

COVID-19 update 70 – 17/08-20/09/2021

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

The European company database [Hit Horizons](#) analysed the changes in sales across the entire industry during the corona crisis, with a focus on companies with an annual turnover of more than one million euros. According to Eurostat figures, **the increase in e-commerce sales was 25 percent**, in previous years the growth was between seven and ten percent. The turnover limit of one billion euros was exceeded in five countries in 2020, number one was Germany with six billion euros. However, only 24.772 online retailers are active in Germany, fifth place. The largest number of providers, 82.993, is found in Great Britain. (Source: [e-tailment](#))

The pandemic has also led to a change in shopping behaviours in the food industry. The proportion of consumers who also buy their groceries on the Internet has risen from 16 percent before Corona to 26 percent now, reports [Bitcom](#) after a new representative survey. The most hard-working group are the 30 to 49 year olds, 36 percent buy online, the 16 to 29 year old 32 percent, of the buyers between 50 and 64 years it is 26 percent, of the older only 8 percent use the Internet. Farm shops and vegetable boxes get the best notes from the providers, they are used by ten percent of the buyers, all other retailers only have single-digit values. Delivery services were only used by seven percent. In the meantime, however, there is a way back to the grocery stores, 82 percent are shopping in the supermarket again. (Source: [e-tailment](#))

In a rapidly changing retail environment, shopper marketing demands a fresh look at shopping experience, segmentation, and retail communication. The crisis has interrupted several trends: the growth of entertainment, leisure and air travel, for example. Other trends have accelerated: digitisation, the importance of health and sustainability. Some trends have even been reversed, such as urbanisation and out-of-home consumption. The question is: Which of these will stick around? This uncertain future will be the main topic of the [Trade & Shopper Marketing Congress](#), which will take place on **Thursday 30 September** at RetailDetail's event venue in Shopping Stadsfeestzaal in Antwerp. It will be a hybrid event: 200 tickets are available for participants who want to experience the congress COVID-proof on-site. Others can follow the live stream remotely. More info and tickets can be found [through this link](#). (Source: [RetailDetail](#))

1. EU MEASURES

In the latest public opinion survey of the European Parliament:

- Four out of five respondents (81%) say the EU should only provide funds to Member States that respect the rule of law and democratic principles. It is noteworthy that citizens of Hungary and Poland put the item 'democracy and the rule of law', which on EU average comes in eighth position, at the very top of their priorities for the Parliament (2nd in Poland, 3rd in Hungary).

- 60% of Europeans expect NextGenerationEU projects to help their country overcome the economic and social damage brought about by the coronavirus pandemic.
- 41% question the capacity of their national governments to use the funds properly.

A Eurobarometer survey published on 10 September by the European Parliament ahead of the State of the European Union event on 15 September shows clear public support for transparency and effective control of EU funds disbursed in the framework of the NextGenerationEU programme. Citizens also assess the premise of the European Union's 800 billion euro recovery programme positively. However, citizens **in a range of EU countries express concerns on how well national governments will actually use these additional EU funds**. While on average 45% of citizens trust their national governments in this regard, 41% of respondents express doubts, showing significant differences in trust levels across the EU. Public opinion also clearly supports the position taken recently by the European Parliament in the debate on the need for conditionality, control and transparency.

Asked which issues the European Parliament should pursue as its political priorities, respondents put **actions against climate change back in first place**, backed by 43% of citizens. Further priorities considered by respondents (which match Parliament's priorities for the post-pandemic recovery) are **measures to fight poverty and social exclusion (32%), support for the economy and to create new jobs as well as fight against terrorism (both 31%)**. Public health as well as migration and asylum come in joint fourth position with 27% each.

The survey was conducted for the European Parliament by Ipsos European Public Affairs from 17-25 August 2021, online with 26.459 respondents aged 15 years and older, in all 27 Member States. The sample size per country was 500 interviews in Luxembourg, Cyprus, Malta and 1.000 interviews in all other EU countries.

Detailed presentation of the survey results, national factsheets as well as the complete data tables can be found here: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/heard/eurobarometer/soteu-flash-survey>

NextGenerationEU – The European Commission disburses several billions to various countries under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)

The pre-financing payment will help kick-start the implementation of the crucial investment and reform measures in those countries. The Commission will authorise further disbursements based on the implementation of the investments and reforms outlined in each country's recovery and resilience plan.

- On 17 August the European Commission has disbursed €9 billion to [Spain](#) and €289 million to Lithuania in the form of pre-financing. Over the life of their plans, Spain is expected to receive €69,5 billion in total and [Lithuania](#) €2,22 billion in total, in the form of grants.
- On 19 August the European Commission has disbursed €5,1 billion in pre-financing to [France](#), i.e. 13% of the financial allocation allocated to this country under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (FRR). Over the life of its plan, France is expected to receive a total of €39,4 billion in the form of subsidies.

- On 26 August the European Commission has disbursed €2,25 billion to [Germany](#) in pre-financing, equivalent to 9% of the country's financial allocation under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). The country is set to receive €25,6 billion in total, fully consisting of grants, over the lifetime of its plan.
- On 2 September the European Commission has disbursed €201 million (1,5 billion kr.) to [Denmark](#) in pre-financing, equivalent to 13% of the country's financial allocation under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). The country is set to receive €1,5 billion (11,5 billion kr.) in total, fully consisting of grants, over the lifetime of its plan.
- On 9 September the European Commission has disbursed €157 million to [Cyprus](#) in pre-financing, equivalent to 13% of the country's financial allocation under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). The country is set to receive €1,2 billion in total over the lifetime of its plan, with €1 billion provided in grants and €200 million in loans.
- On 10 September the European Commission has disbursed €237 million to [Latvia](#) in pre-financing, equivalent to 13% of the country's financial contribution as established in the Council Implementing Decision. The country is set to receive €1,8 billion in total, fully consisting of grants, over the lifetime of its plan.
- On 17 September the European Commission has disbursed €231 million to [Slovenia](#) in pre-financing, equivalent to 13% of the country's grant allocation under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). The country is set to receive €2,5 billion in total, consisting of €1,8 billion in grants and €705 million in loans, over the lifetime of its plan.

NextGenerationEU – European Commission endorses Malta's €316,4 million recovery and resilience plan

On 16 September the European Commission [has adopted](#) a positive assessment of [Malta's](#) recovery and resilience plan. This is an important step towards the EU disbursing €316,4 million in grants under the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). This financing will support the implementation of the crucial investment and reform measures outlined in Malta's recovery and resilience plan. The Commission assessed Malta's plan based on the criteria set out in the RRF Regulation. The Council will now have, as a rule, four weeks to adopt the Commission's proposal. The RRF is at the heart of NextGenerationEU which will provide €800 billion (in current prices) to support investments and reforms across the EU.

NextGenerationEU – European Commission gearing up for issuing €250 billion of NextGenerationEU green bonds

On 7 September the European Commission [has adopted](#) an independently evaluated Green Bond framework, thus taking a step forward towards the issuance of up to €250 billion green bonds, or 30% of NextGenerationEU's total issuance. The framework provides investors in these bonds with confidence that the funds mobilised will be allocated to green projects and that the Commission will report on its environmental impact.

Now that the framework has been adopted, the Commission will soon proceed with the first green bond issuance in the month of October, subject to market conditions.

In line with standard practice, the framework will report on both allocation and impact. For the allocation reporting, the Commission will use Member States' data on spending on green projects. An independent external auditor will verify the allocation reporting.

Impact reporting will be a cross-Commission exercise. This reporting will allow investors in NextGenerationEU green bonds to gauge the beneficial impact of their investment.

NextGenerationEU – Fourth bond issuance maintains strong momentum for EU borrowing for recovery

On 14 September the European Commission [has raised](#) a further €9 billion to support Europe's recovery from the coronavirus crisis and its consequences, through the fourth NextGenerationEU bond issuance since the start of the programme in mid-June. The European Commission issued a 7-year bond due on 4 October 2028. The bond was largely oversubscribed – over 11 times, with books exceeding €103 billion.

The strong demand confirms the ongoing interest by investors in EU securities, which enabled the Commission to place the bonds under very favourable pricing conditions, fully in line with the remarkable performance of the NextGenerationEU programme so far.

Following this transaction, the Commission has so far raised €54 billion under NextGenerationEU.

The Commission will issue EU-Bills exclusively via its new auction platform and following [its detailed issuance calendar for 2021](#).

Commission gives green light to new synthetic securitisation product under the European Guarantee Fund to further support SMEs affected by the coronavirus outbreak in 22 Member States

On 17 August the European Commission has [approved](#), under EU State aid rules, the introduction of a new product in the form of guarantees on synthetic securitisation tranches under the European Guarantee Fund managed by the European Investment Bank Group (consisting of the European Investment Bank – EIB – and the European Investment Fund – EIF) to support companies affected by the coronavirus outbreak in the 22 participating Member States. With an envisaged dedicated budget of €1,4 billion, the new product is expected to mobilise at least €13 billion of new lending to SMEs affected by the outbreak. This is a significant contribution to the overall target for the European Guarantee Fund to mobilise up to €200 billion of additional financing in the 22 participating Member States. The purpose of the new product is to help originate new, riskier lending by financial intermediaries to SMEs. The aim is to free up lending capacity of financial intermediaries and prevent that their resources are shifted towards lower-risk assets instead of loans to SMEs.

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

- a €500 million [Greek aid scheme](#) to support uncovered fixed costs of companies affected by the coronavirus outbreak;
- a €1,24 billion [Italian scheme](#) to support companies hiring young workers in the context of the coronavirus outbreak.

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.

For an update on the current restrictions in the Member States *in French* consult the [Toute l'Europe website](#).

AUSTRIA

Federal Minister of the Interior, Karl Nehammer, visited the SPAR logistics centre in St. Pölten and on behalf of the government, he thanked the SPAR team for their excellent performances in difficult times.

With eight logistics centres and about 1.580 stores, **SPAR Austria** is an essential part of the national food supply. Approximately 8,9 million Austrians rely on continuous access to everyday products. At SPAR, regional and locally sourced products are given priority.

The safety of employees and customers was high on the agenda during the visit of the Minister of the Interior. SPAR has invested in safety for years and has been a partner of the Ministry's 'GEMEINSAM.SICHER' ('Safety for all') initiative from the start. As part of this initiative, workshops and training courses on safety are held regularly at SPAR stores. The aim is to improve the safety of everyone, to prepare employees for unpleasant situations and to combat organised crime and cybercrime in retail. (Sources: SPAR International, [SPAR Österreich](#))

The Austrian government decided it would tighten COVID measures again as of 15 September. Since the objective is vaccination, not lockdown, the measures will apply to the unvaccinated only, in order to protect them and to protect hospitals from becoming overloaded. As a result, **unvaccinated people will be required to wear FFP2 masks in non-essential shops** such as clothing retailers, stationery shops and other retailers where non-essential items are sold. Those who are vaccinated will not need to wear a mask in these areas, although masks are still recommended. One change which applies to **both vaccinated and unvaccinated people is that FFP2 masks will again be required in supermarkets** and public transport; currently, only cloth face coverings are required here.

Bed occupancy in the intensive care units should become the new lead indicator for COVID-19 measures instead of the seven-day incidence. (Source: [The Local](#))

BELGIUM

The COVID pandemic caused major shifts in consumer spending: Last year, Belgians spent significantly more money on food and alcohol and much less on clothes according to the numbers from Belgian statistical office Statbel. Last year a household spent an average of 35.209 euros, more than 500 euros less than two years earlier. Spending on food and non-alcoholic beverages rose by 12% compared to 2018. Belgians spent more on bread and cereal products (+ 6%), fruit (+ 10%), milk (+ 10%), meat (+ 12%), fish and shellfish (+ 15%), coffee (+ 23%) and vegetables (+ 26%). These numbers are consequences of the closure of the

hospitality industry, of course. People cooked at home more often, and spending on takeaway meals tripled.

Spending on alcohol also went up: Belgians bought 10% more alcoholic drinks, roughly 600 euros per household. The biggest risers were soft drinks with alcohol, of which sales tripled. There were also significant increases for wine (+ 7%), beer (+ 14%) and spirits (+ 18%).

As people stayed in their homes, they also spent more on their interiors: furniture sales increased by 30%, household textiles by 20% and garden items by 16%. Belgians also bought more vacuum cleaners and air conditioners.

One of the big sufferers from the COVID crisis was the fashion industry: spending dropped by as much as 30%. Men spent half as much on shirts and 71% less on suits. Women spent 27% less on trousers, 39% less on blouses and 22% less on bras. (Source: [RetailDetail](#))

GERMANY

“With all that we know today, we can avoid a new lockdown for those who have been vaccinated and those who have recovered. And that also means: restaurants and shops can stay open in winter.” With this sentence, reproduced by Handelsblatt.com, Federal Minister of Economics Peter Altmaier (CDU) confirms earlier statements by the government. Federal Minister of Justice Christine Lambrecht also said (according to Welt.de): “a new lockdown would hardly be justifiable”. Anyone who decides not to be vaccinated can hardly expect that the fundamental rights of the entire population will be encroached on so deeply. (Source: [etailment](#))

With the vaccination campaign “[Choose life over lockdown](#)” („Leben statt Lockdown“), which was launched two weeks ago, the retail sector has already been able to reach several million people and increase the number of people vaccinated. The aim of the campaign is to provide information about the corona vaccination and, together with testimonials from professional sports and medicine, to motivate them to vaccinate.

The campaign, which is supported by more than 30 retailers, the German Retail Federation (HDE) and other organisations, has grown into the largest privately organised vaccination campaign in Germany.

With posters in shop windows and checkout areas as well as brochures in several languages, the vaccination campaign recorded more than 200 million customer contacts at the point of sale within two weeks. Vaccination offers on site were also accepted, over 100.000 vaccine doses were administered in shopping centers. (Source: [Lebensmittel Zeitung](#))

LITHUANIA

On 13 September Lithuania made it mandatory for its citizens to obtain national COVID-19 certificates in order to have access to essential goods stores, major shopping malls, and marketplaces larger than 1.500 square metres. (Source: DeHavilland)

SLOVENIA

Slovenia has expanded the recovered-tested-vaccinated rule, its main tool in combating a surging fourth COVID-19 wave. All those who come into contact with other persons or are involved in settings or activities where there is a direct risk of an outbreak must meet the recovered-tested-vaccinated requirement. For the unvaccinated and those who have not had yet caught COVID-19, this means they will have to undergo mandatory testing once a week. The rule now applies to staff in sectors including healthcare, public administration, education, social services, retail, cultural activities, and sports. Police officers and security services staff are covered as well. Face masks are mandatory in most indoor settings, including shops and schools. Exemptions include children up to the age of 12, parents bringing young children to kindergarten or school, and customers of certain services and retail establishments. The new rules took effect on 6 September but the government has said it expects compliance to be gradual considering how sweeping the change is. (Source: [Euractiv](#))