

COVID-19 update 55 – 4-11/12/2020

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

EU leaders finally reached a **compromise on the EU's next budget and the recovery fund "Next Generation EU", together amounting to €1,8 billion**. EU leaders had originally agreed on the deal in the summer. However, in recent weeks, **Poland and Hungary had threatened to veto the deal over its "rule of law mechanism"**, which the European Parliament had strongly insisted on. A compromise involving an explanatory note and more liberal deadlines for the application of the mechanism finally led to a breakthrough. Commission President **Ursula von der Leyen said the agreement "underlined Europe's ability to come together and act"** in the face of the "worst crisis" the bloc has faced. (Source: [eureporter](#))

The European Commission has [prolonged for two years](#) the **validity of several EU State aid rules applicable in the agricultural, forestry and fisheries sectors, which would otherwise expire at the end of 2020**. This includes an extension, until 31 December 2022, of the EU Guidelines for State aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas, the Block Exemption Regulations applicable to State aid in the areas of agriculture, forestry, fishery and aquaculture, as well as the Regulation on de minimis aid for fishery and aquaculture.

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

- a [Danish](#) umbrella scheme to support self-employed undertakings;
- a €10 million [Estonian](#) scheme to support research and development by companies affected by coronavirus outbreak, as well as coronavirus-related research and development;
- the prolongation of a [Finnish](#) short-term export-credit insurance scheme;
- a €132,5 million [Hungarian](#) aid scheme to support catering, culture, sports and accommodation sectors;
- a €625 million [Italian](#) scheme to support tour operators and travel agencies affected by coronavirus outbreak, the modification of an [Italian](#) scheme to support companies active in agriculture, forestry, fishery, aquaculture and related sectors, and a €500 million scheme to sustain business activities in historic centres of the most touristic [Italian](#) cities;
- a €1,5 million [Luxembourg](#) scheme to support the meat sector;
- a €500 million [Spanish](#) reinsurance scheme to support the trade credit insurance market.

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

Austria has **launched its mass antibody testing campaign**. Federal Chancellor Sebastian Kurz encouraged the population to participate. **Several hundred infected persons were already discovered due to the campaign, he said**. In the Tyrol region, over a third of all eligible have already been tested. (Sources: [Der Standard](#), [Spiegel Online](#))

The Austrian government **has decided that hotels will have to remain closed until at least mid-January to discourage skiing vacations**. Ski lifts, however, will remain open, which some observers believe could lead to people hosting tourists illegally. (Source: DeHavilland)

BELGIUM

The Walloon regional government has **decided to extend the region's curfew between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. until 15 January**. On Christmas Eve, however, the curfew will only start at midnight and last until 6 a.m. on Christmas Day. (Sources: POLITICO, [Le Soir](#))

FRANCE

According to a survey by FoxIntelligence, the **big winners of the two lockdowns periods are e-commerce for non-food, and delivery services and click-and-collect services for the food sector**. Intermarché, Apple and delicacies store La Bella Vie were especially successful online. (Source: [LSA conso](#))

GERMANY

Germany is **debating whether to increase the level of restrictions as case numbers remain high even during the country's "lockdown light"**. The public health experts of the Leopoldina academy recommend that Germany impose a **"hard" two-phase lockdown beginning in the week of 14 December**. In a first phase, citizens should reduce contacts and work from home, kids would not be required to attend school. In a **second phase, after Christmas eve, non-essential shops should close again**, and larger gatherings be banned. Federal chancellor Angela Merkel has expressed her support for the plan, but depends on the cooperation of the heads of Germany's Federal States to implement the measures. (Sources: [POLITICO](#), [Manager Magazin](#))

In the eastern State of Saxony, a **"hard" lockdown was already announced for 14 December, by which date schools, day-care centres and many stores will have to close**. Only "essential stores" will be allowed to remain open. Saxony had been largely unaffected by the first wave but has now become a hot spot in COVID-19 infections. Meanwhile, the **government of Bavaria has announced that it is also pondering stricter measures**. Minister-President Markus Söder is backing the Leopoldina recommendations. (Source: [Tagesschau](#))

REWE is struggling to keep up with orders on its online platform. Delivery slots are often booked out for days. The Rhine area, Berlin and Leipzig are especially affected. (Source: [Supermarktblog](#))

German Retail Federation HDE has **demanded an extension for the temporarily lowered VAT rate that applies in Germany since the summer**. According to HDE, the measure has

shown little effect and many retailers have not even recouped the cost of its implementation. (Source: [Lebensmittel Zeitung](#))

An EDEKA retailer from North Rhine-Westphalia has **filed an urgent appeal against the access restrictions to counter coronavirus infections**. Operators of larger stores feel discriminated because shores with more than **800 sqm of sales space are subject to tighter restrictions than smaller shops**. (Source: [Lebensmittel Zeitung](#))

GREECE

The Greek government has **extended its lockdown that has been in place since late November until 7 January. Schools, restaurants, clubs and courts remain closed**. Travel between regions is suspended unless for "a valid reason". A curfew between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. remains in place. **Citizens are to stay at home and teleworking is mandatory**. Valid exceptions from the rule are groceries, caring for elderly family members, and sport. (Source: [Spiegel Online](#))

ITALY

Italy is **restricting the movement between regions from 21 December until 6 January**. Furthermore, it will not be possible to move outside one's town or city of residence on the three days of Christmas and New Year's Eve. From 4 December and until 6 January, **shops will be allowed to stay open until 9 p.m. to avoid overcrowding, but malls will be closed over the weekend**. (Source: DeHavilland)

HUNGARY

The **Hungarian government has announced that it will maintain the current level of restrictions until at least 11 January**. Measures include a curfew between 8 p.m. and 5 a.m. and **limits on footfall** in stores. (Source: DeHavilland)

Over the past months, **SPAR Hungary has joined the campaign "Buy domestic! Support domestic!"** to support local producers during the pandemic. (Source: [SPAR International](#))

LITHUANIA

The Lithuanian **government decided to further extend the existing nationwide lockdown to 31st December**. (Source: DeHavilland)

LUXEMBOURG

The government has **announced that COVID-19 restrictions will be extended until mid-January**. Under the country's current restrictions, restaurants cafes and bars remain closed, a night curfew runs from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m. and up to two guests from the same household are allowed to visit another home. (Source: DeHavilland)