

COVID-19 – PUBLIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS

26 – 30 March 2020

Summary

<p style="text-align: center;">The European Union</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">France</p> 
<p>Number of cases: 359,102 <i>(including the UK)</i> Number of deaths: 23,461</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On March 26, the ECDC published a risk assessment and management options for the safe and sustainable supply of substances of human origin (SoHO) during the coronavirus crisis. • On March 26, the European Parliament approved with near-unanimity the three urgent proposals to help the EU to fight the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In its extraordinary plenary session, the EP approved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Corona Response Investment Initiative (making available EUR 37 billion from available EU funds) ○ The extension of the EU Solidarity Fund to cover public health emergencies up to EUR 800 million for European countries in 2020 ○ Temporarily suspending EU rules on airport slots to stop air carriers from operating empty flights. • On March 26, during the plenary session, Commission President von der Leyen called the COVID-19 crisis the ‘fight of our lives’ and criticised Member States for inward looking unilateral decisions. 	<p>Number of cases: 40,174 Number of deaths: 2,606</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The parliamentary joint committee adopted the national health emergency plan on 22 March, which is effective from 23 March for a period of two months and enables the government to pass decrees during the closure of the Parliament. • French President Emmanuel Macron announced strict confinement measures on 16 March, with the closing of schools, universities, and non-essential shops. Confinement measures will be extended until 15 April at least, and the scientific council argued for a confinement until 24 April. • The European clinical trial “Discovery” started on 22 March, including hydro chloroquine. The microbiologist Didier Raoult decided not to wait for the results and made available this medicine to his patients. • The government has authorised the use of it within hospitals for individuals with severe symptoms but stated that no treatment is recognized as efficient against the virus yet, creating a big debate between health professionals.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On 26 March, the European Commission issued guidelines to facilitate air cargo transport within the EU amid the coronavirus outbreak. • On 27 March, the European Commission presented a draft proposal to extend the State aid Temporary Framework adopted on 19 March 2020 to support the EU economy. • The European Commission has proposed to allocate EUR 75 million from the EU budget to strengthen the RescEU medical stockpile. • The Commission also proposed to amend the 2020 official budget to appropriate – among others – EUR 115 million to provide an urgent response to prevent a further deterioration of the COVID-19 outbreak. It also allocates an extra EUR 3.6 million for the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). • On 30 March, the European Commission issued a Q&A to help increase the production of essential medical devices. • Also on 30 March, the European Commission presented practical guidance to ensure the free movement of essential workers. Examples include health associate professionals, child and elderly care workers, scientists in health-related industries, those needed to install critical medical devices, firefighters and police officers. • The European Innovation Council announced that it has received almost 4000 applications for the EIC Accelerator Pilot Programme relating to preventing the impact and spread of COVID-19. A total of EUR 164 million will be allocated, results will be announced later in May. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Prime Minister and the Health Minister announced on 28 March an increase in available tests, masks and intensive care beds. • An order of 1 billion masks from China is planned to fill the need throughout the entirety of the pandemic. • The opening of schools is planned on 4 May according to the Education Minister.
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<p style="text-align: center;">Germany</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Italy</p> 
<p>Number of cases: 62,435 Number of deaths: 541</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On 25 March the German Federal Association of Health Insurance Fund (GKV) introduced the option to defer social insurance payments for companies and self-employed workers to support them amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. To cope with the shortage of medical equipment and protective equipment, respectively, the German Federal Ministry of Health announced to accelerate the procurement of protective equipment. Since 27 March, this has been done in a so-called 'open house procedure' meaning that protective equipment is purchased to a fixed price. The federal cabinet, the Bundestag as well as the Bundesrat have approved the "COVID-19 Hospital Relief Act" and the "Law for the protection of the population in the event of a pandemic situation of national importance". 	<p>Number of cases: 73,880 Number of deaths: 10, 779</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All non-essential commercial and industrial activities have been suspended. The government is expected to extend the lockdown until 18 April at least. A new decree which provides 4.3 billion for the Municipalities Solidarity Fund will be soon adopted. Almost 9,500 nurses replied to the call from the Minister for Regional and Autonomous Affairs to form a task force of 500 nurses who will work in support of regional health facilities involved in the COVID-19 emergency. The donation of blood is still allowed and encouraged amid the 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: 85,195 Number of deaths: 7,340</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The government is adapting stricter containment measures in Spain due to high numbers of infected people. As such, the Council of Ministers has passed a new decree aiming at minimising travels and gatherings for non-essential workers during the Easter break. Non-essential workers not being able to perform their job remotely will be under a recoverable paid leave scheme, allowing them to make up for non-worked hours throughout 2020. Although their activities will be stopped from 30 March until 9 April, their leave will still be paid as usual. On 27 March the Ministry of Health published a legal order establishing special conditions for the dispensing and administration of medicines within the National Health System. This order allows autonomous communities to set up mechanisms allowing patients to receive medicines for hospital dispensing in other dependencies. 	<p>Number of cases: 19,522 Number of deaths: 1,228</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PM Boris Johnson sent a letter to all UK households urging them to follow the social distancing rules. On 27 March the Government announced a new effort to introduce COVID-19 testing for frontline NHS staff following criticism of a lack of testing so far. Under sustained pressure to do more for the self-employed, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a package of measures on 27 March to provide financial assistance for this section of the workforce. Police have new powers to enforce the lockdown following the passing of the Coronavirus Act 2020. The UK parliament entered the Easter recess period almost a week earlier than planned. Both the House of Commons and the House of Lords are now in lockdown until 21 April. Schools in the UK have been shut until further notice, but they will remain open to look after the children of key workers such as healthcare professionals. Anticipating a fresh wave of cases, the government 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 12 weeks. The Armed Forces are supporting individuals to receive essential groceries who do not have a network of friends or family.
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I. EUROPEAN UNION

- On March 26, during the European Parliament plenary session, Commission President von der Leyen gave a speech characterising the current situation as the ‘fight of our lives’. Yet, more notably, she pointed at the lack of unity in how Member States reacted to the crisis and characterised this as an ‘only for me’ response.
- On 26 March, the European Commission [issued guidelines](#) to facilitate air cargo transport within the EU amid the coronavirus outbreak. The measures include inviting Member States to grant temporary traffic rights for additional cargo operations from outside the EU if restrictions would apply. Member States are also advised to temporarily remove restrictions at airports for essential air cargo operations, and to facilitate the use of passenger aircraft for cargo-only operations. Aircrew flying the aircraft should be exempted from travel restrictions if they do not show symptoms.
- In the past week, the Commission has taken 14 State aid decisions [based on the Temporary Framework](#) to approve 22 national measures that provide liquidity to European businesses. The Commission is now proposing to extend the Temporary Framework by adding additional support possibilities for five types of aid measures. The Commission aims to have the amended Temporary Framework in place next week:
 - Research and development

- Development of testing facilities
- Increased support for the production of medical products to combat COVID-19 (such as vaccines, personal protective equipment, disinfectants)
- Targeted financial support to avoid mass lay-offs in the form of tax suspensions
- Provision of wage subsidies for companies

Member States now have the possibility to comment on the Commission's draft proposal.

- The European Commission has proposed to make an additional EUR 75 million available for various measures to combat COVID-19, including an increased budget of the RescEU medical stockpile. This European Commission proposal will increase the total budget of the first ever RescEU stockpile of medical equipment (ventilators, protective masks and essential medical gear) to EUR 80 million.
- The European Commission put forward the Draft Amending Budget for 2020 to provide EUR 115 million to assist with the COVID-19 outbreak. EUR 3.6 million will be allocated for the ECDC to enhance the capacity to identify, assess and communicate threats to human health from communicable diseases, with special relevance given to the COVID-19 outbreak.
- The Commission published a guidance to assist manufacturers to increase production of essential medical equipment and material in three areas: the [production of masks and other personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#), [leave-on hand cleaners and hand disinfectants](#) and [3D printing](#) in the context of the coronavirus outbreak.
- The European Innovation Council received almost 4000 applications for the [EIC Accelerator Pilot Programme](#), which is more than double than the usual amount. Over 1000 start-ups and SMEs applied with innovations relating to preventing the impact and spread of the coronavirus. A total of EUR 164 million will be allocated among the selected companies to move forward with their proposals. Results will be announced later in May.
- On 27 March, the EMA, the European Commission and the Heads of Medicines Agencies updated the Guidance on the management of clinical trials during the COVID-19 pandemic which now includes safety reporting, the distribution of in-vitro diagnostics, medical devices and auditing. The updated guidance also incorporates changes on communicating with authorities, informed consent and the distribution of investigational medicines.

II. ITALY

- On 29 March¹, it was announced that the national lockdown will be probably extended until 18 April at least.
- In a press release on 28 March, PM Giuseppe Conte announced² a new decree which provides EUR 4.3 billion for the Municipalities Solidarity Fund. An ordinance of the Civil Protection will also designate EUR 400 million for food vouchers and an emergency food relief fund. Some have reported that citizens in the south are running out of food and money. Several countries have in recent days supported Italy with personal and medical equipment, including Albania that sent 30 doctors and nurses over the weekend.
- The Ministry of Health has updated the organizational guidelines³ of the hospital and territorial services in the context of the COVID-19 emergency. Among other, the document provides the following recommendations:
 - Provide masks and swabs to all medical personnel.
 - Identify of hospitals dedicated to Covid-19 only-
 - More attention (also in terms of availability of masks and swabs) to workers (also not-healthcare professionals) in nursing homes and particularly to vulnerable patients.
 - Sharing clinical protocols both at hospital and territorial level.
 - Increasing the number of beds for intensive care and the Covid-19 medical area.
 - Suspension of hospitalisation activities, with the exception of those which cannot be postponed, such as emergency admissions, elective oncological admissions and non-oncological elective admissions with priority class A".
 - More training of staff dedicated to the management of affected patients Covid-19

¹ Il Sole 24Ore, 30 March. Available at: <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/nuova-chiusura-e-poi-riapertura-tappe-ipotesi-campo-la-fine-lockdown-AD6a1sG>

² Press Conference, PM Giuseppe Conte, Minister of Economy Roberto Gualtieri and President of Anci Antonio Decaro. Available at: <http://www.governo.it/it/articolo/conferenza-stampa-del-presidente-conte/14389>

³ Guidelines on hospital and territorial services in the context of the COVID-19, 28 March. Available at: http://www.quotidianosanita.it/governo-e-parlamento/articolo.php?articolo_id=83238&fr=n

- On 28 March a new ordinance⁴ from the Minister of Infrastructure and Transport the Minister of Health provides that people arriving in the national territory by air, sea, rail or land transport must communicate the reasons for the trip and their address in Italy where they will be subject to health surveillance and isolation for a period of fourteen days.
- At the EU level, the Italian government has called for increased coordination between Member States to deal with the economic impact of COVID19. It has argued for issuing joint debt, so called Eurobonds, to cover some of the debt incurred because of the virus. So far, the German and Dutch governments have been reluctant to approve the use of Eurobonds. In a press conference on 29 April evening, the Prime Minister Conte warned that “if Europe does not rise to this unprecedented challenge”, European cooperation might lose its meaning and raison d’être for people.

III. FRANCE

- The French Parliament is closed during the confinement. It only reopened from 19 to 23 March with a very limited number of MPs to vote on extraordinary measures proposed by the government. Non-attending MPs were able to delegate their vote to those MPs that attended.
- The parliamentary joint committee voted through the national health emergency plan on 22 March, which is effective from 23 March for a period of two months. It is possible the government can reduce the implementation time by issuing a decree.
 - This plan enables the government to issue exceptional decrees during the pandemic. As a result, the government will be able to legislate on areas initially dedicated to the Parliament to deal with the virus. Every new measure announced by the government will be applied through decrees without being having the consent of Parliament.
 - The second ballot of the municipal elections is postponed to 21 June.
- Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced stricter measures in a speech on 23 March. After recording 91,824 offences to the confinement measures since the beginning of the quarantine. Leaving home is now limited to 1-hour every day, outdoor markets are banned and fines have been increased.
- The President announced new measures on 25 March including the launching of an army operation called “Resilience” to help the population facing the pandemic, a major investment plan to support the hospital was announced which will include an exceptional bonus for health professionals and career advancement, an increase in available tests.

⁴ Ordinance of the Minister of Transport and Minister of Health, 28 March. Available at: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/29/20A01921/sg>

- On 25 March, the Health Minister Olivier Véran called for voluntary health professionals, including retired ones, to help during the pandemic. So far 40,000 health professionals have already registered in the national health register in order to be called to help if necessary.
- The health coalition which was launched in response of COVID-19 on 25 March gathering pharmaceutical groups (including Sanofi, Novartis and GSK), French public hospitals (AP-HP) and public authorities (Leem), has now submitted its first call for innovative projects to address hospital capacity overloads and follow-up of chronic diseases. Projects can be sent until 24 April.
- Chloroquine, which is claimed to effectively treat COVID-19, is authorised in hospitals to help individuals with severe symptoms. The European clinical trial “Discovery” started on 22 March, involving 3,200 patients. Four molecules, including chloroquine, will be tested and the first results will be published from 5 April.
- French microbiologist Didier Raoult made chloroquine available from 22 March for individuals infected by the virus in the Marseille area, leading to objections from many health professionals who doubt its effectiveness. Didier Raoult has since left the government’s scientific council.
 - Mr. Raoult published a study on chloroquine on 28 March, which he claims confirms the efficiency of the treatment against Covid-19. The study concerns 80 infected people.
 - Many scientists objected this study, arguing that 80 people is not sufficient to make available a treatment across the territory.
 - The government stated during the press conference of 28 March that “no treatment proved efficiency in France and the World yet”.
 - Some cases of cardiac toxicity were recorded by health professionals on 29 March due to chloroquine treatment, which was taken without medical opinion by individuals who followed the study of Mr. Raoult.
- On 28 March, Prime Minister Edouard Philippe and Health Minister Olivier Véran conducted a press conference to explain the strategy concerning the pandemic. The principal announcements were:
 - The confinement measures are pursued until 15 April at least. The Prime Minister announced that “the fight is just starting”;
 - The Health Minister announced tripling the number of intensive care beds;
 - An order of 1 billion masks from China is planned to fill the need throughout the entirety of the pandemic, as 40 million masks are still lacking every week for frontline health workers;
 - 5 million rapid tests will be made available from April, to massively test individuals by the end of the quarantine;
 - Overseas territories will receive investments to increase the number of intensive care beds, and welcome more health professionals.

- Evacuation of infected people from overloaded hospitals to unscathed regions started on 26 March, by train, plain and helicopter. 250 people were concerned by these transfers since 26 March.
- On 30 March, Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer stated that the opening of schools is planned on 4 May, a date that appears compatible with the pandemic evolution.

IV. GERMANY

- To cope with the shortages of medical equipment and protective equipment, the German Federal Ministry of Health announced to accelerate the procurement of personal protective equipment. Since 27 March, this has been done in a so-called 'open house procedure' meaning that protective equipment is purchased at a fixed price.
- German Chancellor Angela Merkel has expressed her disapproval towards emerging discussions about relaxing precautionary measures and contact restrictions. Prior to that, Prime Minister of North-Rhine Westphalia, Armin Laschet, explained that it is time to develop benchmarks to ensure a smooth transition into the social and public life after lifting current restrictions.
- Head of the German public health institute Robert-Koch-Institut, Lothar Wieler, stated in a daily update that Germany is still at high risk to have more patients than respiratory equipment. Although in global comparison and compared to the total population, the number of deaths is relatively low, a "situation such as seen in Italy" cannot be ruled out.

V. SPAIN

- The Congress approved on 25 March [the extension of the state of emergency until 11 April](#), as was tabled by the government earlier this week. There have not been any significant changes in the content of the decree. Spain will therefore follow the same rules: freedom of movement limited to essential activities, educational, cultural and other leisure centres will remain closed, as well as bars and restaurants.
- On 27 March the Ministry of Health published a [legal order](#) establishing **special conditions for the dispensing and administration of medicines** within the National Health System in light of the situation caused by COVID-19. This order will apply until the end of the emergency state. The conditions are as follows:

Dispensing

- Hospital pharmacy services may not dispense hospital dispensing medications for more than 2 months of treatment. The Spanish Agency for Medicines and Health Products (AEMPS) may reduce this period to 1 month for some medications. For medications in clinical trials, a larger amount of medication is recommended to be dispensed covering a longer period of the treatment than usual.
- Exceptionally, the competent body in the field of pharmaceutical provision of the autonomous community may establish measures to guarantee the dispensing of medicines for hospital dispensing in other dependencies. In the same way, it can facilitate that patients who participate in a clinical trial receive the medication at home.

Administration

- Likewise, the competent body of the autonomous community may administer medicines for hospital use outside the hospital, provided that the conditions of the patient, the disease, the medicine or the epidemiological situation allow it.
- As the number of people infected with COVID-19 will soon reach 100,000, the Council of Ministers agreed on 29 March to put in place tighter containment measures. A [decree](#) setting up a “**recoverable paid leave**” for all non-essential workers who must stop their services as of 30 March until 9 April has been approved. Non-essential workers who are not able to provide their services remotely will be furloughed and therefore still receive their usual pay. Non-worked hours will be caught up throughout 2020. The government aims at minimising travels throughout the Easter period, starting in Spain on 5 April. Non-essential activities both in the public and the private sector are listed in the decree annex and include services considered necessary for the maintenance of basic social functions (health, security, social and economic wellbeing of citizens), and for the institutions of the state and its public administrations, such as the health sector, security forces, telecommunications and the power sector. This measure does not apply to employees able to perform their work remotely and for those whose job has been suspended.

VI. UNITED KINGDOM

- The Prime Minister Boris Johnson sent a letter to all UK households urging them to follow the social distancing rules in anticipation of a continued escalation of COVID-19 cases. In the letter he also said he will “not hesitate to go further” should the scientific evidence suggest so. The UK could remain in lockdown until early June according to Neil Ferguson of Imperial College London, and the UK’s Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Jenny Harries, warned over the weekend (28-29 March) that social distancing measures could be in place for at least six months or more.
- On 27 March the Government announced a new effort to introduce COVID-19 testing for frontline NHS staff following criticism of a lack of testing so far. These Government measures include three new hub laboratories to test people, with one entering operation over the weekend. The Government are also exploring partnerships with Amazon, Boots, Royal Mail, Thermo Fisher Scientific and Randox, alongside research institutes and UK universities in

order to drive this effort. Separately, on 29 March, it was announced that leading mental health charities will be given GBP 5 million to expand support services during this period, and NHS mental health providers are also establishing 24/7 helplines.

- Under sustained pressure to do more for the self-employed, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a package of measures on 27 March to provide financial assistance for this section of the workforce. A new Self-Employed Income Support Scheme will pay self-employed people who have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 crisis with a taxable grant worth 80% of their average monthly profits over the last three years, up to GBP 2500 a month. This is therefore the same amount of income support as was announced on 20 March for furloughed employees under the job retention scheme. The Chancellor said that when things return to “normal”, the self-employed may no longer receive the same tax benefits that they currently enjoy over the employed workforce.
- On 26 March, the UK Government revealed the new powers police will have to enforce the lockdown following the passing of the Coronavirus Act 2020. Police may now instruct members of the public to go home; ensure parents are taking necessary steps to stop their children breaking these rules; and issue a fixed penalty notice of GBP 60 and GBP 120 for repeat offenders. Around 1,500 additional police officers have already joined forces across England and Wales since September 2019 as a result of the police recruitment campaign. The government is also speaking to the Security Industry Authority about what more they can do to encourage the private security sector to support the national response.
- The UK parliament entered the Easter recess period almost a week earlier than planned. Both the House of Commons and the House of Lords are now in lockdown until Tuesday 21 April. However, a standing order passed by the House of Commons means select committees will continue to hold evidence sessions remotely.
- The UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced on Monday 23 March a major escalation of its measures – a “lockdown” – aimed at tackling the outbreak. Speaking in a direct televised statement to the nation, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced several legally enforceable measures, including a requirement to stay at home unless for very limited reasons; all gatherings of more than two people to end; and all non-essential shops and public places to close.
- Over the weekend of 22-23 March, the Government announced measures to protect – or “shield” – the UK’s 1.5 million most vulnerable from COVID-19. This group received a personal letter instructing them to quarantine themselves at home for a minimum of 12 weeks. Those within this group 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 is being supported by the Armed Forces.

- 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.