



COVID-19 – PUBLIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS



16 - 19 March 2020



Summary

The European Union 	France 
<p>Number of cases: 82,869 Number of deaths: 4,069</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Commission is proposing to support the EU economy with EUR 37 billion as per the proposal for a Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative published on 13 March. • The Commission has created the first ever rescEU stockpile of medical equipment with an initial budget of EUR 50 million which enters into force on 20 March. • The Commission put together a European team of scientific advisers in response to the COVID-19 crisis composed of epidemiologists and virologists from different Member States to formulate EU guidelines on science-based and coordinated risk management measures • The Commission put forward guidelines on border measures after several Member States unilaterally introduced tight border controls, in some cases complete lockdown of borders from non-nationals. Separately, the Commission and the Member States agreed to introduce a 30-day closure of EU borders in an attempt to halt the spread of the virus. 	<p>Number of cases: 9,134 Number of deaths: 264</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 MPs and 4 staff members infected by the virus, generating fears about a contamination within the Parliament. The Parliament was closed for 2 weeks but reopens on 19 March to vote the postponement of the second ballot of the municipal elections and the financial plan. As a background, the government decided to go ahead with the first ballot of the municipal elections on 15 March which was highly criticised • The government increased its original pledge of EUR 40 billion to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic on businesses to EUR 100 billion • On 17 March, French President Emmanuel Macron announced strict confinement measures for 15 days, with the closing of schools, universities, and non-essential shops. Presence outside has to be justified if questioned by authorities.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On 17 March, President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen held a video conference with European heads of state to discuss and coordinate response to the Coronavirus crisis • On 17 March, the procurement for gloves, masks and respiratory machines was launched with the participation of 24 Member States. Companies now have 6 days to tender for the equipment. • The European Central Bank launched an emergency EUR 750 billion package on 18 March to buy government and company debt in the Eurozone to ease the economic effects of the COVID-19. • The Commission offered up to EUR 80 million of financial support to CureVac, a highly innovative vaccine developer from Tübingen, Germany. 	
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<div data-bbox="566 300 736 341">Germany</div> <div data-bbox="602 344 703 443"></div>	<div data-bbox="1541 300 1624 341">Italy</div> <div data-bbox="1534 352 1628 443"></div>
<p>Number of cases: 10,999 Number of deaths: 20</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal and state governments decided to set up an emergency plan for hospitals and health facilities. The respective resolution includes the upgrading, expanding and converting of rehabilitation facilities, hotels or larger halls to build capacities. According to Federal Health Minister Spahn, there are currently 28000 intensive care beds in Germany, of which 25000 have respiratory capabilities. These capacities shall be doubled. The National Association of Statutory Health Insurance Funds as well as Health Minister Jens Spahn assured the financial security of health facilities Chancellor Angela Merkel gave a speech in German TV in which she urged people living in Germany to comply with the precautionary measures to minimise the speed of the spread of COVID-19. 	<p>Number of cases: 28,710 Number of deaths: 2,978</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On March 17, Italy passed through an emergency decree (Decree #Curaltalia), allocating EUR 25 billion to support the Italian economy, with targeted measures towards self-employed workers, families and businesses. Stricter measures were adopted for the entire country, all services and shops closed other than groceries, pharmacies, financial services and other services for 'urgent need'. Donation of blood is still allowed amid nationwide lockdown
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<div>Spain</div> <div></div>	<div>The United Kingdom</div> <div></div>
<p>Number of cases: 17,147 Number of deaths: 767</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government has informed the state of emergency will most likely be extended up until 11 April, although an additional extension until end of April should not be excluded. • Under a state of emergency freedom of movement is restricted, all shops except providers of essential goods remain closed, and education centres are shut. • External land borders are now closed, and border controls restored. • As part of the economic contingency plan and in addition to the EUR 18 billion package approved by the government, another EUR 200 billion have been pledged to support families, workers, self-employed workers and companies. This stimulus is conceived as a mitigation measure against the upcoming economic crisis. 	<p>Number of cases: 2,626 Number of deaths: 103</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UK has notably taken a more “relaxed” approach towards restrictions compared to other European countries • The Government’s action plan centres around Contain, Delay, Research, and Mitigate in a phased response • The UK’s approach has been to accept the inevitability of mass infection, but to manage that infection in a sustainable way which retains NHS capacity • The Government have been criticised for its approach in communicating information about its plans to deal with the pandemic. • The Government will hold daily press conferences from 16 March to improve communication, with the UK’s Chief Medical and Scientific Advisors leading on detail • The Government have introduced emergency regulations in response to the outbreak, with new draft emergency legislation due to be presented before Parliament which would give the Government powers to restrict social liberties and reduce regulatory requirements
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I. EUROPEAN UNION

- As per the published regulation proposal on the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative, Commission increases support to EU economy to EUR 37 billion by reallocating funds from 4 different EU structural funds, namely the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the Cohesion Fund (CF), and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).
- Commission creates first ever rescEU stockpile of medical equipment on with an initial budget of EUR 50 million which enters into law on 20 March. Medical equipment part of the stockpile will include items such as intensive care medical equipment such as ventilators, personal protective equipment such as reusable masks, vaccines and therapeutics, and laboratory supplies. The stockpile will be hosted by one or several Member States. The hosting State will be responsible for procuring the equipment. The Commission will finance 90% of the stockpile. The Emergency Response Coordination Centre will manage the distribution of the equipment to ensure it goes where it is needed most. Once the measure enters into law on Friday 20 March, the Member State wishing to host rescEU stockpiles can apply for a direct grant from the European Commission. The rescEU is part of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.
- The Commission launched a European team of scientific advisers in response to the COVID-19 crisis composed of epidemiologists and virologists from different Member States to formulate EU guidelines on science-based and coordinated risk management measures. The panel will provide advice the

European Commission by formulating responses to be taken by Member States, identify and mitigate gaps and challenges, prioritise healthcare and recommend policy measures. The panel is composed of 7 professionals from 6 Member States and will meet twice a week.

- The European Commission put forward guidelines on border measures after several Member States unilaterally introduced tight border controls, in some cases complete lockdown of borders from non-nationals. All Schengen Area Member States have approved a plan proposed by the EU Commission which foresees the closure of the external borders of the territory, for at least a period of 30 days
- On 17 March, President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen held a video conference with European heads of state where they discussed the various measures taken by the Commission, including border control measures, goods transportation, procurement and the economic package.
- On 17 March, the procurement for gloves, masks and respiratory machines (on 16 March) was launched with the participation of 24 Member States. Companies now have 6 days to tender for the equipment.
- The European Central Bank launched an emergency EUR 750 billion package on 18 March to ease the economic effects of the Coronavirus. It will buy government and company debt across the eurozone, including that of troubled Greece and Italy. ECB boss Christine Lagarde tweeted "there are no limits" to its commitment to the euro.
- The Commission offered up to EUR 80 million of financial support to German company CureVac to scale up development and production of a vaccine against COVID-19. The support from the Commission was announced after it came to light that the US government offered support to the company in exchange for exclusive rights to use the vaccine in the US. Commission President von der Leyen stated that with the EU's support, the developed vaccine "will benefit everyone, in Europe and beyond." The support would come in form of an EU guarantee of a currently assessed EIB loan of an identical amount, in the framework of the InnovFin Infectious Disease Finance Facility under Horizon 2020.

II. ITALY

- Following the stringent measures of the Government which allow leaving home only for proven professionals, health and other necessary reasons, the Ministry of Health, in a document released on 9 March, clarified that donation of blood and blood components can be classified as "situation of need", therefore donors are allowed to go to donation centers.¹ After a call to address the reduction in blood collection, the National Blood Center on 16 March reported that 'the appeals of the past few days have led to an "impressive" influx of donors in all regions allowing not only to replenish blood supply but also

¹ Ministry of Health, 10 March: <http://www.trovanorme.salute.gov.it/norme/renderNormsanPdf?anno=2020&codLeg=73637&parte=1%20&serie=null>

to ensure interregional compensation'.² According to the press release, the national Information System (Sistra), which monitors regional availability and shortages, showed a surplus of almost 900 bags throughout the national territory.

- On 17 March, Italy passed an emergency decree³ (Decree #CuraItalia), allocating EUR 25 billion to support the Italian economy, with targeted measures towards self-employed workers, families and businesses. Measures include direct payments for self-employed, limiting the possibility of terminating workers' contract, support for childcare, possible suspensions of rents and mortgages, as well as the suspension of tax and insurance payments. The decree also allocates EUR 3.5 billion specifically for the health system, with investments towards ventilation units, protective gear and the recruitment of new medical staff. The investments are also to stimulate private investments, and together with public funds the aim is to leverage about 340 billion on the long term.
- Italy's government also argued in favour of taking extraordinary measures in issuing joint EU debt bonds, which would entail mutualising debt at EU level, in supporting member states economies. Countries such as Germany have previously argued against common Eurobonds, explaining that it is up to the individual member state to keep finances in order, and that some member states shouldn't be paying for others.
- Another proposed idea includes resorting to the European Stability Mechanism, a bailout fund for the Eurozone, which was established following the financial crisis to safeguard and support members of the Eurozone in financial difficulties. Normally reserved for extraordinary occasions it remains to be seen if there is a common agreement among Eurozone countries on using the fund.

III. FRANCE

- The number of infected in the French **National Assembly rose to eighteen** (MPs and staff members), generating fears about a contamination within the Parliament. Access to the National Assembly is limited for 2 weeks. The re-opening of the National Assembly is planned for 19 March only for voluntary MPs, to vote the government crisis measures.
- The first ballot of the municipal elections took place on 15 March with a record low turnout. The government's decision to hold the first ballot was highly criticised. On 16 March, Emmanuel Macron announced the postponement of the second ballot of the municipal elections.

² National Blood Center, 16 March. Available at: <https://www.centronazionalesangue.it/sites/default/files/Press%20release%20-%20Coronavirus%2C%20in%20the%20last%20days%20an%20impressive%20donors%E2%80%99%20response%20%28ENG%20version%29.pdf>

³ Law Decree of Council of Ministers, 17 March. Available at: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/17/20G00034/sq>

- On 16 March Emmanuel Macron met President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and President of the European Council Charles Michel to discuss coordinated border control. This resulted in an agreement between the European Commission and the Member States that the Schengen area would close its external borders for non-essential travel for 30 days.
- On 16 March Emmanuel Macron announced strict restrictions of movements for 15 days which may be extended. Confinement measures are implemented as follows:
 - A paper presenting proper justification will have to be presented to the police if stopped outside. 100 000 policemen will be rallied to uphold this rule. An absence of paper or proper justification will lead to fines. Accepted justifications are:
 - Travel from home to the office if teleworking is not possible,
 - Travel to buy necessary things in the authorised shops,
 - Travel for health reasons,
 - Travel for urgent family reason,
 - Short travel to do sports in a very limited area around the housing.
 - **Protective masks** will be delivered urgently to the most affected departments.
 - All the ongoing reforms in the Parliament are **postponed**.
 - The **Alsace hospital of the armed forces** is requisitioned to welcome infected citizens.
 - An **economy-saving plan** was announced, and will be presented to the Parliament on 19 March, to limit the effects of the pandemic on the economy. An EUR 300 billion guarantee was announced to support companies.
 - Taxes, social contributions and bills are **suspended** for companies.
- The French borders are now closed except for French citizens who want to go back to the country.

IV. GERMANY

- On 17 March, the Robert Koch Institute assessed the COVID-19 situation in Germany and categorised it a high public health risk.
- Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs, Heiko Maas, announced to bring back all German citizens who are currently abroad. To do so, a budget of EUR 50 million will be released. Simultaneously, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a global travel warning.
- On 18 March, Chancellor Angela Merkel gave a speech in German TV. The speech will be aired after the main news programmes of the German public channels ARD and ZDF. Angela Merkel did not announce protective measures that would further restrict public life. This is the first time in her nearly 14 years in office, that Angela Merkel gave a speech on current political developments besides her new year's speech. Rather, an urgent appeal to the people living in Germany to comply with the precautionary measures to minimise the speed of the spread of COVID-19 was presented. Angela Merkel outlined that the COVID-19 situation is the most serious public crisis in Germany since the Second World War.
- Two days ago, on 16 March, Angela Merkel announced a list of precautionary measures, including:
 - All venues related to cultural, entertainment and leisure activities will be closed.
 - Meetings of associations, religious communities or leisure facilities are prohibited.
 - Visitors' schemes for hospitals and rehabilitation facilities and hygiene standards for canteens, restaurants, catering establishments and hotels will be set up.
 - Restaurants and cafes are only allowed to be opened from 6:00 - 18:00.
 - Grocery stores, weekly markets, pick-up and delivery services, beverage markets, pharmacies, medical supply stores, drugstores, gas stations, banks and savings banks, post offices, hairdressers, dry cleaners, laundries, the sale of newspapers, building, gardening and pet supplies markets and wholesale remain open
- In addition to that, federal and state governments decided to set up an emergency plan for hospitals and health facilities. The respective resolution includes the upgrading, expanding and converting of rehabilitation facilities, hotels or larger halls to build capacities. According to Federal Health Minister Spahn, there are currently 28000 intensive care beds in Germany, of which 25000 have respiratory capabilities. These capacities shall be doubled.
- In a press statement, the National Association of Statutory Health Insurance Funds assured the financial security of health facilities

- With her speech in German television, Angela Merkel reacts to the current state of play of the general public life in Germany. Prior to the announcement of the beforementioned precautionary measures on 16 March, a high number of citizens did not respect respective instruments. Although policymakers encouraged to socially distance oneself, pedestrian zones, parks and playgrounds remained crowded in a number of German cities.
- With respect to the restructuring of organisational processes in hospitals as well as the development of additional intensive care capacities, health facilities are financially challenged. This is due to the disruption of the principle of the German reimbursement system, the DRG, that is particularly based on the redistribution of financial capacities in the context of health facilities. With respect to this, Federal Minister Jens Spahn assured financial support as well as the creation of respective regulative measures to cope with this challenge.

V. SPAIN

- Spain is under a state of emergency since 14 March for a period of 15 days, although Dr Fernando Simón, the government representative of health authorities, has informed the situation will be extended until 20 April, after Easter. The state of emergency applies to all national territory, peninsula and islands, and sets the government as the only competent authority, who rules along delegated authorities such as inter alia the Ministry of Health. The latter has now the possibility to intervene medicine manufacturers to ensure the supply of pharmaceuticals. Besides, freedom of movement of citizens is temporally suspended and only allowed in specific cases such as purchasing basic and essential goods, going to work and back home, going to the hospital or healthcare centres, going to the bank, and attending vulnerable people. In any case, the activities mentioned must be done individually, according to an [updated version of the decree declaring a state of emergency](#). All businesses remain closed, except for those considered essential, and so are all education centres.
- As of 16 March, **external land borders are closed**, and border controls have been restored. Only Spanish citizens, residents in Spain and other individuals under force majeure reasons are allowed to enter the country, although Spanish Foreign Affairs Minister encouraged Spaniards living abroad to remain in their current residencies. Transports to and from Spanish islands have been suspended, however basic supplies are insured.
- Within the economic contingency plan announced by the government, a decree on 12 March was released which includes EUR 18.2 billion for 2020 to strengthen the healthcare system, the wellbeing of families, and companies. Moreover, a new [decree](#) was published on 18 March to complement the latter, in which the government pledges **EUR 200 billion**, equivalent to 20% of Spanish GDP, to support families, workers, self-employed workers and companies. This liquidity-providing measure is thought to mitigate the current and future negative economic effects of COVID-19 in Spain. The decree refers specifically to vulnerable people, for whom EUR 600 million will be invested to cover basic provisions, to companies refraining from firing employees and to companies lacking from liquidity for which state loans up to EUR 150-200 billion will be made available. In terms of healthcare, EUR 30 million will be allocated to scientific research aiming at developing a treatment for COVID-19. The funding will go to the Council on Scientific Investigations (CSIC) and to the Carlos III Health Institute.

- Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez announced on 18 March the proposal to create a post COVID-19 [Committee to improve the public health system](#), as well as a white paper to analyse lessons learned and put improvements forward. Mr Sánchez showed the government's willingness to draft a national budget proposal "extremely social" aimed at strengthening the welfare state, namely the healthcare system, as soon as the coronavirus crisis is over.
- As for institutional affairs, parliamentary activity has temporarily stopped, both in the upper and lower chambers, except for COVID-19 related matters. While an extraordinary plenary session in the Spanish Congress took place on 18 March, only 23 MPs attended due to the spread of COVID-19 amongst parliamentarians. Regional elections in the Basque Country and in Galicia, due to be held on 5 April, have been suspended.

VI. UNITED KINGDOM

- On 16 March, the British Prime Minister was joined by the UK's Chief Medical and Scientific Advisers in the first of daily televised broadcasts aimed at providing greater information and reassurance to the nation over the management of the pandemic. During the press conference, the UK intensified its approach to COVID-19, enacting measures that the Government said it may introduce "at the right time, when the science indicates". The measures introduced rely on non-mandatory social distancing for the entire population. They include:
 - Avoiding contact with someone who is displaying symptoms of coronavirus
 - Whole household isolation for 14 days if any member of the household shows symptoms
 - Avoiding all but essential travel, especially in London due to its dense population and the virus spreading more rapidly in the capital, and a plea to work from home
 - Avoiding large gatherings, and gatherings in smaller public spaces such as pubs, cinemas, restaurants, theatres, bars, clubs
 - Avoiding gatherings with friends and family. An urge to keep in touch using remote technology such as by phone, internet, and social media
 - Using telephone or online services to contact a GP or other essential services
- At the same time, the UK and Scottish Parliaments placed restrictions on external visits to the Estates, mainly to limit tourists. Both Parliaments will remain open for official one-to-one meetings with stakeholders and parliamentary business will carry on as usual. All-Party Parliamentary Groups have been cancelled. Elderly policy makers are being encouraged to stay away from the estates. The Welsh Assembly is stopping all non-critical business and prohibiting the public from entering.
- People aged 70 and older, those with underlying health conditions, and those who are pregnant are asked to be particularly stringent in following social distancing measures due to an increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus.

- The Government has received criticism for its more “relaxed” approach to social distancing measures, but the Government insist measures should only be introduced at the right time to reduce the rate of infection – not prevent transmission altogether. The approach is designed to have a large effect on reducing the peak of the disease and reducing the death rate. They are introduced at a time most effective to reduce pressure on the NHS and prevent the system from becoming overwhelmed.
- New modelling by Imperial College London, which informs the Government’s approach, reckons the UK is now “approaching the fast growth part of the upward curve” and measures needed to be stepped up due to avoid a dramatic rise in deaths over the coming weeks. The measures could last up to 18 months.
- On 17 March, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak MP, set out the economic response to COVID-19 in the second daily press conference on the pandemic. Recognising the impact COVID-19 will have on individuals and businesses, the Chancellor set out an initial £330 billion bailout package, equivalent to 15% of UK GDP. He pledged to give any business which needed it, access to a government-backed loan, on attractive terms. Small and medium-sized businesses will benefit from an expansion of the new Business Interruption Loan Scheme announced in the Budget, from an original £1.2 million to £5 million of loans with six months interest-free. Large businesses will benefit from a new lending facility from the Bank of England which will provide low cost, easily accessible commercial paper. The Chancellor also announced a new power in the draft emergency legislation which will allow HM Treasury to increase its economic response.
- The Mayor of London announced late on the evening of 18 March that Transport for London will operate reduced public transport services across the capital in response to the outbreak. The services will help to ensure essential workers are able to get to work.
- On 19 March, new draft emergency legislation will be presented before Parliament which would give the Government powers allowing police and immigration authorities to detain individuals suspected of having coronavirus, including to stop any vehicle, train, vessel, or aircraft, as well as the lowering of standards in care homes to accommodate limited staff numbers, alter death requirements, lower standards for medical professional recruits, and altering the terms of the Mental Health Act to remove requirements on the number of doctors in clinics⁴. The Official Opposition is broadly supportive of the measures, but the Government have yet to formally outline the powers and nature of the Bill, which will be enforced for two-years upon Royal Assent and only on the recommendation of scientific advice.
- From 20 March, schools will close 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. A national voucher scheme will be launched to ensure children eligible for free school meals continue to get a meal each day.

⁴ The i News, <https://inews.co.uk/news/coronavirus-uk-police-powers-detain-suspected-covid-19-emergency-law-2450654>