

# COVID-19 – PUBLIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS

23 – 26 March 2020

## Summary

<p>The European Union</p> 	<p>France</p> 
<p><b>Number of cases:</b> 232,470 <b>Number of deaths:</b> 13,692</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On 24 March, the European Commission adopted decisions aimed at ensuring harmonised standards for medical devices in response to the COVID-19 crisis.</li> <li>Since 23 March, the European Commission approved additional state aids in Latvia, Denmark, Spain, France, UK, Germany, Luxembourg, and Italy based on the Temporary Framework for State Aid measures to combat COVID-19.</li> <li>The European Commission reported on 24 March that the joint procurement for personal protective equipment has proved successful with bids arriving from companies on face masks, gloves, face shields and overalls.</li> <li>The European Commission discussed the European agriculture sector’s situation amid the Coronavirus crisis with EU agricultural ministers on 25 March.</li> <li>On 25 March, the European Commission <a href="#">issued guidelines</a> to protect European technological assets, effectively introducing a restriction on the free flow of capital within the EU.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Number of cases:</b> 25,233 <b>Number of deaths:</b> 1,331</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>French President Emmanuel Macron announced strict confinement measures for 15 days on 16 March, with the closing of schools, universities, and non-essential shops. Confinement rules were then strengthened on 23 March after it became clear many were not adhering to the regulations and there were several recorded offences by the police.</li> <li>The scientific council have suggested the quarantine period be extended to 28 April. The government have made no announcement yet and are still considering this recommendation.</li> <li>French President Emmanuel Macron launched an army operation called “Resilience” on 25 March to support public services during the epidemic. He also announced a major investment plan to support hospitals and established a target to test 29,000 people per day.</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finance ministers from 9 Member States have asked the European Commission and the European Central Bank to consider the possibility of issuing a joint eurozone bond for coronavirus.</li> <li>• According to the new agenda of the European Parliament issued on 25 March, plenary sessions in the EP will be postponed until September.</li> <li>• The European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention upgraded its risk assessment of COVID-19 in the EU to 'moderate' and 'very high', depending on the age group of the population.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is an ongoing debate around the effectiveness of chloroquine, a medicine supported by the microbiologist Didier Raoult which is supposed to treat COVID-19. Despite opposition to the treatment, the government have launched a clinical trial of the medicine and have authorised the use of it within hospitals for individuals with severe symptoms.</li> </ul>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Germany</b></p> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Italy</b></p> 
<p><b>Number of cases:</b> 37,323 <b>Number of deaths:</b> 206</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> <li>Speaking in a press conference on 23 March, the Federal Minister of Health Jens Spahn announced that the federal cabinet had approved the "<a href="#">COVID-19 Hospital Relief Act</a>" and the "<a href="#">Law for the protection of the population in the event of an epidemic situation of national importance</a>".</li> <li>Additional restrictive measures were adopted on 22 March. Citizens are urged to limit contact to those only within their household. In public, wherever possible, a minimum distance of at least 1.5 metres must be kept from those outside of an individual's household.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Number of cases:</b> 57,521 <b>Number of deaths:</b> 7,503</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All non-essential commercial and industrial activities have been suspended.</li> <li>Travels between municipalities or communes, both with private and public transport are banned, except for emergency, health or work purposes.</li> <li>Italy allocated EUR 25 billion to support the economy, with targeted measures towards self-employed workers, families and businesses.</li> <li>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 a similar measure that would apply to nurses.</li> <li>The donation of blood is still allowed and encouraged amid the nationwide lockdown.</li> </ul>
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## Spain



**Number of cases:** 56,188

**Number of deaths:** 4,089

- The Congress has approved an extension of 15 additional days of the state of emergency, up until 11 April. There have not been significant changes in the decree; Spain will remain under the same conditions in its response to COVID-19.
- The Ministry of Health has taken measures to secure medicine supplies and has urged manufacturers to keep the Spanish Agency for Medicines and Health Products informed about the availability of stocks. The Ministry are able to instruct manufacturers to prioritise the development of certain medicines over others.
- The government is importing medical equipment from third countries and also encouraging domestic production. Several healthcare regional systems feel under immense strain caused by a high number of patients demanding intensive care.

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## The United Kingdom



**Number of cases:** 9,529

**Number of deaths:** 463

- The UK parliament has passed emergency legislation which gives the Government unprecedented powers to deal with COVID-19.
- Following confirmation that this legislation will become law, both the House of Commons and House of Lords have entered their Easter recess period almost 1 week early for social distancing purposes. Select committees, however, will continue to hold evidence sessions remotely.
- The Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a major escalation of measures aimed at tackling COVID-19 on Monday, including a ban on gatherings of more than two people.
- 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.
- 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.
- The UK Government continues to face difficult questions over its ability to test the UK population after its testing regime was shown to be lagging that of other countries.

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## I. EUROPEAN UNION

- The European Commission received proposals from companies for the joint procurement of personal protective equipment that was launched on 17 March. The joint procurement covers masks type 2 and 3, gloves, goggles, face-shields, surgical masks and overalls. The aim is to provide hospitals, healthcare professionals, care homes and individuals with the requisite equipment. The equipment should be available two weeks after the 25 participating Member States sign the contracts with the bidders.
- Agriculture Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski held a videoconference meeting with EU Agriculture Ministers on 25 March to discuss the effects of the Coronavirus crisis on the EU agricultural sector. They discussed the extension of the CAP deadlines, increased state aids to the national agricultural sectors, and the maintenance of the food supply across the EU.
- On 25 March, the European Commission [issued guidelines](#) to protect European technological assets especially in areas such as health, medical research, biotechnology and infrastructures that are essential for EU security and public order. Under existing EU rules, Member States are empowered to screen

foreign direct investments (FDI) from non-EU countries which are currently in place in 14 Member States. Within the guidelines, the Commission calls upon Member States 1) to make full use of tools available to them under EU and national law to prevent potentially detrimental capital flows from non-EU countries, 2) to put in place screening mechanisms, and 3) for Member States to cooperate when it comes to foreign direct investments. This essentially introduces a restriction on the free flow of capital.

- On 24 March, the European Commission adopted decisions aimed at ensuring [harmonised standards for medical devices](#) in response to the COVID-19 crisis. These devices include mainly medical face masks, surgical drapes, gowns and suits, washer-disinfectors and sterilisation. The Commission hopes that the use of these standards would help producers comply with EU health and safety regulations more effectively.
- ECDC has updated its Rapid Risk Assessment [of COVID-19](#) in which it upgrades the risk assessment of Coronavirus to moderate for the general population and very high for the elderly. The risk of healthcare system capacity being exceeded in the EU and the UK in the coming weeks is considered high.
- The Commission approved additional support via Horizon 2020 to strengthen priorities, including coronavirus research. This decision enshrines the pledge of EUR 47 million made earlier by the Commission. There are altogether 17 different projects which aim to provide funds in the following areas: epidemiology and public health, the development rapid point-of-care diagnostic tests, the exploration new treatment options and the development of vaccines.
- On 26 March, nine eurozone countries sent an open letter to the President of the EU Council, Charles Michel, asking for a common debt instrument to mitigate the damage caused by the coronavirus crisis. The letter is signed by the leaders of nine countries – Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Slovenia and Ireland. The funds collected would be targeted to finance in all member states the necessary investments in the healthcare system. According to the Commission, the possibility of issuing joint debt – or ‘coronabonds’ – is still on the table.
- The European Parliament has postponed its full four-day plenary sessions in Strasbourg until at September at the earliest. A new system will be used for the first time on Thursday (26 March) to allow the remote participation of MEPs, including e-voting. Lawmakers are expected to vote on some of the measures to address the fallout of the virus. The first ordinary plenary session is foreseen to take place between 14-17 September.

## II. ITALY

- On 22 March, Prime Minister Conte signed a decree<sup>1</sup> ordering the suspension of all non-essential industrial and commercial activities as well as Italian utilities. The decree contains a list of 97 activities that may under certain conditions be considered essential and therefore continue. On 25 March<sup>2</sup>, following intense negotiations between trade unions and government which managed to avoid worker strikes, a new list of essential activities was agreed which includes the manufacture of basic pharmaceutical products and pharmaceutical preparations as well as pharmaceutical wholesale. By contrast, the production of various products, such as rubber, wallpaper, string and agricultural machinery has been suspended until 03 April.
- The Italian government has decided<sup>3</sup> to ban travel between municipalities or communes, whether by private or public transport, until a new decree comes into force. The ban will apply to everyone with an exception for emergency health or work reasons.
- On 24 March, the Italian government adopted a new decree<sup>4</sup> that gives the possibility to introduce stronger sanctions and higher fines for citizens who do not follow the strict lockdown rules. The decree introduces new fines of between EUR 400 and EUR 3,000. The additional rules also give regional governors the power to impose stricter control of the rules. Under the current rules, people are not allowed to leave their homes except for proven work-related needs or health needs. The decree of 24 March also allows the government to extend, if necessary, the current extraordinary measures until 31 July (current restrictions are to remain in place until 03 April).

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<sup>1</sup> Decree Law 22 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/22/20A01807/sq>

<sup>2</sup> Update of annex I with list of essential activities, 25 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.mise.gov.it/images/stories/normativa/DM-MiSE-25-03-20.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> 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>

<sup>4</sup> Decree-Law 25 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/25/20G00035/sq>

### III. FRANCE

- The French National Assembly has reported nineteen MPs infected with coronavirus. The Parliament 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 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, he announced:
  - The limitation of sports outside to 1-hour every day, in an area of 1 km from peoples' homes,
  - The hours of spending time outside will be written on authorisation papers to limit their reuse,
  - Every outdoor market will be banned,
  - Fines will increase to EUR 375 instead of EUR 135 in areas where many offences are recorded,
  - Only urgent health displacements are authorised,
  - The number of people authorised to attend funerals will be limited to 20 people.
- Chloroquine, which is claimed to effectively treat COVID-19, is authorised in hospitals to help individuals with severe symptoms. Clinical trials of chloroquine will be started.
- The governmental scientific council presented its last opinion to the government on 25 March, asking for an extension of the quarantine until 28 April. The government are considering the recommendation and will make an announcement in due course.
- The President announced on 25 March the following new measures:

- An army operation “Resilience” to help the population facing the epidemic. This operation will focus on helping citizens and supporting public services to fight COVID-19,
  - A medical train will evacuate infected people from Strasbourg to Pays de la Loire, where hospitals are less in demand,
  - Two helicopters will be sent to the Indian Ocean and Antilles to support the French overseas regions,
  - A major investment plan to support the hospital was announced which will include an exceptional bonus for health professionals and career advancement,
  - Additional tests will be available in the following days with a target to test 29,000 people per day.
- On 25 March, the Health Minister Olivier Véran called for voluntary health professionals, including retired ones, to help during the epidemic. 40,000 health professionals have already registered in the national health register in order to be called to help if necessary.
  - A health coalition against the virus was launched on 25 March, gathering pharmaceutical groups (including Sanofi, Novartis and GSK), French public hospitals (AP-HP) and public authorities (Leem). A first call for innovative projects was held, on the question of hospital capacity overloads and follow-up of chronic diseases. Projects can be sent until 24 April.
  - A French microbiologist Didier Raoult decided not to wait for the results of the clinical trials concerning chloroquine and has made the medicine available from 22 March for each individual infected by the virus in the Marseille area, leading to objections from many health professionals who doubt the effectiveness of the medicine. Didier Raoult has since left the government’s scientific council.

## IV. GERMANY

- 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 help during the COVID-19 pandemic. Affected companies and self-employed workers shall be relieved of social insurance payments provisionally for March and April, and this could be extended if financial aid programmes do not reach the relevant recipients in time. Nevertheless, the deferral is only permitted if all available financial aid and other aid measures provided by the German government have already been fully exploited.
- On 23 March 2020 the Federal Minister of Health Jens Spahn gave a [press conference](#) where he indicated the federal cabinet approval of the "[COVID-19 Hospital Relief Act](#)" and the "[Law for the protection of the population in the event of an epidemic situation of national importance](#)".
- In order to support the health care system and the nursing sector in coping with coronavirus, the cabinet approved two draft bills presented by Federal Minister of Health Spahn:
  - The "**COVID-19 Hospital Relief Act**" will mitigate the economic consequences for hospitals and contract physicians through the following key points:
    - Hospitals are being supported to provide care capacities for a growing number of patients with coronavirus.
    - General practitioners and nursing facilities will receive financial support. Registered doctors and psychotherapists are further protected by compensation payments in an event of an excessive lower utilization by patients.
    - Hospitals will receive financial compensation for postponed scheduled operations and treatments in order to free up capacity for the treatment of coronavirus patients.
    - Hospitals will receive a flat rate of EUR 560 per day for each unoccupied bed and EUR 50,000 for each additional intensive care bed they create in the period from 16 March to 30 September 2020.
    - For additional costs, especially for personal protective equipment, hospitals will receive a bonus of EUR 50 per patient from 1 April to 30 June 2020.
    - The so-called "provisional nursing charge" will be increased to EUR 185.
    - Under certain conditions, preventive care and rehabilitation facilities can also provide hospital services to ease the burden.

- The Associations of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians are reimbursed by the health insurance funds for the additional costs of financing extraordinary measures that are necessary during the existence of the epidemic emergency.
- The compensation payments for keeping bed capacities free by postponing plannable operations, interventions and admissions in hospitals will mean additional expenditure for the Federal budget of probably about EUR 2.8 billion in 2020. For the SHI system, the aid package in the hospital sector will result in an estimated additional expenditure of about EUR 5.9 billion this year, of which EUR 1.5 billion will be financed directly from the liquidity reserve of the Health Fund.
- The **“Law for the protection of the population in the event of an epidemic situation of national importance”** aims at improving the overall ability to react to epidemics. It empowers the German Ministry of Health to take precautions to protect the population and ensure health care through general orders or instruments. It is hence authorised to decide upon:
  - Regulations for cross-border travel, e.g., if reporting requirements are introduced for rail and bus transport,
  - Reporting and investigation obligations,
  - Arrangements which are normally made by the self-governing partners,
  - Measures to ensure the basic supply of medicines, protective equipment and laboratory diagnostics,
  - Making regulations in medical and nursing facilities more flexible.

## V. SPAIN

- The Congress has approved [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. Hotels were also forced to shut last week, however the government has released a new [legal order](#) which obligates 370 tourist accommodations to remain closed, but they can offer their accommodation services to workers delivering essential services, including healthcare. All decrees passed two weeks ago regarding additional measures set during the state of emergency have also been extended and validated by the Congress.

- On 23 March Vice President for Economic Affairs and Digital Transformation Nadia Calviño stressed the importance of digitalisation to face COVID-19 and announced several measures including the launch of a digital platform gathering all official and certified information concerning coronavirus to avoid fake news, a digital assistant for the elderly, an auto diagnose mobile application, a tracking system for people's movement, and a data system against coronavirus allowing regions to share the state of play of their healthcare systems and therefore identify their needs and vulnerabilities. These measures will start as a pilot project in several Spanish regions and potentially expanded to the rest of the country.
- On 24 March the Ministry of Health released a [legal order](#) for drug manufacturers and marketing authorisation holders to share information on their medicine stocks on a continuous and daily basis to the Spanish Agency for Medicines and Health Products. Manufacturers will be providing information on the stock available, amount supplied in the last 24 hours and the amount expected to be released and received (date and quantity) of 108 medicines. Other than providing such data, manufacturers are also asked by the Ministry to ensure their supply to healthcare centres. The Ministry can urge companies to prioritise manufacturing of the above-mentioned medicines.
- On 25 March the Spanish government purchased EUR 432 million of health equipment from China, such as face masks, gloves, rapid diagnostic tests and respiratory equipment. The first batch is expected to be delivered throughout the week and the government is encouraging domestic production of medical equipment.

## VI. UNITED KINGDOM

- On 25 March, the UK parliament passed emergency legislation – Coronavirus Act 2020 – which provides the Government with unprecedented powers to deal with the COVID-19 outbreak. The Act aims to increase the health and social care workforce to deal with the crisis, for example by removing barriers to allow recently retired NHS staff and social workers to return to work. The Act also gives the Government powers allowing police and immigration authorities to detain individuals suspected of having coronavirus, including to stop any vehicle, train, vessel, or aircraft.
- Following the passing of this legislation, the UK parliament has 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 Health and Social Care Committee will today hold an e-hearing with Public Health England and the British Medical Association to discuss the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak, and there are other scheduled committee hearings next week on legislation unrelated to COVID-19.
- The UK Chancellor announced a series of measures to help the employed workforce in an emergency Budget Statement announced on Friday 20 March. These measures included a job retention scheme whereby the government would pay 80% of a worker's wage up to a limit of GBP 2,500 a month. The

Government, however, have been under sustained pressure to deliver more for the self-employed workforce, and today the Chancellor is expected to announce a package of measures which includes targeted financial support to around 1.7million self-employed workers.

- 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:
  - People must always stay at home unless for very limited reasons such as shopping for necessities and to address medical needs
  - All gatherings of more than two people must end
  - All non-essential shops and social spaces must be closed (e.g. hair and nail salons, outdoor and indoor markets, libraries, community centres, places of worship etc.)
- The UK Home Office is expected to reveal the new powers police will have to enforce these new UK ‘lockdown’ rules on 26 March.
- Anticipating a wave of new cases, 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.
- The UK Government continues to face difficult questions over its ability to test the UK population. The testing regime is shown to be falling behind other countries that are also grappling with the virus outbreak. The Chief Medical Officer Chris Whitty said it was due to a “global shortage” during a Downing Street press conference, although critics remain concerned that frontline NHS staff are not being routinely checked for the virus and believe that more could be done.
- 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.