

# COVID-19 – PUBLIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS

2 April – 6 April 2020

## Summary

<p>The European Union</p> 	<p>France</p> 
<p><b>Number of cases:</b> 582,554 <i>(including the UK)</i>  <b>Number of deaths:</b> 47,741</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The European Medicines Agency (EMA) reported on 6 April that EU authorities agreed on new measures to support the availability of medicines for treating coronavirus. The EMA has been asked to take on the role of a central coordinator to actively support Member States.</li> <li>On 3 April, <a href="#">a research letter was published</a> by Chinese authors which presents evidence that COVID-19 was detected in blood donations. The authors screened all donations collected at the Wuhan Blood Center, a total of 2,430 donations. The research showed that the viral SARS-CoV-2 RNA from several asymptomatic patients were detected in blood plasma. The study could not confirm whether the virus can be transmitted through blood products, since detectable RNA might not signify infectivity.</li> <li>On 3 April, the <a href="#">European Commission issued guidelines</a> on the cross-border treatment of patients that primarily foresees transferring patients from overburdened areas to hospitals with free capacities in nearby countries. The Commission seeks to promote a more coordinated approach through the guidelines.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Number of cases:</b> 70,478  <b>Number of deaths:</b> 8,078 (including retirement homes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Covid-19 pandemic seems to be subsiding in France, as the number of cases started to decrease on 5 April. 390 new patients were admitted to hospitals on 5 April, compared to 771 on 1 April.</li> <li>The government is worried about enforcing the confinement measures, as the sunny weekend led to a multiplication of violations of the measures. It called for greater respect of the rules on 5 April.</li> <li>Although originally promised for 5 April, the first results of the European clinical trial Discovery have not yet been published and are expected in the following weeks.</li> <li>The Medicine Academy issued a recommendation on 2 April concerning an obligation to wear masks for 14 days at the end of the quarantine, to help eradicate the virus across the country. This recommendation is contradictory with the government's statements over the inefficiency of masks for civilians.</li> <li>The Health Minister Olivier Veran announced on 5 April that the government is currently reviewing its strategy concerning masks after the Medicine Agency's statement.</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On 3 April, the <a href="#">Commission officially adopted the proposal</a> to postpone the implementation of the Medical Devices Regulation by one year to May 2021.</li> <li>The European Commission adopted an amendment to extend the temporary framework for state aid to combat the economic fallout of COVID-19. This decision primarily aims to promote the research, testing and production of coronavirus related products.</li> <li>The Commission has today decided to approve requests from Member States and the UK to temporarily waive customs duties and VAT on the import of medical devices, and protective equipment in response to the COVID crisis. This measure includes masks and protective equipment, as well as testing kits, ventilators and other medical equipment and it will apply for a period of 6 months.</li> <li>On 3 April, the Health Security Committee held a meeting to discuss Member States' health system resilience, the ECDC guidance on the public usage of face masks, exit strategies from the pandemic, digital solutions in healthcare, and cross-border health collaboration.</li> <li>EIB approved on 2 April EUR 700 million of financing under the Investment Plan for Europe for agricultural and the bioeconomy sector.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Prime Minister stated on 2 April, that the high school Baccalaureate will not take place on 17 June as it was planned. The Baccalaureate will be awarded based on the achieved grades throughout the academic year, without any final exam.</li> </ul>
<p>For more information, please get in touch with <b>Charline Quillérou, Associate Director EU</b> at <a href="mailto:c.quillerou@rpp-group.com">c.quillerou@rpp-group.com</a></p>	<p>For more information, please get in touch with <b>Salomé Chelli-Enriquez, Director RPP France</b> at <a href="mailto:s.chelli-enriquez@rpp-group.com">s.chelli-enriquez@rpp-group.com</a></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Germany</b></p> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Italy</b></p> 
<p><b>Number of cases:</b> 100,123 <b>Number of deaths:</b> 1,584</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On 3 April, the German Federal Government announced that with immediate effect, that the wages of employees who take the</li> </ul>	<p><b>Number of cases:</b> 128,948 <b>Number of deaths:</b> 15,887</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The death toll in Italy continues to drop daily. Italy still has the highest number of fatalities in Europe with 15,887 cases. According to the Italian</li> </ul>

<p>employment as a second job are tax and social insurance free up to an amount of EUR 1500. This measure shall be an incentive for those who are actively engaged in the support against COVID-19.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On 3 April, Federal Minister of Agriculture Julia Klöckner and Federal Minister of Interior, Horst Seehofer introduced a concept that allows seasonal workers in the agricultural sector a limited entry under strict conditions. Consequently, up to 40,000 seasonal workers may come to Germany by plane.</li> <li>• According to Head of the Federal Chancellery Helge Braun, a new application will be launched in the coming days intended to track the pathways of infection. The German Federal Government welcomes the "Pan-European Privacy-Preserving Proximity Tracing" initiative (PEPP-PT) that is executed with the support of the German Robert-Koch Institute as well as the Fraunhofer Heinrich Hertz Institute (HHI). The application will comply with the European data privacy standards.</li> </ul>	<p>government, the decline of the number of cases is a clear indication that the lockdown works.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On 1 April, the government decided to extend the country's lockdown until 13 April. However Prime Minister Conte has also underlined that it is impossible for the moment to say when the containment measures will be lifted.</li> <li>• The Government and the Scientific Technical Committee have been working on a strategy that can slowly and gradually revive the social and economic life of the country.</li> <li>• Regional authorities in Lombardy and Tuscany are now requiring anyone venturing outside to cover their mouths and noses (with a face mask or even a scarf).</li> </ul>
<p>For more information, please get in touch with <b>Franziska Schoeps, Associate Director Germany</b> at <a href="mailto:f.schoeps@rpp-group.com">f.schoeps@rpp-group.com</a></p>	<p>For more information, please get in touch with <b>Daniela Lemme, Associate Director Italy</b> at <a href="mailto:d.lemme@rpp-group.com">d.lemme@rpp-group.com</a></p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Spain</b></p> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The United Kingdom</b></p> 
<p><b>Number of cases:</b> 135,032 <b>Number of deaths:</b> 13,055</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On 4 April Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez announced that the Council of Ministers will table a second extension of the state of emergency for another 15 days. The current state will last until 11 April as foreseen and a new period will follow until 25 April. The Congress has the last word to approve the decree on the matter and amid initial rejection from the opposition, the legislation is expected to be passed. Conditions under the second extension are foreseen to remain the same, although the “recoverable paid leave” scheme for non-essential workers will be removed as of 9 April, as initially set.</li> <li>PM Sánchez confirmed that the termination of containment measures will be gradually implemented possibly throughout May as long as the evolution of COVID-19 allows it. In this regard, the government is moving forward with its diagnostic strategy to test as many symptomatic cases as possible within health professionals and vulnerable communities. A million rapid diagnostic tests are distributed amongst regions.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Number of cases:</b> 47,806 <b>Number of deaths:</b> 4,935</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prime Minister Boris Johnson has been admitted to hospital for tests, 10 days after testing positive for coronavirus, as a precautionary measure.</li> <li>Sir Keir Starmer MP has been elected as the Leader of the Labour party and he has appointed a new Shadow COVID-19 Committee to support efforts to curb the crisis.</li> <li>Health Secretary Matt Hancock has warned that more draconian measures could be introduced to limit social contact after Britons were seen enjoying the warm weather in parks around the country.</li> <li>The Government are under pressure to increase testing, and medical professionals have criticised the effectiveness of new home testing kits.</li> <li>The Chief Medical Officer in Scotland – Catherine Calderwood – has resigned after breaking social distancing rules.</li> <li>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 which will be releasing data now every Tuesday.</li> <li>Both the House of Commons and the House of Lords remain in lockdown until Tuesday 21 April.</li> </ul>
<p>For more information, please get in touch with <b>Kit Greenop, Director RPP Spain</b> at <a href="mailto:k.greenop@rpp-group.com">k.greenop@rpp-group.com</a></p>	<p>For more information, please get in touch with <b>Martyna Giedrojć, Associate Director UK</b> at <a href="mailto:m.giedrojć@rpp-group.com">m.giedrojć@rpp-group.com</a></p>

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## I. EUROPEAN UNION

- The European Medicines Agency (EMA) reported on 6 April that EU authorities agreed on new measures to support the availability of medicines used in the COVID-19 pandemic. Some EU Member States have indicated that they are starting to see shortages of certain medicines used for patients with COVID-19 or are expecting such shortages to occur very soon. Mitigation measures such as regulatory actions to support increased manufacturing capacities are being taken. The EMA has been asked to take on the role of a central coordinator to actively support Member States' prevention and management actions during this extraordinary health crisis. This is a new type of activity which requires new ad hoc processes and will see the reprioritisation of resources to this activity.
- On 3 April, a research letter was published by Chinese authors which suggests that COVID-19 was detected in blood donations. The authors screened all donations collected at the Wuhan Blood Center, in total 2,430 donations in real-time, including 1,656 platelet and 774 whole blood donations. According to the research, the viral SARS-CoV-2 RNA were detected in blood donations from several asymptomatic patients. The study could not confirm whether the virus can be transmitted in blood products, since detectable RNA might not signify infectivity. However, it cautions that this remains a possibility. The article will foreseeably published in the Emerging Infectious Diseases Journal in July 2020.

- On 3 April, the European Commission issued guidelines on the cross-border treatment of patients that primarily foresees transferring critical patients from overburdened areas to hospitals with free capacities in nearby countries. The Commission seeks to promote a more coordinated approach through these guidelines.
- On 3 April, the Commission officially adopted the proposal to postpone the implementation of the Medical Devices Regulation by one year to May 2021. This decision was taken to mitigate risks of any potential or already existing shortages for medical devices across the European market.
- The European Commission adopted an amendment to extend the temporary framework for state aid to combat the economic fallout of COVID-19. This decision primarily aims to promote the research, testing and production of coronavirus related products.
- The Commission has today decided to approve requests from Member States and the UK to temporarily waive customs duties and VAT on the import of medical devices, and protective equipment in response to the COVID crisis. This measure includes masks and protective equipment, as well as testing kits, ventilators and other medical equipment and it will apply for a period of 6 months.
- On 3 April, the Health Security Committee held a meeting to discuss Member States' health system resilience, the ECDC guidance on the public usage of face masks, exit strategies from the pandemic, digital solutions in healthcare, and cross-border health collaboration. The Commission is working on a guidance for mobile apps and the eHealth Network. Several Member States also work on contact tracing apps, which play a key role in mitigating the early stages of the spread of COVID-19.
- EIB approved EUR 700 million of financing under the Investment Plan for Europe for agricultural and the bioeconomy sector. The financing aims to support private companies operating throughout the value chains of production and processing of food, bio-based materials and bioenergy. The lending programme will enable direct lending for private sector investments ranging from EUR 15 million to EUR 200 million, with the EIB loan amount ranging from EUR 7.5 million to EUR 50 million.

## II. ITALY

- On 1 April, the Italian government issued a new decree<sup>1</sup> 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. However Prime Minister Conte has also underlined that it is impossible for the moment to say when the containment measures will be lifted. Against this background, the Government and the Scientific Technical Committee have been working on a strategy that can slowly and gradually revive the social and economic life of the country.
- Italian authorities have strictly enforced the lockdown, with Italian police officers fining more than 175.000 people so far.
- Regional authorities in Lombardy and Tuscany are also now requiring anyone venturing outside to cover their mouths and noses – a U-turn compared to previous recommendations from officials. Previously authorities had followed international health recommendations suggesting that masks offered little protection. Still there is a fear that panic might set in with a lack of proper face mask equipment for all. The President of the Lombardy region has explained that a simple scarf would do to cover mouth and nose, in trying to prevent the spread of the virus.
- On 3 April, the Italian Medicines Agency (AIFA) updated the information<sup>2</sup> related to clinical trials on the treatment of COVID-19 with useful references for participation.

## III. FRANCE

- The Covid-19 pandemic seems to be subsiding in France, as the number of cases started to decrease on 5 April. 390 new patients were admitted to hospitals on 5 April, compared to 771 on 1 April. According to the government, this is the first positive proof of the confinement measures, which led to a decrease of infections.
- However, as a result, the government is worried about the loosening adherence to the confinement measures. So far more than 350,000 offences have been recorded in violation of the measures since the beginning of the quarantine. The Minister of Internal Affairs stated on 5 April that French people must be vigilant and keep to the measures. Indeed, the sunny weekend led to a multiplication of violations.

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<sup>1</sup> 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](http://www.governo.it/sites/new.governo.it/files/documenti/documenti/Notizie-allegati/covid-19/DPCM_20200401.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> AIFA, Clinical trials, COVID-19, 3 April. Available at: <https://www.aifa.gov.it/sperimentazioni-cliniche-covid-19>

- The Minister of Internal Affairs announced that tracking systems may be used at the end of the quarantine to help contain the virus and avoid new infections.
- The European clinical trial “Discovery” started on 22 March, involving 3,200 patients. Four molecules, including chloroquine, are tested and the first results were expected to be published from 5 April. However, no result has been yet published. The Inserm (French Institute for Health and Research) director stated that results will be published in the following weeks if one of the tested molecules showed positive results.
- 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 and is increasingly calling for a massive availability of this medicine across the country.
  - Three leading health experts signed a letter published in a French newspaper on 6 April, to call for a massive availability of chloroquine. Indeed, they expressed their support to Didier Raoult, arguing that this medicine will be a useful tool to eradicate the virus.
- The government first stated that masks were not useful and that masks were set aside for frontline health workers.
  - The Medicine Academy issued a recommendation on 2 April to wear masks even as a preventive tool. It also recommended an obligation to wear masks for 14 days at the end of the quarantine, to help eradicate the virus across the country.
  - The Health Minister Olivier Veran announced on 5 April an order of 2 billion masks to China and admitted that the government is currently reviewing its strategy concerning masks.
  - However, delays in delivering, competition over orderings are creating fear over the effective delivery of masks from China.
- The Prime Minister stated on 2 April, that the high school Baccalaureate will not take place on 17 June as it was planned. The Baccalaureate will be given based on the grades of the entire year, without any final exam. This is the first time since 1968 that these exams are cancelled.

## IV. GERMANY

- On 3 April, the German Federal Government announced that with immediate effect, wages of employees taking the job as a second employment are tax and social insurance free to an amount of EUR 1500. This measure shall be an incentive for those that are actively engaged in the support against COVID-19.
- On 3 April, Federal Minister of Agriculture Julia Klöckner and Federal Minister of Interior, Horst Seehofer introduced a concept that allows seasonal workers in the agricultural sector a limited entry under strict conditions. Consequently, up to 40,000 seasonal workers may come to Germany by plane and will be picked up by the respective farms at the airport. Furthermore, the workers must pass a health check and will work separately from the other

workers within the first two weeks upon their arrival. In addition to that, both ministers aim to mobilise about 10,000 unemployed, students, asylum seekers and short-time workers to work in the agricultural sector.

- According to Head of the Federal Chancellery Helge Braun, a new application will be launched in the coming days intended to track the pathways of infection. The German Federal Government welcomes the "Pan-European Privacy-Preserving Proximity Tracing" initiative (PEPP-PT) that is executed with the support of the German Robert-Koch Institute as well as the Fraunhofer Heinrich Hertz Institute (HHI). The application shall comply with the European data privacy standards.
- The German Association of Teachers recommends that low-performing pupils repeat the school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This applies particularly to pupils that indicated a low-performance and that were likely to not reach the class goal before the COVID-19 pandemic.

## V. SPAIN

- In its 4<sup>th</sup> week of confinement, Spain is now starting a stabilisation phase according to the Ministry of Health. There has been signs of de-escalation of cases in several regions, where the basic reproduction number is less than 1, that is to say every primary case produces less than one secondary case. Those regions are Cantabria, Extremadura, Murcia, the Canary Islands, the Balearic Islands and the Basque Country. On the other hand, Ceuta, Galicia and Castilla La Mancha have the highest basic reproduction numbers. The Ministry of Health Salvador Illa has requested all regions to provide the Ministry with information of public and private infrastructures available for asymptomatic cases eager to self-isolate during the de-escalation phase, following the model of Fangcang shelter hospitals in China.
- Minister Illa announced on 5 April the distribution of a million rapid testing kits to the regions on 6 April. An average of 15,000-20,000 tests have been distributed so far but the Ministry wants these numbers to increase in order to test all symptomatic cases, prioritising hospitals and vulnerable communities. The Carlos III Health Institute has stated that the antibody tests will have a diagnostic sensitivity of 70% for cases where the infection has been ongoing for at least 7 days and 64% for cases with early symptoms. However, the government diagnostic strategy has rapid diagnostic tests as a complement to PCR tests.
- The General Secretariat of the Spanish Congress is currently assessing a system to donate parliamentarians' salaries and benefits to support the fight against coronavirus, considering parliamentary activity has been suspended for the last 3 weeks – except for the Health Committee.

## VI. UNITED KINGDOM

- Prime Minister Boris Johnson has been admitted to hospital for tests, 10 days after testing positive for coronavirus. It is said to be a "precautionary step" taken on the advice of his doctor.
- Sir Keir Starmer MP has been elected as the Leader of the Labour party, and he has immediately appointed his senior members of the shadow cabinet. As well as their role in the shadow cabinet, these appointees will sit on a new "Shadow COVID-19 Committee" to coordinate the party's response to the ongoing crisis. Keir Starmer is expected to finalise his full team this week.
- Health Secretary Matt Hancock warned over the weekend that more draconian measures could be introduced to limit social contact after Britons were seen enjoying the warm weather in parks around the country.
- The Health Secretary also appeared to alter the Government's ventilator goal telling a UK journalist the current goal was to have ventilator capacity for 18,000 patients in the coming few weeks, lower than the 30,000 figure quoted at the beginning of the crisis.
- The Government are under increasing pressure to increase testing. 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.
- Medical professionals have meanwhile criticised the Government's proposed rollout of finger-prick coronavirus tests to the public, saying that such screening must be supervised by healthcare specialists. There is apparently a stock of 17.5m home testing kits ordered but experts have said no test on the market has yet been shown to be sufficiently reliable. The government have insisted that they are currently evaluating their effectiveness.
- The Chief Medical Officer in Scotland – Catherine Calderwood – has resigned after facing intense criticism for breaking the social distancing rules and twice visiting her second home during the coronavirus outbreak. She said she realised it was impossible for the public to have confidence in official advice to avoid all essential travel if she remained in post.
- 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.
- 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.