

COVID-19 – PUBLIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS

19 – 23 March 2020

Summary

<p>The European Union</p> 	<p>France</p> 
<p>Number of cases: 141,858 Number of deaths: 7,319</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last week, the European Commission focused on coordinating with Member States to introduce economic measures to combat the economic fallout of the virus. Throughout Europe, the financial markets and the economic forecasts paint a dire picture which propels decision makers to take measures to avoid a potential recession. This includes an EUR 750 billion package announced by the European Central Bank last week and national measures providing EUR billions to assist respective healthcare systems. • On 19 March, the European Commission adopted a communication on the Temporary Framework for State Aid measures to combat COVID-19. • The European Commission, following the adoption of the Communication, has so far approved state aids from Denmark, Portugal, Italy, Germany and France. • On 20 March, the Commission proposed introducing the general escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact to allow Member States fiscal flexibility amid dealing with the economic impact of the crisis. 	<p>Number of cases: 16,018 Number of deaths: 674</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 MPs and 4 staff members infected by the virus. The Parliament closed for 2 weeks on 9 March but reopened from 19 to 22 March to vote measures announced by the government. • The parliamentary joint committee adopted the national health emergency plan on 22 March, which enables the government to issue decrees during the epidemic, and to postpone the second ballot of the municipal elections to 21 June. This plan enters into force on 23 March, for a period of two months. • Special measures are taken regarding short time working arrangements, social security costs, taxes for companies, in order to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic on businesses. The French government announced a EUR 300 billion guarantee to support companies. • French President Emmanuel Macron announced strict confinement measures for 15 days on 16 March, with the closing of schools, universities, and non-essential shops. So far, over 90,000 people has been fined over violation of the quarantine/confinement rules.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On 20 March, the Commission adopted a communication on the exportation of certain personal protective equipment that requires export authorisation to be submitted before exporting these products. The European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) announced support to Member States to combat COVID-19 by addressing disinfectant shortages. On 20 March, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) has published new recommendations for sponsors on how to manage the conduct of clinical trials in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On 23 March, Assistance Publique – Hopitaux de Paris, a public institution which oversees the French capital’s hospital network of 39 hospitals, suffered a cyberattack during coronavirus outbreak cutting access to their websites.
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<p>Germany</p> 	<p>Italy</p> 
<p>Number of cases: 22,672 Number of deaths: 86</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional restrictive measures were adopted on 22 March 2020. Citizens are urged to reduce contacts with other people outside the members of their own household to an absolutely necessary minimum. In public, wherever possible, a minimum distance of at least 1.5 metres, preferably even two metres, must be kept from persons other than those living in one household. Angela Merkel is in quarantine and works from home as her doctor was tested positive for COVID-19 after giving Ms. Merkel a pneumococci vaccination on Friday, 20 March 2020. Federal and state governments decided to set up an emergency plan for hospitals and health facilities. The respective resolution includes the upgrading, expanding and converting of rehabilitation facilities, 	<p>Number of cases: 50,418 Number of deaths: 6,077</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All non-essential commercial and industrial activities are suspended. Travels between municipalities or communes, both with private and public transport are banned, except for emergency, health reasons or work. Italy allocated EUR 25 billion to support the Italian economy, with targeted measures towards self-employed workers, families and businesses Almost 8,000 doctors replied to the call from the Minister for Regional and Autonomous Affairs to form a task force of 300 doctors who will work in support of regional health facilities involved in the COVID-19 emergency. The Minister is considering to launch a similar call addressed to nurses.

<p>hotels or larger halls to build capacities. There are currently 28,000 intensive care beds in Germany, of which 25,000 have respiratory capabilities. These capacities shall be doubled.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Companies are allowed to shorten the working time of employees as per the decision of the Bundestag.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Donation of blood is still allowed amid nationwide lockdown.
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<p style="text-align: center;">Spain</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">The United Kingdom</p> 
<p>Number of cases: 33,089 Number of deaths: 2,182</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government has officially announced the state of emergency will be extended 15 additional days up until 11 April. Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez will be seeking the approval of the Congress for the extension in extraordinary plenary session on 25 March. Equivalent or stricter measures are expected to be put in place. During a speech on 21 March, PM Sánchez stated “the worst is yet to come” in Spain. • While freedom of movement is restricted across the country, industries and other economic activities can keep running. • As a result of the increasing cases of infected people, new measures to tackle COVID-19 are to be put in place, namely the purchase of additional health products, and domestic manufacturing of medical supplies and medicines. 	<p>Number of cases: 5,683 Number of deaths: 281</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UK government continues to face criticism for its lack of strict measures in response to the outbreak of COVID-19, as well for its approach in communicating its plans. • Many Britons have been seen ignoring the guidelines and have continued meeting and greeting people as normal. • Anticipating a fresh wave of cases, the government have announced new measures to protect the most vulnerable including issuing personal letters to 1.5 million people with serious medical conditions warning them to go into quarantine for at least the next 12 weeks. • A new Local Support System will ensure those individuals without a support network of friends or family receive basic groceries during this period, with the Armed Forces in support. • Schools in the UK have now been shut until further notice, but they will remain open to look after the children of keyworkers such as healthcare professionals. • The Coronavirus Bill will be introduced to the House of Commons proposing emergency measures including police powers to detain suspected carriers of COVID-19 and travel restrictions.
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I. EUROPEAN UNION

- Last week, the European Commission focused on coordinating with Member States to introduce economic measures to combat the economic fallout of the virus. Throughout Europe, the financial markets and the economic forecasts paint a dire picture which propels decision makers to take measures to avoid a potential recession. This includes an EUR 750 billion package announced by the European Central Bank last week and national measures providing EUR billions to assist respective healthcare systems.
- Most notably, on 19 March, the European Commission adopted a [communication on the Temporary Framework for State Aid measures](#) to combat COVID-19. This document sets out the framework for state aid, credit loans and other financial measures that Member States can take during the COVID-19 crisis in line with the EU Treaties.
- The European Commission, following the adoption of Communication, has so far approved state aids from Denmark, Portugal, Italy, Germany and France.

- On 20 March, the Commission proposed introducing the general escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact, a measure which was first introduced after the global economic crises of 2008 to allow Member States to deviate from the 3% budget deficit and the rules on state debt in order for them to be able to provide stimulus packages. According to the Commission's economic scenario, the real GDP could contract by 1% in the EU in 2020.
- On 20 March, [the Commission adopted a communication](#) on the exportation of certain personal protective equipment. [As per the adopted implementing regulation](#), Member States are required to produce export authorisation in order to export these products.
- The European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) announced support to Member States to combat COVID-19 by addressing disinfectant shortages. As per the initiative, flexibility will be ensured including the payment of invoices. Companies will also receive a 2 months extension on certain deadlines that are due until the end of May.
- On 20 March, the European Commission, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and national Heads of Medicines Agencies (HMA) have published [new recommendations](#) for sponsors on how to manage the conduct of clinical trials in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the EMA, the impact of the pandemic on European health systems makes it necessary to adjust how clinical trials and the people who participate in these trials are managed.

II. ITALY

- On 22 March, Prime Minister Conte signed a new decree¹ ordering the suspension of all non-essential industrial and commercial activities as well as utilities on the Italian territory. The decree contains in attachment a list of 97 activities that may under certain conditions continue because considered essential. These include the production, transport, marketing and delivery of pharmaceuticals, health technology and medical-surgical devices. Businesses will have three days (until 25 March) to comply with the decree.
- The Italian government has also decided² to ban travels between municipalities or communes, both with private and public transport until a new decree comes into force. The ban will apply to everyone with exceptions for cases of absolute urgency, health reasons or work. The aim is to limit travels to a bare minimum.

¹ Law Decree 22 March 2020. Available at: <http://www.governo.it/articolo/coronavirus-firmato-il-dpcm-22-marzo-2020/14363> (to be published in the OJ)

² Ordinance of the Ministry of Health and Ministry of the Interior, 22 March. Available at: <http://www.trovanorme.salute.gov.it/norme/dettaglioAtto?id=73728>

III. FRANCE

- The French National Assembly has reported nineteen MPs infected by the coronavirus. The National Assembly is closed until the end of the quarantine. The National Assembly reopened on 19 March only for voluntary MPs, to vote on the government's crisis measures. The parliamentary joint committee voted the national health emergency plan on 22 March, which enters into force on 23 March, for two months, with a possibility to reduce the implementation by issuing a decree.
 - This plan enables the government to issue exceptional decrees during the epidemic. As a result, the government will be able to legislate on areas initially dedicated to the Parliament to deal with the epidemic.
 - The second ballot of the municipal elections is postponed to 21 June.
- The French Ministry of Economy announced an economic stimulus package to limit the effects of the epidemic on the economy. A EUR 300 billion guarantee was announced on 16 March to support companies which includes the suspension of taxes, social contributions and utility bills (water, gas, electricity).
- A number of 91,824 offences were recorded by the police since the beginning of the quarantine.
- The government is waiting for the scientific council's opinion on 23 March, to announce an extension of the quarantine.
- Paris' public hospital group suffered a cyberattack Sunday morning that lasted one hour and targeted two websites with an overload of internet traffic. Assistance Publique – Hôpitaux de Paris, which oversees the city's hospital network, stopped the distributed-denial-of-service (DDoS) attack by cutting internet access to the websites, including stopping access to its servers from outside Europe. The country's cybersecurity agency ANSSI said it was informed of the attack. An ANSSI official said the "incident was quickly and efficiently managed" and remained "without critical impact."³

³ Reported on [Politico](#)

IV. GERMANY

- After an exchange between Chancellor Angela Merkel and the heads of the federal states on 22 March 2020, nine additional restrictive measures were announced by Angela Merkel. She explained that from 23 March 2020 on,
 - Citizens are urged to reduce contacts with other people outside the members of their own household to an absolutely necessary minimum.
 - In public, wherever possible, a minimum distance of at least 1.5 metres, preferably even two metres, must be kept from persons other than those living in one household.
 - It is only permitted to stay in public places alone, with one other person not living in the same household or with members of the household. The way to work, emergency care, shopping, visits to the doctor, participation in meetings, necessary appointments and examinations, help for other or individual sports and exercise in the fresh air as well as other necessary activities remain possible.
 - Groups of people celebrating in public places, in homes and private institutions are unacceptable given the seriousness of the situation in Germany. Violations of the contact restrictions should be monitored by law enforcement agencies and the police and sanctions should be imposed in case of violations.
 - Restaurants will be closed. This does not include the delivery and collection of take-away food for consumption at home.
 - Personal hygiene services such as hairdressers, beauty salons, massage studios, tattoo studios and similar establishments will be closed.
 - In all establishments and especially those open to the public, it is important to comply with hygiene regulations and implement effective protective measures for employees and visitors.
 - These measures will have a minimum duration of two weeks.
- Prime Minister of North Rhine-Westphalia, Armin Laschet, moreover, announced the measures to have a duration until 19 April in his federal state.
- Angela Merkel is in quarantine and works from home as her doctor was tested positive for COVID-19 after giving Ms. Merkel a pneumococci vaccination on Friday, 20 March 2020.
- In addition to that, federal and state governments decided to set up an emergency plan for hospitals and health facilities. The respective resolution includes the upgrading, expanding and converting of rehabilitation facilities, hotels or larger halls to build capacities. According to Federal Health Minister Spahn, there are currently 28000 intensive care beds in Germany, of which 25000 have respiratory capabilities. These capacities shall be doubled.

- With respect to the restructuring of organisational processes in hospitals as well as the development of additional intensive care capacities, health facilities are financially challenged. This is due to the disruption of the principle of the German reimbursement system, the DRG, that is particularly based on the redistribution of financial capacities in the context of health facilities. With respect to this, Federal Minister Jens Spahn assured financial support as well as the creation of respective regulative measures to cope with this challenge.

V. SPAIN

- The government has announced that Spain will extend the state of emergency until 11 April. Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez will put forward the extension of 15 days in plenary session on 25 March. The Congress will most likely approve it, and conditions are expected to be equivalent or stricter than the current situation. While freedom of movement is limited to essential activities, industries and other sectors are still running. Nonetheless, hotels have been [forced](#) to shut and education centres remain close.
- As a response to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases and deaths, 12% amongst health professionals, and the collapse of several regional healthcare systems, on 21 March, the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Health published several legal orders regarding the purchase of up to [8 million face masks](#) for transport-related activities, a protocol for [health workers in elderly care homes](#), and access to [pharmaceutical provision for patients under the private healthcare system](#). Since 10 March the government has distributed over 4 million face masks to the regional healthcare systems.
- A [Scientific Committee for COVID-19](#) was launched on 21 March and formed by 6 renowned experts and led by Mr Sánchez and Mr Simón, director of the Coordination Centre for Alerts and Health Emergencies.
- On 22 March, Prime Minister Sánchez announced [new measures to tackle the COVID-19 crisis](#), as follows:
 - Private care homes and their human and material resources are available to the regional healthcare systems,
 - Third country non-essential travels are restricted for 30 days, with several exceptions,
 - The army extends services to the transfer of patients, security in critical infrastructures, logistical support to transport of key human and material resources,
 - Local governments receive help from the government in distributing food, basic products and medicines to the elderly,
 - In addition to domestic manufacturing, medical supplies and medicines to combat the coronavirus, the government will establish a strategic reserve of these products for future pandemics.

- With the largest number of cases, the region of Madrid is seeing its healthcare system collapse. In light of this situation, an [adapted hospital](#) with up to 5,500 beds has been set up by the Spanish army within 48 hours.
- As a response to the increasing number of COVID-19 cases, the government has imported [640,000 rapid diagnostic tests](#) from China and South Korea for frontline health workers. Additional 6 million tests will be used in risk population groups first, and eventually to the whole population.

VI. UNITED KINGDOM

- The UK Government has come under sustained pressure in the past few weeks to provide more information and a clearer explanation on its approach to managing coronavirus.
- Following an initially more “relaxed” approach, the UK Government are now imposing far stricter measures in line with similar nations such as the forced closure of pubs, restaurants and schools until further notice. Anticipating a wave of new cases, over the weekend (22-23 March) the Government announced new measures to protect – or “shield” – the UK’s 1.5 million most vulnerable from COVID-19. This group will each receive a personal letter instructing them to quarantine themselves at home for a minimum of 12 weeks. These groups include people with specific cancers, severe respiratory conditions, those on immunosuppression therapies, people with rare diseases and women who are pregnant with significant heart disease. A new Local Support System will make sure those individuals self-isolating at home and who are without a support network of friends and family will receive basic groceries, and this will be supported by the Armed Forces.
- Today (23 March) The Coronavirus Bill will be presented to parliament which will give the Government powers allowing police and immigration authorities to detain individuals suspected of having coronavirus, including to stop any vehicle, train, vessel, or aircraft, as well as the lowering of standards in care homes to accommodate limited staff numbers, alter death requirements, lower standards for medical professional recruits, and altering the terms of the Mental Health Act to remove requirements on the number of doctors in clinics. The Official Opposition have tabled amendments to the Bill, including to reduce the length of time that the powers expire. The Government proposed the powers would last 2 years, but the Opposition believe they should not be extended beyond 6 months without the consent of parliament. Accepting their arguments, the government has now said it will introduce its own amendment which would ensure the powers have to be renewed every six months.
- From 20 March, schools closed indefinitely, and exams will be cancelled in England, following similar measures in Scotland and Wales. Up to 8 million children will have lessons cancelled in England. Schools will remain open, however, for the supervision of hundreds of thousands of children of NHS staff and other frontline workers, as well as for vulnerable children. A national voucher scheme will be launched to ensure children eligible for free school meals continue to get a meal each day.

- Last week, the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee held an evidence session to clarify the Government's approach to COVID-19, inviting the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Patrick Vallance. In the session Sir Patrick estimated that around 55,000 people in the UK now have the illness and that most deaths were in groups who were older or had pre-existing health conditions. Sir Patrick emphasised the importance of testing, saying that there must be a major increase in the number of tests particularly for NHS workers.
- The House of Commons' Health and Social Care Committee an emergency evidence session to clarify the Government's approach to COVID-19, inviting the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser and the head of NHS England to explain its plans.