

COVID-19 update 56 – 12-18/12/2020

A compilation of press releases/articles on policies and best practices from various EU and national information sources, and information provided by our members.

1. EU MEASURES

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) has [announced](#) that an exceptional meeting on the approval of the Pfizer/BioNtech vaccine against COVID-19 has now been scheduled for 21 December, eight days earlier than originally envisaged. **Vaccinations across the EU will begin on 27 December, provided the EMA authorises the shot. A second vaccine by Moderna will be considered by the EMA on 6 January.** Economy Commissioner Paolo Gentiloni is hoping for a **speedier recovery of the economy as vaccines become available to all Europeans**, but also noted that “a credible vaccination strategy, with all the challenges that entails in terms of both logistics and ensuring sufficient acceptance rates among the population, is essential”. (Sources: [POLITICO](#), [Euronews](#))

On 16 December, the European Commission [presented](#) a **strategy to prevent a future build-up of non-performing loans (NPLs) across the European Union, as a result of the coronavirus crisis**. The strategy aims to ensure that EU households and businesses continue to have access to the funding they need throughout the crisis. Given the impact coronavirus has had on the EU’s economy, the **volume of NPLs is expected to rise across the EU, although the timing and magnitude of this increase is still uncertain**. Depending on how quickly the EU’s economy recovers from the coronavirus crisis, banks’ asset quality – and in turn, their lending capacity – could deteriorate.

The Commission has [launched](#) a **mobile app for its web portal “Re-open EU.”** The app, available for Android and iOS devices, gives regular **updates on coronavirus health, safety and travel measures** across Europe.

EU regions get an additional €47,5 billion to tackle the local effects of the pandemic. [Funds](#) will support projects **between 1st February 2020 and the end of 2023**. The aid, dubbed REACT-EU, will be made available through the EU Structural Funds, with €37,5 billion assigned for 2021 and €10 billion for 2022.

The European Commission has greenlighted the [Pan-European Guarantee Fund](#) to **enable up to €200 billion financing for companies affected by the coronavirus outbreak in 21 Member States. The amount will be leveraged using €25 billion in public guarantees that EU countries will pool. The fund was agreed by EU leaders in April and is supposed to counter concerns** that EU countries vary in the support they can give to their businesses, and that deep-pocketed states like Germany would distribute public money generously, skewing competition within the EU. (Source: [POLITICO Pro](#))

Under the [State Aid Temporary Framework](#), the Commission has recently approved:

- a €40 million [Bulgarian](#) scheme to support small enterprises affected by the coronavirus outbreak;
- a €4,1 billion change to a [French](#) wage subsidy scheme to support businesses affected by the pandemic;
- the modification of an [Italian](#) “umbrella” scheme to support uncovered fixed costs of companies;
- a €70,8 million [Latvian](#) scheme to support companies affected by the coronavirus outbreak;
- a [Luxembourg](#) scheme to support the wine sector;
- the modification of a [Spanish](#) “umbrella” scheme to further support the economy.

2. NATIONAL MEASURES

For information on the current **provisions regarding the crossing of Single Market borders**, please consult the Commission's [Re-open EU](#) web portal.

AUSTRIA

A total of 234.880 people – which corresponds to 13,5% of the population – has taken part in **Austria's mass testing campaign** as of 14 December. Among all participants, **591 new cases without symptoms were identified**. (Source: DeHavilland)

BELGIUM

An epidemiologist at Belgium's public health institute Sciensano believes **the country's COVID-19 restrictions will have to stay in place well into the spring**. As of now, restaurants, bars and "contact professions" such as hairdressers have to remain closed until 15 January. Sciensano's Sophie Quoilin said that the development of the pandemic points to a **need for measures to remain in place for several more weeks or even months**. (Source: [POLITICO](#))

CZECH REPUBLIC

The Czech Republic is **introducing a strict Christmas lockdown**. **Restaurants, hotels and indoor sports venues will close again from 18 December** after case numbers began to rise again in recent weeks. **Retail shops are allowed to remain open, provided they enforce a cap on footfall of one person per 15 sqm of sales space**. Public gatherings will be limited to six people indoors and out, with a nationwide curfew from 11 p.m. until 5 a.m. and an early start to Christmas school. (Sources: DeHavilland, [Vlada.cz](#))

DENMARK

Denmark will impose a **hard lockdown over Christmas and the New Year** to limit the spread of COVID-19, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said on 16 December. **Shopping malls closed as of 17 December and other stores, with the exception of supermarkets and food shops, will close from 25 December**. (Source: DeHavilland)

FRANCE

Retailers are struggling to cope with the reinforced second lockdown in France. Since 15 December and for three weeks, **a curfew will be enforced across France from 8 p.m., meaning that shops and shopping centres that could open so far until 9 p.m. will now have to close at 7.45 p.m. at the latest**. Several retailers are now considering to **open their doors earlier**, especially in busy December. Auchan will open its stores from Monday to Saturday at 7.30 and close just before 8 p.m. until the end of the month. (Source: [LSA conso](#))

GERMANY

The German government announced a **reinforced lockdown as of 16 December with non-essential shops and schools closing until at least 10 January**. Christmas gatherings are to be limited to four people per

household from the closest family circle. The sale of fireworks for New Year's Eve is banned this year. (Source: [POLITICO](#))

German Retail Federation HDE is **adjusting its sales forecasts for 2020. Compared with 2019, retail trade stands to lose 20% of sales this year.** Online trade, on the other hand, grew by 20%. (Source: [HDE](#))

The Higher Administrative Court of Germany's Saarland state **has temporarily suspended the stricter access restrictions for stores with more than 800 sqm sales space.** The announcement was made in reaction to an expedited procedure launched by a local **EDEKA retailer.** In most German States, there is a limit of one person per 20 sqm in stores below 800 sqm total sales space. The cap is set at one per 10 sqm for larger stores. (Source: [Lebensmittel Zeitung](#))

Much like in spring, Germany's second "hard" lockdown is promising to be a **patchwork of regional restrictions.** Retail associations are still in the process of negotiating the details with State governments. **"Click & Collect" services for brick-and-mortar retailers are allowed in North Rhine-Westphalia, Lower Saxony, Rhineland-Palatinate and Brandenburg, but not in Baden-Württemberg.** In Hesse, DIY stores are only allowed to serve professional craftsmen. Book stores remain open in Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt, but are limited to "Click & Collect" in Thuringia. (Source: [Lebensmittel Zeitung](#))

Around **100 Amazon workers in a warehouse in Garbsen near Hannover have tested positive for the coronavirus.** Now the **rest of the workforce will be tested.** Local authorities and Amazon are in contact to discuss next steps. During the busy Christmas season, more than 900 people are employed by Amazon in the warehouse. (Source: [Lebensmittel Zeitung](#))

ITALY

Italy [is considering](#) more **stringent nationwide coronavirus restrictions during the Christmas and New Year holidays, after scenes of big gatherings in many cities over the weekend raised worries of a new spike in infections.** Health Minister Roberto Speranza told State TV RAI that he hopes that more stringent measures would be taken soon to prevent a third wave of infections. (Sources: DeHavilland, [Reuters](#))

THE NETHERLANDS

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte has announced **that "the Netherlands will close for five weeks"** in an attempt to reduce the number of infections. **Non-essential shops, gyms, museums, cinemas and theatres will close. Bars and restaurants which have already been closed since mid-October will also remain shut.** People are advised to stay at home and are urged to have a maximum of two guests per day. (Source: [Guardian](#))

POLAND

Poland will enter a **national lockdown from 28 December until 17 January.** In addition to existing restrictions, hotels will close, including for business travel. **Ski slopes and shopping malls will also be closed.** (Source: [RMF24](#))

UNITED KINGDOM

One week after the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine against COVID-19 was approved in an emergency procedure by British health authorities, **137.000 people in the UK have already been vaccinated. To achieve full effectiveness, recipients need a second shot after several weeks.** (Source: [Sky News](#))

The British government has **decided to relax restrictions between 23 and 27 December for most of the country and allow for a maximum of three households to mix over Christmas.** Meanwhile, UK scientists are warning people to rethink their plans, **warning of a spike of infections even if people do follow the rules.** (Source: [Guardian](#))

London and other parts of southeast England **moved into the highest tier of lockdown restrictions on 16 December,** following soaring new case numbers. Tier 3 includes the closing of restaurants, hotels, museums, sports facilities. **Retail premises may open, provided they are accessible directly from the street, which excludes shops located in shopping malls.** (Sources: [BBC](#), [gov.uk](#))

The Welsh government **has announced that the entirety of Wales will move into the highest level of the country's coronavirus control plan on 28 December.** All non-essential retail shops, including contact services, leisure and fitness centres will **close at the end of trading on Christmas eve.** (Source: [gov.wales](#))

UNITED STATES

American brick-and-mortar **retailers are finding it easier to expand their e-commerce offer because of their physical stores.** 40% of US retailers are now offering click & collect services. At Walmart and Target, **growth in the C&C segment is greater than in traditional online retailing.** (Source: [Retaildive](#))