

COVID-19 – PUBLIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS

30 March – 2 April 2020

Summary

<p style="text-align: center;">The European Union</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">France</p> 
<p>Number of cases: 455,901 <i>(including the UK)</i> Number of deaths: 32,778</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On 2 April, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen gave a press conference where she mentioned that to date, the European Union, the European institutions and Member States, have mobilised EUR 2,770 billion which is the largest economic package to a European crisis ever given. On 2 April, the European Commission announced the launch of SURE. The new instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) is designed to help protect jobs and workers affected by the coronavirus pandemic. It will provide financial assistance, in the form of loans granted on favourable terms from the EU to Member States, of up to EUR 100 billion in total. On 31 March, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) announced that it held discussions with the developers of around 40 medicines and 12 vaccines, some of which are in Phase I trial. On 1 April, the EMA, advised patients and healthcare professionals to only use chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine medicines for their authorised indications or as part of clinical trials or national emergency 	<p>Number of cases: 56,989 Number of deaths: 4,032</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The France's daily death toll doubled in a week, with 509 deaths on 1 April compared to 240 seven days before. This number does not include the number of deaths outside the hospitals. The peak of the epidemy is expected for 4 April, according to Edouard Philippe. The parliamentary joint committee adopted the national health emergency plan on 22 March enabling the government to pass decrees to manage the crisis. French President Emmanuel Macron first announced strict confinement measures on 16 March. Confinement measures will be extended until 15 April at least, and the scientific council recommends confinement until 24 April. Transfer of infected people from overloaded hospitals to unscathed regions is continuing across the territory. 288 people have been transported since 26 March. Nine European frontline hospitals sent a common letter that was published on 1 April, calling for urgency measures looking at the



<p>use programmes for the treatment of COVID-19. This is to ensure patient safety and the best use of available supplies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen issued a statement on the value of democracy in the extraordinary times of the COVID-19 crisis. This statement was made after Hungary passed a controversial law that provides emergency powers to the government without an end date, although Hungary is not mentioned by name. • On 31 March, a high-level videoconference took place where EU leaders discussed the Roadmap and the Action Plan that the European Council and the Commission were tasked to complete. • On 31 March, the European Commission selected the 18th supported project under its specially designated Horizon2020 EUR 47.5 million fund. The newly selected project, called HG nCoV19 test and coordinated by an Irish company, will develop and validate a rapid molecular diagnostic test for the novel coronavirus. • On March 31, the European Commission published an implementing regulation on temporary measures to contain risks to human, animal and plant health and animal welfare during certain serious disruptions of Member States' control systems due to coronavirus disease (COVID-19). • On 31 March, the European Reference Networks Board of Member States adopted a statement declaring full support for the COVID-19 CMSS initiative, launched by the Commission, which aims to facilitate exchange of information between healthcare professionals on COVID-19. 	<p>upcoming shortage of essential medicine on intensive care such as morphine. They call for a solution coordinated at EU-level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emmanuel Macron announced on 31 March an exceptional EUR 4 billion donation to reach the objective of being totally independent regarding masks production before the end of the year. • The Prime Minister Edouard Philippe and the Health Minister Olivier Véran were questioned by the National Assembly on 1 April, about the impact, the management and the consequences of the crisis.
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<p style="text-align: center;">Germany</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">Italy</p> 
<p>Number of cases: 77,981 Number of deaths: 931</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On 1 April, Chancellor Merkel and the heads of the German Federal State decided to extend the period of precautionary measures until 19 April. Furthermore, Ms. Merkel called citizens to refrain from visits during the Easter holidays. A debate on how to withdraw from the current restrictive measures can be expected after the holidays. The German Bundeswehr is expected to support the medical and logistic sector with 15,000 soldiers. The German Hospital Federation expects the number of intensive care units to be increased to a total number of 40,000 beds of which 30,000 have respiratory equipment. Currently, approximately 15,000 to 20,000 are not occupied. According to a governmental estimation, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the German labour market will be greater than the consequences of the financial crisis in 2008. Despite financial reserves, the government does not expect to secure all jobs that are currently being lost. The Federal Ministry of Health launched a website on which certified nursing staff can signal their willingness to help to work in health care facilities. 	<p>Number of cases: 110,574 Number of deaths: 13,157</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On 1 April, the government decided to extend the country's lockdown until 13 April. Bank of Italy approved new donations equal to over EUR 34 million to hospitals to help combat the COVID-19 emergency. The Ministry of Health allocates EUR 7 million for research projects in relation to the COVID-19 emergency lasting 12 months, using funds for current Scientific Hospitalization and Care Institute (IRCCS) research for the financial years 2020 and 2021 The donation of blood is still allowed and encouraged amid the nationwide lockdown. On 27 March, the National Center Blood announced that a clinical protocol to treat Covid-19 patients with hyperimmune plasma from cured patients have been launched.
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<p style="text-align: center;">Spain</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">The United Kingdom</p> 
<p>Number of cases: 110,238 Number of deaths: 10,003</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On 1 April, the Minister for Transport José Luis Ábalos announced that the government has not decided yet whether the state of emergency will be extended for a second time. In any case, the termination of containment measures will be gradually implemented. As part of the economic contingency plan, the Council of Ministers approved a third package of socioeconomic measures for individuals and companies suffering the most from the coronavirus crisis. The decree containing such measures needs the approval of the Congress. The opposition has however preliminarily indicated its objection to the decree. The Council of Ministers also announced the distribution of EUR 300 million to the regions to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. 	<p>Number of cases: 29,857 Number of deaths: 2,357</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boris Johnson has vowed to increase testing to “unlock the coronavirus puzzle” after a major backlash over the low test numbers. Various NHS trusts, media outlets and hospitals have criticised the current government strategy. On 1 April the UK saw its highest rise in deaths, with 563 patients passing away in 24 hours. Business Secretary Alok Sharma stated the UK is continuing to ramp up NHS capacity with university engineers working with Mercedes Formula One to build new ventilators which are set to enter mass production. On 29 March the Deputy Chief Medical Officer announced that it could be six months before life in the UK returns to "normal". On 28 March the Foreign Secretary announced a GBP 75 million deal with British airlines to help British nationals who were stuck around the world. Both the House of Commons and the House of Lords are now in lockdown until Tuesday 21 April. The cabinet are continuing to meet electronically via webcam, allowing ministers to discuss the latest updates on the outbreak while observing official advice to work from home whenever possible.
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I. EUROPEAN UNION

- On 2 April, the European Commission announced the launch of SURE. The new instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) is designed to help protect jobs and workers affected by the coronavirus pandemic. It will provide financial assistance, in the form of loans granted on favourable terms from the EU to Member States, of up to EUR 100 billion in total.
- On 31 March, the European Medicines Agency announced that it held discussions with the developers of around 40 medicines and 12 vaccines. However, no potential COVID-19 treatments had demonstrated efficacy based on the preliminary data available. Two vaccines had already entered phase I clinical trials. EMA estimates that it might take at least a year before a vaccine is ready for approval and available in sufficient quantities to enable widespread use.
- On 1 April, the European Medicines Agency, advised patients and healthcare professionals to only use chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine medicines for their authorised indications or as part of clinical trials or national emergency use programmes for the treatment of COVID-19. This is to ensure patient safety and the best use of available supplies. It calls on healthcare professionals that chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine should preferably be used in the context of clinical trials. Outside clinical trials, they can be used in accordance with established national protocols.

- Chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine should continue to be used in chronic conditions. In order to prevent unnecessary strain on supply chains, patients should only receive their usual supply of medicines. Healthcare professionals should not write prescriptions that cover more than the usual duration.
- President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen issued a statement on the value of democracy in the extraordinary times of the COVID-19 crisis. This statement was made after Hungary passed a controversial law that provides emergency powers to the government without an end date, although Hungary is not mentioned by name. Following the Hungarian government's move, several high level political figures, including EPP President Donald Tusk, condemned the move and called for EPP to expel Mr. Orban's Fidesz party.
- On 31 March, a high-level videoconference took place between Council President Charles Michel, Commission President von der Leyen, President of the European Central Bank Christine Lagarde and President of the Eurogroup Mario Centeno. The leaders discussed the Roadmap and the Action Plan that the European Council and the Commission were tasked to complete.
- On 31 March, the European Commission selected the 18th supported project under its specially designated Horizon2020 EUR 47.5 million fund. The newly selected project, called HG nCoV19 test and coordinated by an Irish company, will develop and validate a rapid molecular diagnostic test for the novel coronavirus.
- On 31 March, the European Reference Networks Board of Member States adopted a statement declaring full support for the COVID-19 CMSS initiative, launched by the Commission, which aims to facilitate exchange of information between healthcare professionals on COVID-19. The COVID-19 CMSS Web Conferencing system is aiming to allow clinicians to communicate easily with any other colleagues across the EU and EEA to exchange knowledge and to discuss cases. The System consists of a database of treating clinicians (the COVID19 Clinicians Network), a central helpdesk, a WebEx communication tool and a simple and easy procedure for Web conferences and Webinars following the request of any of the hospitals identified as reference centres across the EU. The establishment of the system, with start of operations on the 23 March 2020, has been communicated to the competent National authorities represented in the Health Security Committee of the EU.

II. ITALY

- On 1 April, the Italian government issued a new decree¹ to extend the country's lockdown until 13 April. The Italian Minister for Health Roberto Speranza said that despite the first positive signs the “battle is still very long”, adding that the “data shows we are on the right path” and that the measures are bearing fruit.
- After an initial allocation of EUR 20.9 million, the Bank of Italy² (the central bank of Italy) on 31 March approved new donations equal to over EUR 34 million to hospitals to help combat the COVID-19 emergency.
- On 1 April, the Ministry of Health announced that they will allocate EUR 7 million³ for research projects in relation to the COVID-19 emergency lasting 12 months, using funds currently allocated for the research of the Scientific Hospitalization and Care Institute (IRCCS) until 2021. Since these funds are related to current research, the lead institutional recipient of the aforementioned funding must be part of the IRCCS.
- On 27 March, the National Center Blood announced that a clinical protocol to treat Covid-19 patients with hyperimmune plasma from cured patients have been launched⁴. The study is being carried out by the team of Dr. Cesare Perotti, head of Immunohaematology and Transfusion Medicine at the San Matteo University Hospital in Pavia.
- The Italian businesses organisation Confindustria released a report⁵ saying that the loss of GDP in the first half of 2020 could be up to 10%, resulting in a GDP contraction of -6%, should the health crisis conclude in May.
- At the European level, the Italian Prime Minister Conte has been arguing in favour of important economic measures – such as mutualising the debt incurred by EU countries with so-called corona-bonds. Conte has underlined that important measures have been put in place in the US and China, and that if Europe is not able to react forcefully it may very well become less competitive on the global stage after the crisis. In trying to convince his European partners, Conte has multiplied his media interventions in the last days, including in the German media, stating that “we are writing history, not an economics textbook”.

¹ Decree of the President of the Council, 1 April. Available at: http://www.governo.it/sites/new.governo.it/files/documenti/documenti/Notizie-allegati/covid-19/DPCM_20200401.pdf

² Press release, Bankitalia, 31 March. Available at: https://www.bancaditalia.it/media/comunicati/documenti/2020-01/cs_55_milioni_per_emergenza_coronavirus.pdf

³ Press release, Ministry of Health, 1 April. Available at:

<http://www.salute.gov.it/portale/nuovocoronavirus/dettaglioNotizieNuovoCoronavirus.jsp?lingua=italiano&menu=notizie&p=dalministro&id=4373>

⁴ Press release, National Blood Center, 27 March. Available at: <https://www.centronazionalesangue.it/node/844>

⁵ Confindustria report, 31 March. Available at: <https://www.confindustria.it/home/centro-studi/temi-di-ricerca/congiuntura-e-previsioni/tutti/dettaglio/rapporto-previsione-economia-italiana-scenari-geoeconomici-primavera-2020>

III. FRANCE

- 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. This plan enables the government to rule by decree 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.
- So far more than 350,000 offences have been recorded in violation of 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 once again increased.
- 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.
- Chloroquine, which is claimed to effectively treat COVID-19 suffers from a big scandal about its efficiency. The French microbiologist Didier Raoult is leading the pro-chloroquine part of the debate. He personally made chloroquine available from 22 March for every individual infected by the virus in the Marseille area, leading to objections from many health professionals who doubt its effectiveness. Mr. Raoult is increasingly calling for a massive availability of this medicine across the country.
 - The government stated during the press conference of 28 March that “no treatment proved efficiency in France and the World yet” but since then authorized the use of chloroquine for severe cases in hospital only.
 - Some cases of cardiac toxicity were recorded by health professionals due to chloroquine treatment. So far a total of 3 deaths were recorded to the French medicine Agency (ANSM), following undesirable side effects of this medicine.
 - The Angers Hospital announced on 31 March that they are launching a large study on chloroquine involving 1,300 patients, to definitively resolve the issue concerning the efficiency of this treatment against COVID-19.
- So far 288 coronavirus patients have been transported from overloaded hospitals to unscathed regions since the start of the initiative on 26 March.
- Nine European frontline hospitals published a joint open letter on 1 April, calling for urgent measures looking at the upcoming shortage of essential medicine on intensive care such as morphine. Without any coordinated effort at the EU level, these hospitals warn that shortages will be experienced in less than two weeks.
- Emmanuel Macron announced on 31 March an exceptional EUR 4 billion donation to reach the objective of being completely independent regarding masks production before the end of the year.
 - Currently 40 million masks are missing every week for frontline health workers, due to delays in the supply of Chinese masks.

- This shortage has been highly criticized by political opponents and citizens, and the government was accused of lacking its responsibility to protect its citizens.
- As a result, the government ordered 1 billion masks to China for the whole pandemic and announced the launching of a French masks production plan.
- The Prime Minister Edouard Philippe and the Health Minister Olivier Véran were questioned by the National Assembly on 1 April over the government's handling of the crisis. This represents the first step of a parliamentary inquiry launched after the increase of criticism over the government's crisis management efforts.
- The Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer will make a decision about the French baccalaureate before the end of this week. The high school baccalaureate tests are planned to take place on 17 June.
- The Prime Minister, Edouard Philippe, will speak on the evening of 2 April to address the strategy used by the government to fight the pandemic. New measures are expected to be announced.

IV. GERMANY

- On 1 April, Chancellor Merkel and the heads of the German Federal State decided to extend the period of precautionary measures until 19 April. Furthermore, Ms. Merkel called citizens to refrain from visits during the Easter holidays. A debate on how to withdraw from the current restrictive measures can be expected after the holidays.
- The German Bundeswehr is expected to support the medical and logistic sector with 15,000 soldiers.
- The German Hospital Federation expects the number of intensive care units to be increased to a total number of 40,000 beds of which 30,000 have respiratory equipment. Currently, approximately 15,000 to 20,000 beds are not occupied.
- In a press conference on 31 March, Federal Minister of Labour Hubertus Heil and the Chairman of the Federal Employment Agency Detlef Scheele made an initial assessment of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the German labour market. They elaborated the increase of short-time working as the Federal Agency of Employment received 470,000 applications. Minister Hubertus Heil promised to secure as many jobs as possible. Nevertheless, he emphasised that the COVID-19 pandemic would have greater consequences than the financial crisis in 2008. Although the Federal Ministry of Labour as well as the Federal Agency of Employment have financial reserves, Hubertus Heil explained that it is unlikely to secure all jobs currently being lost.
- Due to the closing of borders to its Eastern neighbouring countries, the German agricultural sector lacks personnel, especially harvest workers and personnel in slaughterhouses. Thus, Federal Minister of Agriculture, Julia Klöckner, announced the launch of a job placement platform for jobs in the

agricultural sector. Additionally, the limit of tax-free allowances for students was increased to provide incentives to take up an activity as a harvest worker.

- The Federal Ministry of Health launched a website on which certified nursing staff can signal their willingness to help to work in health care facilities. For this purpose, the Ministry cooperates with various public health actors such as the German Nursing Council. Additionally, another platform was introduced called "Deutschland zusammen" (Germany together) that aims to bring together citizens that are willing to support people in need for help with daily-life tasks such as grocery shopping, walking with pets or courier services.

V. SPAIN

- A legal order completing the information provided in last week's decree setting up a recoverable paid leave for non-essential workers was published on 1 April. The order includes a numerus clausus list of healthcare centres, services and establishments considered to be essential and therefore excluded from the abovementioned decree. The list can be found in the Annex.
- Another decree was approved by the Council of Ministers for a 3rd package of over 50 economic and social measures within the COVID19 contingency plan aimed at tenants, household assistants and self-employed workers, amongst others. The decree will have to seek approval of other political forces in the Spanish Congress. The measures are as follows:
 - Support to workers, families, consumers, self-employed workers and vulnerable individuals to mitigate economic loss and reduce their fixed costs to ensure a minimum income. The proposal includes a moratorium period for economically vulnerable tenants, suspension of evictions for the next 6 months, mortgage moratorium for 3 months, support to basic supplies in households such as a prohibition to companies to cut off electric, gas and water supplies, and a deferral of social security payments for self-employed workers and for small to medium-sized businesses who have seen their income significantly reduced due to the coronavirus crisis;
 - Support production output and employment stimulus to allow a better economic recovery;
 - Some of the measures included in the state of emergency decree have been reinforced and extended an additional month after the end of the state of emergency.
- As part of the economic package, the Council of Ministers approved the distribution of EUR 300 million to the regions to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. The amount allocation takes account several criteria such as the population (80%), the number of infected cases (15%) and the number of patients in Intensive Care Units (5%). Catalonia, Madrid and Andalusia are the autonomous communities receiving the greatest amount according to the distribution.

- As a reminder, in addition to the economic package, several additional measures have been taken to strengthen the regional healthcare systems. There are currently over 50,000 additional health professionals available for the regions to request: resident doctors, nurses, retired health workers, foreign doctors and last year medical and nursing students. Overall, regions have received over 10.7 million face masks and 9.7 million medical gloves amongst other medical equipment. As the demand increases for mechanical ventilators and ICUs are running out, the Spanish Agency for Medicines and Health Products (AEMPS) published a document informing about security tests and clinical research criteria for ventilators' models. The Agency informed 6 projects are in an advanced state to eventually be used under the set standards.

VI. UNITED KINGDOM

- Boris Johnson has vowed to increase testing to “unlock the coronavirus puzzle” after a major backlash over the low test numbers. Various NHS trusts, media outlets and hospitals have criticised the current government strategy and are also calling for an increase in production of protective gear for frontline workers.
- On 1 April the UK saw its highest rise in deaths, with 563 patients passing away in 24 hours. Pressure continues to be placed on government to increase testing, particularly for NHS frontline workers. Currently only around 2,000 NHS staff have been tested and 1 in 4 are off work with suspected symptoms. Amid criticism of the UK's low testing numbers, No 10 said a “clear instruction” has been issued to hospitals to test as many staff as possible, with trusts allowed to decide how to split tests between workers and patients. Downing Street said the coronavirus daily testing capacity stands at 12,750 – but only 8,630 tests were carried out on Monday.
- On 31 March it was revealed that Whitehall have officially taken charge of all testing in the UK. This comes after it emerged the NHS in England and Wales were competing over testing with other providers. In Wales, the devolved government's health minister Vaughan Gething declared he was "very disappointed" with a manufacturer which had been due to supply up to 5,000 tests a day in Wales.
- Business Secretary Alok Sharma stated the UK is continuing to ramp up NHS capacity with university engineers working with Mercedes Formula One to build new ventilators which are set to enter mass production. He noted broadband providers are now giving customers unlimited data and London's new temporary Nightingale Hospital in the Excel Centre has space for 4,000 patients. He also announced that businesses will start to receive and benefit from the GBP 22 billion business rates relief scheme. Grants of up to GBP 25,000 are to be paid into the bank accounts of the smallest high street firms.
- On the 31 March new data revealed the UK's true coronavirus death toll could be 20% higher than official figures have shown, according to the Office for National Statistics. Official statistics only take into account those who have died from Covid-19 while in hospital but the ONS figures – which will now

be released weekly – include all deaths where coronavirus is listed anywhere on the death certificate, including in combination with other health conditions. This means they take into account those who may have died at home or in the wider community, such as at care homes.

- On 29 March the Deputy Chief Medical Officer announced that it could be six months before life in the UK returns to "normal". Whilst she stated that this may not mean complete lockdown for this length of time, Dr Jenny Davies emphasised that social distancing measures will be reduced at a gradual rate.
- On 28 March Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab led the public COBRA announcement, addressing the issue of the British nationals who are currently stranded abroad. He announced a GBP 75 million deal with British airlines to help those still stuck around the world. Warning that the crisis represented the "greatest global challenge in a generation". The Foreign Secretary said that a further 13,500 people had been brought back from Cyprus and Morocco in recent weeks. A number of repatriation flights organised by the Government in recent days have also taken off from Peru and Ghana, bringing home 1,400 people.
- 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 cabinet are continuing to meet electronically via webcam, allowing ministers to discuss the latest updates on the outbreak while observing official advice to work from home whenever possible. Virtual meetings will continue especially as Boris Johnson, health secretary Matt Hancock and Scotland secretary Alister Jack have tested positive for the virus.