

COVID-19 – PUBLIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS

6 April – 9 April 2020

Summary

<p>The European Union</p> 	<p>France</p> 
<p>Number of cases: 665,778 (including the UK) Number of deaths: 59,508</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tensions are running high among European authorities. Mauro Ferrari, president of the European Research Council (ERC), was asked to resign on 2 April due to disappointment in the European union’s response to the coronavirus crisis. European bodies state that Mr. Ferrari had misunderstood the ERC’s mission. • The European Parliament facilities in Strasbourg were offered to French authorities to become a COVID-19 testing and consultation centre in what is a symbol of the EU’s solidarity. • The EMA and Health Canada held a global regulatory workshop under the International Coalition of Medicines Regulatory Authorities (ICMRA) to discuss data generation during treatment of COVID-19. Simultaneously, the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) have introduced a fast-track procedure for the application of co-creation funding specifically designated to COVID-19 activities. • On 8 April the European Commission has published Commission Recommendations on a common Union toolbox for using technology and data to combat and exit from the COVID-19 crisis. 	<p>Number of cases: 112,950 Number of deaths: 10,869 (including retirement homes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Covid-19 pandemic seem to be subsiding in France, as the number of cases have been constantly decreasing since 5 April. 348 new patients were admitted to hospitals on 9 April, compared to 771 on 1 April. • The government announced on 8 April that confinement measures will be extended after 15 April. French President Emmanuel Macron will speak on 13 April to fix the end-date. • Health Minister Olivier Véran announced on 9 April that the government was developing a tracking app to help eradicating the virus at the end of the confinement measures. • Minister of Labour Muriel Pénicaud announced on 9 April that 6,9 million employees were concerned by the partial unemployment plan, which represents 620,000 companies. • The French GDP will decreased by 6% in the first three months of the year 2020, according to the forecast of the Banque de France (central bank of France).



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On 8 April the Commission published Guidelines on the optimal and rational supply of medicines to avoid shortages. On the same day it published a Temporary Framework Communication for assessing antitrust issues related to business cooperation in response to situations of urgency stemming from the current COVID-19 outbreak. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new clinical trial started on 7 April in the Paris Hospitals (AP-HP), with the sampling of hundreds of doses of plasma from recovered patients, in order to develop a vaccine.
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<p>Germany</p> 	<p>Italy</p> 
<p>Number of cases: 111,296 Number of deaths: 2,349</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The German Institute for Vaccines and Biomedical pharmaceuticals, the Paul-Ehrlich Institute, approved the first clinical trial on COVID-19 treatments that is executed with convalescent plasma. On 9 April, Federal Minister of Health, Jens Spahn, explained in an interview that with respect to the positive development of decreasing COVID-19 infections rates in Germany, discussions between the Federal Government and the State governments on a strategy to abolish current precautionary measures are likely to be expected after the Easter holidays. On 7 April, the Robert-Koch-Institute launched a corona-data-donation-app that collects the data of so-called wearables such as smart watches to collect information that may indicate symptoms of a Covid-19 infection while reducing and understanding the spread of the virus. 	<p>Number of cases: 139,422 Number of deaths: 17,669</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since last week, Italy has seen a slow drop in the number of deaths. The lockdown will last until at least 13 April. The Italian Government hopes to start gradually lifting the lockdown measures after Easter. On 6 April, the Italian government presented a new economic programme of EUR 400 billion to better face the several difficulties the country is experiencing because of COVID19. The economic programme includes a list of measures focusing on businesses A previous decree by the Italian government named “Cura Italia” (Heal Italy) passed on 17 March focused on supporting workers, families, schools and the health system – representing another investment of EUR 350 billion.
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<p style="text-align: center;">Spain</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;">The United Kingdom</p> 
<p>Number of cases: 152,446 Number of deaths: 15,283</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to the Health Ministry, Spain is now starting a stabilisation phase since contagion is slowing down and intensive care units feel less burdened. The government is now focusing on measures to be taken during the transition period which might start after the second extension of the state of emergency, until 26 April. The Ministry of Health is moving forward with its diagnostic strategy to use antibody tests in a sample of 62,400 individuals for three weeks to determine the degree of spread of the virus. 	<p>Number of cases: 60,773 Number of deaths: 7,097</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boris Johnson has spent his third night in intensive care in what is thought to be a serious but stable condition, having now been ill with COVID-19 for a fortnight. First Secretary of State Dominic Raab is deputising for Johnson and will today (9 April) chair his first COBRA meeting for national emergencies on how long the lockdown measures will persist. Welsh First Minister Mark Drakeford has said measures in Wales will not be lifted, while Scotland's interim chief medical officer has said it will be some time before measures are lifted in Scotland. Health Secretary Matt Hancock has unveiled a 'five-pillar' plan to decentralise testing and develop a 'huge diagnostic industry'. Universities, research institutes and private companies will supplement the Government's efforts to reach 100,000 daily tests in England by the end of April; this week tests have numbered just below 15,000 a day. The world's largest randomised control trial of potential COVID-19 treatments is now underway in the UK. Around 1,000 patients from 132 hospitals have been recruited to definitively test the efficacy of treatments including lopinavir-ritonavir, commonly used to treat HIV; dexamethasone, primarily used to reduce inflammation; and hydroxychloroquine, a malaria treatment. Both the House of Commons and the House of Lords remain in lockdown until Tuesday 21 April.
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I. EUROPEAN UNION

- Mauro Ferrari, who became president of the European Research Council (ERC) on 1 January 2020, has resigned on 2 April due to disappointment in the European union’s response to the coronavirus crisis. He quoted institutional and political obstacles, particularly the unanimous rejection of his proposal for a special programme to combat the coronavirus under ERC. This resignation and criticism may add to the pressure on the EU, as its response to the pandemic has been under fire. Nonetheless, European bodies as well as other stakeholders counter Mr. Ferrari’s claims by stating that he had misunderstood the ERC’s mission, clearly stated to be of a “bottom-up” nature, rather than “top-down”, as his programme proposed.
- The European Parliament in Strasbourg facilities were offered to French authorities to become a COVID-19 testing and consultation center. This decision is mainly symbolic of European assistance to its Member States. No date has yet been announced for when this will in fact happen.
- The EMA and Health Canada jointly held a global regulatory workshop on Monday 6 April under the International Coalition of Medicines Regulatory Authorities (ICMRA). This discussed data generation during treatment of COVID-19 to complement evidence for clinical trials. The report can be accessed [here](#).

- The EMA has announced on 7 April that it has put [measures](#) in place to ensure that COVID-19 pandemic will continue to be tackled during the Easter Holidays. Measures ensure that essential work continues during the public holidays, as well as a phone number for emergencies.
- The European Open Science Cloud ([EOSC](#)) have introduced a fast-track procedure for the application of co-creation [funding](#) specifically designated to COVID-19 activities that use EOSC communities and deploy open science methods and resources. This follows a [statement](#) by the Wellcome Trust on Data Sharing in Public Health Emergencies that agrees to make research findings publicly available during the outbreak.
- Digital tools are becoming a key player in the fight against COVID-19. On 8 April the European Commission has [published Commission Recommendations](#) on a common Union toolbox for the use of technology and data to combat and exit from the COVID-19 crisis, in particular concerning mobile applications and the use of anonymised mobility data. This was accompanied by a [press release](#). Member States are recommended to work with the Commission and the European Data Protection Board to develop a toolbox towards a pan-European approach for mobile applications by 15 April 2020.
- On 8 April the Commission called on Member States to ensure the coronavirus outbreak does not impact access to essential medicines. [Guidelines](#) on the optimal and rational supply of medicines to avoid shortages during the COVID-19 outbreak were published on the same day, as well as an accompanying [press release](#).
- In a similar effort to avoid shortages of critical hospital medicines, on 8 April the European Commission [published](#) a [Temporary Framework Communication](#) for assessing antitrust issues related to business cooperation in response to situations of urgency stemming from the current COVID-19 outbreak. This is targeted at companies cooperating in response to the pandemic.
- On 8 April, Member States were [invited](#) by the Commission to prolong the restriction of non-essential travel until 15 May, due to evidence that measures require more than 30 days to prove effective.

II. ITALY

- On 6 April, the Italian government adopted a new [decree - law](#) (in force as of 9 April) to support the economy and businesses – the so-called “Decreto Liquidità” (Liquidity decree). The decree includes a EUR 400 billion liquidity plan targeted towards small, medium and larger businesses. It establishes a guarantee from the government to provide loans to businesses employing up to 499 workers: covering 90-100% of the debt incurred. For larger firms a special fund will be set-up, covering loans up to 90%, 80%, or 70%, depending on the firm’s size and revenues.
- The decree allocates EUR 200 billion towards direct liquidity for businesses and another EUR 200 billion to guarantee investments to support trade exports. The Economy Minister Gualtieri underlined that businesses benefiting from the state guaranteed loans will not be allowed to distribute dividends to shareholders. It also enlarges the so-called “golden power” of the government, meaning the power to screen investments and shield Italian companies from foreign buyers that could seek to benefit from their current low value. The government’s prerogative in this respect would be enlarged to additional areas considered to be strategic: health, communications, banking, insurance and food production (previously already including security, energy and transport). The decree also foresees the suspension or delay of several taxes for the next months, including on labour. Businesses will also receive a 50% tax credit for medical products such as masks, gloves, and other medical equipment, as well as for sanitation expenditures such as cleaning services.
- A previous decree by the Italian government named “Cura Italia” (Heal Italy) on March 17 focused on supporting workers, families, schools and the health system – representing another investment of EUR 350 billion. Together these two programmes are an “unprecedented economic intervention” by the Italian government – stated by the Economy Minister Gualtieri.

III. FRANCE

- The government announced on 8 April that confinement measures will be extended after 15 April. French President Emmanuel Macron will speak on 13 April as to the end-date, and also to touch upon the issue of masks and tests.
 - Before Monday’s announcement, the President will hold a series of consultations with health professionals, economists.
 - The aim of this allocution will be to fix a precise date to end the confinement, and not only extend it for two more weeks.
- The Covid-19 pandemic seems to be subsiding in France, as the number of cases has been decreasing since 5 April. 348 new patients were admitted to hospitals on 9 April, compared to 771 on 1 April.

- The Minister of Internal Affairs announced on 5 April that tracking systems may be used at the end of the quarantine to help contain the virus and avoid new infections.
 - The Health Minister Olivier Véran announced on 9 April that the government was developing a tracking app to help eradicating the virus at the end of the confinement measures.
 - Called StopCovid, this app would inform a given individual if he has been in contact with an infected other individual, without giving his/her identity, in order to enable the individual to be tested, and quarantined if necessary. The data will be collected by Bluetooth tracking technology.
- The Minister of Labour, Muriel Pénicaud, announced on 9 April that 6,9 million employees were concerned by the partial unemployment plan, which will affect 620,000 companies.
 - The partial unemployment plan enables a given company to reduce its activities, or even stop it during a given time period. This plan was created to avoid massive dismissals. The employees will be paid by the government (70% of their normal salary) during the time of the plan.
- The French GDP is forecasted to decrease by 6% in Q1 2020, according to Banque de France (central bank of France).
 - Considering the fact that the GDP decreased by 0,1% at the end of the year 2019, France is officially in economic recession.
 - The global economic activity decreased by 32% in the first two weeks of March. This decrease is considerably higher than during the global financial crisis of 2008.
- A new clinical trial started on 7 April in the Paris Hospitals (AP-HP), with the sampling of hundreds of doses of plasma from recovered patients, in order to develop a vaccine. The first results will be published in two to three weeks.

IV. GERMANY

- The German Institute for Vaccines and Biomedical pharmaceuticals, the Paul-Ehrlich Institute, [approved the first clinical trial on COVID-19 treatments](#) that is executed with convalescent plasma. The overall aim is to investigate the efficacy and safety of COVID-19 convalescent plasma in the treatment of severe COVID-19 diseases. With respect to the development of a treatment of severe COVID-19 cases, the approved clinical trial CAPSID (a randomised, prospective, open-label clinical trial) that is compared to the best supportive care for treatment of patients with severe COVID-19, shall confirm the first indications of the benefits of convalescent plasma treatment. The respective treatment is a passive immunisation during which patients with severe COVID-19 are treated with blood plasma of recovered COVID-19 patients that contains antibodies against COVID-19. Consequently, several German clinics such as the University Hospital Erlangen called for convalescent plasma donations. The Paul Ehrlich Institute moreover announced to

support the pharmaceutical industry with scientific advice on regulatory requirements of clinical trials with convalescent plasma. This shall be particularly done to ensure the smooth implementation of a goal-oriented development strategy as well as efficient authorisation procedures for clinical trials. Prior to the approval of the clinical trial performed with convalescent plasma, head of the German Robert-Koch Institute, Lothar Wieler, characterised the treatment with COVID-19 antibodies as one of the most worthwhile and promising therapeutic approaches to save the lives of people affected with severe COVID-19.

- On 9 April, Federal Minister of Health, Jens Spahn, explained in an interview that with respect to the positive development of decreasing COVID-19 infections rates in Germany, discussions between the Federal Government and the State governments on a strategy to abolish current precautionary measures are likely to be expected after the Easter holidays. Prior to that, Angela Merkel did not want to comment on a date for an end of the lockdown in Germany. Currently the 19 April is the earliest date to start presenting step-by-step measures.
- On 7 April, the Robert-Koch-Institute, the central institution of the government in disease monitoring and prevention, launched a corona-data-donation-app that collects the data of so-called wearables such as smart watches to collect information that may indicate symptoms of a Covid-19 infection while reducing and understanding the spread of the virus.
- On April 6, Chancellor Angela Merkel reported on the decisions of the so-called Corona Cabinet and on the cooperation within the Eurogroup. The Cabinet decided that the production of masks and personal protective equipment in Germany and Europe must be promoted. Additionally, Merkel stressed that Covid-19 is the EU's biggest challenge since its foundation.

V. SPAIN

- The Minister for Consumer Affairs stated on 7 April that the government will soon control prices for personal protective equipment in Spain. The Ministry is working on a list of reference prices to stop companies from speculating. During his intervention Alberto Garzón informed the government has not make any decision yet on the general and compulsory use of masks due to their scarcity. On another note, he praised the consensus within the government to try and set a universal minimum income to face the negative impacts of COVID-19 on families and vulnerable communities.
- During the [plenary sitting](#) in the Spanish Congress on 9 April a second extension of the state of emergency (Decree 463/2020) was discussed. Spain will remain under a state of emergency until 26 April under the same lockdown conditions. The three main decrees setting up the extraordinary legislative measures taken in light of the coronavirus crisis are also to be extended if the opposition votes in favour. As a reminder, the [decrees](#) tackle economic and social (Decree 11/2020) and labour-related (Decree 9/2020, Decree 10/2020) measures.

VI. UNITED KINGDOM

- Prime Minister Boris Johnson has spent his third night in intensive care in what is thought to be a serious but stable condition, having now been ill with COVID-19 for a fortnight.
- First Secretary of State Dominic Raab is deputising in Johnson's stead, and will this morning (9 April) chair his first COBRA meeting for national emergencies with the devolved governments on how long the lockdown will persist. Welsh First Minister Mark Drakeford has already indicated the lockdown in Wales will not be lifted next week, Scotland's Chief Medical Officer has said it will be 'some time yet' before the lockdown is eased, and there is little prospect of restrictions ending in England next week as police constables call for more stringent measures this bank holiday weekend.
- The Government is launching a 'Stay at Home This Easter' campaign amid growing concerns among ministers that a significant minority of the population will flout restrictions over the coming bank holiday weekend. Any restriction-easing while thousands are still infected will raise infection rates, and a recent Lancet paper has indicated that some social distancing measures will need to be in place until a vaccine is produced.
- There have been some glimpses of limited lockdown easing – a recent study has shown school closure has only had a small effect on infection rates and that their reopening could be the first step out of lockdown, while talk of COVID-19 'immunity passports' has given way to suggestions that younger age groupings will be the first to see restrictions lifted.
- Fresh from self-isolation, Health Secretary Matt Hancock cajoled Britons with calls for a new 'National Effort' as part of his new 'five-pillar' testing plan to accelerate Britain's departure from lockdown. Universities, institutes and private companies will supplement the NHS and Public Health England's efforts to develop a 'huge diagnostic industry'. The decentralised testing model is intended to test 100,000 people per day by the end of April; 14,682 tests were carried out on 7 April, up from fewer than 10,000 a day last week.
- The Government and private institutions are collaborating further to spearhead treatment testing, the Government launching the world's largest randomised control trial of potential COVID-19 treatments. Around 1,000 patients from 132 hospitals have been recruited to definitively test the efficacy and safety of treatments including lopinavir-ritonavir, commonly used to treat HIV; dexamethasone, used to reduce inflammation; and hydroxychloroquine, a malaria treatment.
- The UK parliament entered the Easter recess period almost a week earlier than planned. Both the House of Commons and the House of Lords remain in lockdown until 21 April.