

COVID-19 update 33 – 18-24/07/2020

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

After almost five days of negotiations, the **Member States of the European Union have agreed [to a deal](#) on the Multiannual Framework for 2021-2027, the EU's next budget, and the EU's COVID-19 Recovery Plan**, dubbed "Next Generation EU" (NGEU). NGEU will remain worth €750 billion as proposed in May 2020 but will now be composed of grants worth €390 billion and loans worth €360 billion. The MFF has slightly decreased from the May 2020 proposal of €1,1 trillion to €1,07 trillion. **Notable reductions to the MFF include a 56% funding reduction to the Just Transition Fund**, a core pillar of the European Green Deal. Reductions have also been applied to InvestEU, health, migration and external action programmes (Sources: [DeHavilland](#), [Politico](#)).

The deal still needs to pass the **European Parliament where it has met some resistance**. Johan van Oortveldt, chair of the Parliament's budget committee, has stated that the Parliament could not accept the low ceilings of for the next regular budget in the deal which would mean "renouncing to the EU's long-term objectives and strategic autonomy" (Source: [Politico](#)).

The Council of the European Union has formally **[adopted the decision to postpone the VAT e-commerce package by 6 months to 1 July 2021 instead of 1 January 2021](#)**. The decision was first announced by the Commission in June in the context of the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. NATIONAL MEASURES

Cicero/amo has compiled a [Summer Holiday Tracker](#) for an overview of **travel restrictions that remain in place** across the EU during the summer.

AUSTRIA

Following a spike in infections, **Austria is re-introducing obligatory mask-wearing in stores, banks and post offices on 23 July**. In a tweet, Federal Chancellor Kurz stated that wearing a mask also had a symbolic effect, signalling that the pandemic is not over. He stressed: "Our motto remains the same: as much freedom as possible, as many restrictions as necessary" (Source: [Lebensmittelzeitung](#)).

BELGIUM

In the context of a recent increase of infections, Belgium has **postponed the planned next round of lifting restrictions**. Health Minister De Block announced that there will be no easing of restrictions in early August, as originally planned. She also **suggested that the mandatory wearing of face masks could be extended to all public places in Belgium** (Source: [Politico](#)).

FRANCE

France has made **face coverings compulsory in all enclosed public spaces following new COVID-19 outbreaks**. France's Health Minister has said that there are around 400-500 active clusters of the virus in the country, especially in the North West and East. Anyone found without a mask in these public spaces **could be fined €135** (Source: DeHavilland, [BBC](#)).

French **food retailers welcomed the announcement**. A cashier at Intermarché told TV1 that **“fewer and fewer customers had worn masks in the past weeks, so the obligation comes as a relief”**. Edouard Leclerc, president of the Leclerc retail chain, welcomed the **clarification after weeks of uncertainty** for retailers wanting to enforce mask-wearing on their premises. (Source: [LSA conso](#)).

Research firm Nielsen has established that **almost €175 million were generated by the sale of masks in French supermarkets**. Hydroalcoholic gels, another protective product, made up a turnover of €78 million (Source: [LSA conso](#)).

GERMANY

German scientists are **planning to conduct an experiment, in which 4.000 music fans** will be equipped with **tracking gadgets and bottles of fluorescent disinfectant** to try to find out more about how the spread of COVID-19 in large gatherings can be reduced. The experiment is due to take place on 22 August (Source: DeHavilland, [Guardian](#)).

Many German **consumers still consciously spend less money than usual, according to a study by the market research company Nordlight Research**. The researchers found at least two reasons for consumers' frugality: On the one hand, a third of households say they have less income than before the onset of the crisis. On the other hand, two thirds of the respondents state that shopping in brick-and-mortar stores is *less fun* than before Corona (Source: [Lebensmittelzeitung](#)).

GREECE

Greece's **decision to open up to tourists has not paid off following a recent spike in infections and a muted economic response**. Hotels on the mainland are only a quarter full and the number of air passengers arriving to Greece is down by 93% over last year's figure. Visitors are still met with some restrictions: the government has banned the popular local village festivals until the end of July at least. **Since 18 July, supermarket employees and customers have to wear face masks in stores**. Those not wearing masks can be **fined up to €150** (Source: DeHavilland/[Politico](#)).

IRELAND

The Irish government announced it will continue to support the Pandemic Unemployment Payment programme (PUP) until April 2021, but will close the scheme to new applicants from September. The government also announced a **cut of VAT rates from 23% to 21% between September 2020 and February 2021**, as well as a new help-to-buy scheme for homebuyers. **A “Staycation Subsidy” will allow people who spend at least €625 in Irish hotels and**

restaurants to claim back an income tax credit worth €125 if they upload their receipts to an app on their phone (Sources: [The Irish Times](#)).

On 21 July, the government announced that it had decided to **drop entry restrictions for people coming from countries with a similar or lower rate of infection** and was planning to drop the 14-day quarantine requirement for travellers arriving from a “green list” of 15 European countries (Source: DeHavilland).

ITALY

The Italian island of Capri has **ordered a face mask crackdown after a major influx of tourists ignoring social distancing rules**. The island’s mayor has announced that masks must be worn at all times outside in the evening from 6pm to 4am on weekends (Source: [The Telegraph](#)).

LUXEMBOURG

The small Grand Duchy now has the **most cases of the coronavirus per capita**. Authorities register 50 new infections per 100.000 inhabitants per week. According to a Rudi Balling, scientific advisor to the government of Luxembourg, **around one fifth of cases can be attributed to the many employees from neighbouring regions commuting** to the country every day (Source: [Spiegel Online](#)).

ROMANIA

Romania is seeing a **new spike in coronavirus infections**. On 22 July, the government announced that over 1.000 new cases were registered in the past 24 hours alone, a new record in the country. **In consequence, the government has** extended a state of alert, in place since 15 May, by another 30 days until the middle of August. The new spike is partly the result of a **legislative void after the Constitutional Court required the hospitalization and isolation of suspected cases to be based in a law** approved by parliament instead of cabinet decrees. This law finally came into effect on 12 July, but only after **thousands of infected people had walked out of hospitals** without treatment in the days before (Source: [Reuters](#)).

SPAIN

Infection rates are also up in Spain. **Cases are now at 27,39 per 100.000 inhabitants, which marks a sharp incline of 8,76 per 100.000 reported on the 3 July**. Fernando Rodríguez Artalejo, the spokesperson of the Spanish Epidemiology Association, has said that the **outbreak of cases in Catalonia, the Basque region and Aragon are of most concern**. He stated: “The situation in these regions is very worrying,” he explains. “If they are not controlled immediately and thoroughly, we will have a very complicated situation.” (Source: [euobserver](#), [El Pais](#)).

SWEDEN

Meanwhile, the pandemic situation is developing in an encouraging direction in Sweden. The **numbers for deaths and severe cases of COVID-19 are declining**. Chief epidemiologist Anders Tegnell warned his compatriots to “**travel responsibly and minimise contacts**” to avoid new chains of infection during the summer (Source: [Politico](#)).

UNITED KINGDOM

Following several outbreaks at food production sites, the UK government is set to **updates its [guidance](#) for food businesses**. The update is expected to include more clarity on the processes to follow in the event of an outbreak of the coronavirus (Source: [IGD](#)).

Face masks will become mandatory for public transport, shops and supermarkets across the UK from 24 July. In preparation, the government has issued [guidelines](#) for the correct use of masks (Source: [ACS](#)).

UNITED STATES

In the United States, too, **more and more retailers are mandating the use of face-masks in stores**. From 20 July, the Walmart group requires the use of masks for all its stores in America. Kroger, Home Depot and Aldi announced similar measures for late July (Source: [LSA conso](#)).