage of GDP and enjoy a much higher GDP per capita.

Healthcare expenditure as a percentage of GDP and health care expenditure in EUR per capita is not that different in the Visegrád countries as compared to the Baltics. Health care expenditure in EUR per capita in Romana and Bulgaria is lower than in Baltics and the Visegrád countries also reflecting lower GDP per capita in those countries, see Tables 2 and 3.

Healthcare expenditure in selected countries as percentage of GDP and health care expenditure in EUR per capita 2018

Table 3

	Healthcare expenditure as percentage of GDP[6]	**Health care expenditure in EUR per capita**[7]
Baltics		
Estonia	6.66	1312.18
Latvia	6.21	936.28
Lithuania	6.57	1061.15
Nordics		
Denmark	10.10	5255.75
Finland	9.04	3828.64
Iceland	8.54	5279.54
Norway	10.05	6960.03
Sweden	10.90	5041.30
Anglo- Saxon		
Ireland	6.93	4612.74
UK	10.00	3645.78
Central Europe (Visegrad + Slovenia)		
Czech Republic	7.65	1493.13
Hungary	6.70	916.93
Poland	6.33	829.54
Slovenia	8.30	1830.93
Slovak Republic	6.69	1099.99
South Eastern Europe		
Bulgaria	7.35	586.55
Romania	5.56	583.95
EU28	***9.89***	***3067.80***
Eurostat 2021		

If one considers COVID-19 cases and deaths per 100,000 of population (see Table 4) it is hardly surprising that the Nordics, except for Sweden with its COVID-19 heard immunity strategy, did much better than the Baltics. The Nordics have a well-funded public health care systems and spend many times more per

[6] See further: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/HLTH_SHA11_HF__custom_227597/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=1530a1e6-767e-4661-9e15-0ed2f7fae0d5

[7] See further: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/HLTH_SHA11_HF__custom_227597/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=948e46d8-6423-4775-afe1-ade53d902db3

capita on health care than either the Baltics or the Visegrád countries. What is surprising however is the poor performance of the Visegrád countries compared to the Baltics with regards to COVID-19 deaths. If one considers deaths per 100,000 population the Visegrád countries are close to Romania and Bulgaria, countries at a much lower income level and with much lower health care expenditures in EUR per capita.

WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard. COVID-19 cases and deaths - cumulative total per 100,000 population [8] WHO 9 July 2021.

Table 4

	Cases - cumulative total per 100,000 population	Deaths - cumulative total per 100,000 population
Baltics		
Estonia	9887.01	95.56
Latvia	7223.30	132.88
Lithuania	9986.22	157.33
Nordics		
Denmark	5110.00	43.59
Finland	1767.35	17.66
Iceland	1833.12	8.24
Norway	2469.87	14.83
Sweden	10576.60	141.78
Anglo- Saxon		
Ireland	5561.63	100.84
UK	7399.02	189.05
Central Europe (Visegrad + Slovenia)		
Czech Republic	15605.95	283.63
Hungary	8275.09	307.12
Poland	7589.07	197.99
Slovenia	12291.80	226.78
Slovak Republic	7178.86	229.32
South Eastern Europe		
Bulgaria	6075.73	260.87
Romania	5593.58	176.92

Source: WHO 2021 (9 July 2021)

On the website of the European University Institute one can find the following statement:

> „Europe's East has been conspicuously absent from the daily news on COVID-19. Much of the region took restrictive policy measures relatively early and seem (so far) to have avoided exponential case growth. Yet, the region is particularly vulnerable to the outbreak and its consequences.

[8] See further: https://covid19.who.int/table

Neoliberal reforms and austerity have left healthcare systems chronically underfunded; shortages of medical equipment, expertise and personnel are worsened by free movement of labour in the EU. The region's economies are highly dependent on the West such that disruptions in international production and mobility have disproportionate impact. Finally, a shift towards "illiberal democracies" in the region leaves political systems uniquely unprepared to face the crisis" (European University Institute, 2021).

Poor performance of the Visegrád group may be linked to policy makers' unwillingness in the second and partly third wave of COVID-19 to implement tougher measures and close the economy. All Visegrád countries and Baltic States implemented strict lockdowns before the first wave even arrived and had therefore no real first wave to begin with. But policy makers were very reluctant to do the same in the second or third wave, as measures were not very popular, and some countries feared the dramatic economic fallout. Some part of the explanation might be populist governments. Population density might be a factor, explaining why the Baltics are performing better than the Visegrád countries as the Baltic States are very small and partly scarcely populated. Age and family structure should be similar. But further research is needed.

There are no reasons to believe that there are systematic differences between the healthcare sectors among these groups of countries (Baltics and Visegrád) and expenditures on healthcare per capita is not dramatically different across the Baltics and the Visegrád countries, see Table 3.

6. Concluding remarks

The Nordics and the Baltics have become a well-integrated region in terms of trade, labour mobility, and investment. However, those countries follow dramatically different policies when it comes to economic and social policies. The Nordics as welfare states whereas the Baltics have followed neoliberal policies after reclaiming their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

The Nordics tend to follow more Keynesian economic policies while the Baltics prefer fiscal austerity. This became quite visible during the 2008/09 global economic crisis when strict fiscal discipline was demanded as condition for later euro adoption in the Baltics.

When one considers indicators of poverty, social exclusion, and income equality it is perhaps not surprising that the Baltics, and especially Latvia and Lithuania, do not perform well as compared to the Nordics, but it is notable that they also perform poorly when compared to the Visegrád countries that have similar per capita GDP. In fact, the Baltics are not that far from the Romania and Bulgaria considering those indicators, countries that are poorer than the Baltics.

If one considers healthcare expenditure, as percentage and of GDP, and health care expenditure in EUR per capita, the Baltics are far behind the Nordics, both because they spend a smaller amount on healthcare as a percent of GDP, and also since their capita GDP is much lower than in the Nordics. When it comes to COVID-19 cases (cumulative total per 100,000 population) and COVID-19 deaths (cumulative total per 100,000 population) the Baltics do not perform as well as the Nordics, except for Sweden. However, the Baltics perform better when compared to the Visegrád countries with fewer deaths per 100,000 of population.

Further research is needed to better understand why the Visegrád countries preform much better on social indicators as compared to the Baltics (see Table 2) as well as the poor performance of the Visegrád group as compared to the Baltics in fighting COVID-19 (See Table 4).

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