



SIGMA

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Public Administration: Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic

*Mapping the EU member states' public administration responses to the COVID-19 pandemic
(for EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood countries)*

PART 1

Functioning of the Government, policy co-ordination and decision-making process

1-7 April 2020

This informal mapping exercise was prepared by internal and external SIGMA experts, following a discussion with the European Commission, using publicly available information and some informal insights (collected between 1 and 7 April 2020). It provides a summary of how EU member states and selected OECD countries have managed the COVID-19 crisis initial stage with regard to the functioning of the government and the public administration. The mapping has been compiled as a source of information and inspiration for decision-making and decision implementation by policymakers in EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood countries.

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How is the Government (Council of Ministers) functioning (organisation of virtual meetings, remote sessions etc.)?

AUSTRIA

Tools in place are Skype for Business and Cisco WebEx. Citrix is also used, especially by individuals who do not have an official 'job-laptop'. The core/top crisis management team (consisting of the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Minister of Health and Minister of Interior) are also meeting in person before taking major decisions of strategic importance as well as speaking at joint press conferences.

The Council of Ministers is meeting by video-conferencing only, however the legal aspect of "presence quorum" is possibly not totally clear and might be legally questionable.

BELGIUM

As health care is not (only) a federal competence and the different regions are largely autonomous in this area, co-ordination is always a challenge and even more in the case of crisis management. Eight (8) Ministers are responsible on the different levels. General co-ordination normally takes place in the form of inter-ministerial conferences. These conferences, organised twice a year, are non-decision making, but aim to exchange information and co-ordinate policy. On 2 March 2020, an inter-ministerial conference was held on the COVID-19 crisis.

Since 12 March 2020, Belgium has moved into the "federal phase of crisis management", which means health is managed at national level, by the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry (called the Federal Public Service – FPS). In this context, the National Security Council takes policy decisions, the various inter-ministerial, interdepartmental and interregional crisis units concretise these decisions. This is co-ordinated by the National Crisis Centre (NCCN).

Strategic and policy-making bodies for decision-making

Since the start of this pandemic, the political authorities have taken decisions based on the recommendations of the health experts in this field.

- **The National Security Council (NSC)**, which essentially consists of the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Ministers, has been extended to include the Ministers-President of the Regions and Communities. This collegiate body takes the policy decisions for managing the crisis.
- **The Federal Co-ordination Committee (COFECO)** is chaired by the NCCN. Management of the medical aspects is specifically co-ordinated by the FPS Public Health (hospital capacity, personal protective equipment, testing, etc.). COFECO is made up of the Chair of the Risk Management Group (RMG, see below) and representatives of the Prime Minister, the Federal Ministers for Home Affairs, Justice, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Public Health, Budget, Mobility, Defence, Employment and Labour, as well as the Ministers-President of the Regions and Communities. The following administrations are also represented: the FPSs Public Health, Mobility, Economy and Defence as well as the regional crisis centres and the federal police. The committee prepares and co-ordinates the implementation of the policy decisions of the NSC at strategic level.

To implement these strategic and policy decisions, consultations are organised with the Provincial Governors, the Senior Official of Brussels and the Minister-President of the Brussels-Capital Region, so that they in turn can co-ordinate actions at municipal level.

Consultations between public health actors

Since January 2020, and the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in China, three bodies have come together to ensure that the health situation is monitored:

- **The Risk Assessment Group (RAG)** analyses the risk to the public based on epidemiological and scientific data. The group is chaired by Sciensano (Government Research Institution) and is made up of experts from Sciensano and the health authorities.

- *The **Risk Management Group (RMG)** takes measures to protect public health, based on the advice of the RAG. This group is chaired by the FPS Public Health and is made up of representatives of the health authorities, both from the federal state and the federated entities.*
- *The **Scientific Committee for Coronavirus** assists the health authorities in controlling the coronavirus. The Committee provides scientific advice on the evolution of the virus and helps ensure our country is optimally prepared for the spread of this new pulmonary virus.*

*Since the start of the federal phase, these bodies have provided advice to an “**Evaluation Unit**” (CELEVAL). The cell is chaired by the FPS Public Health and is made up of representatives of Sciensano, the committee set up for COVID-19, the Superior Health Council, the administrations responsible for public health at the level of the Regions and Communities, and the FPS Home Affairs and Mobility. It advises the authorities on matters of public health, so they can take decisions to tackle the pandemic.*

Specific cells to prepare and concretise the decisions

Given the major impact of this pandemic on the entire socio-economic fabric, various crisis units have been put together to implement the crisis management:

- *The **Operational Unit**, co-ordinated by the NCCN. This unit facilitates the flow of information between the authorities, ensures that the crisis infrastructures are fully operational, and guarantees that the crisis units will be alerted if necessary.*
- *The **Socio-economic Unit** is chaired by the FPS Economy and is made up of representatives of the Ministers for the Economy, Employment and Public Health and for SMEs, as well as from the FPS Economy, Employment, and Labour, Mobility, Social Security and from the Government Department (POD) Social Integration. It carries out analyses and provides advice on the socio-economic impact of the measures already taken or that will be taken.*
- *The **Information Unit** is jointly chaired by the FPS Public Health and the NCCN. It ensures the co-ordination of all local, regional, community and federal authorities so that the crisis communication strategies and actions are coherent. It provides strategic advice to the competent authorities by basing its actions on the identified information needs of the public.*
- *The **Legal Units** are responsible for drafting the legal texts and providing answers to various legal questions raised in the context of this complex crisis management.*
- *The **International Unit** facilitates the flow of information at European level between the equivalent crisis management authorities.*
- *The **Task Force Integrated Police** co-ordinates the actions of the police services. Other units have been activated to answer various, frequently asked questions, and to verify the translations of published texts.*

*Since Thursday 19 March, the **Economic Risk Management Group (ERMG)** has also been operational to manage the economic and macroeconomic risks associated with the spread of the COVID-19 virus in Belgium (see further below on measures taken for businesses and citizens).*

CROATIA

Government sessions are being held with consideration to measures of social distancing (in larger meeting rooms, keeping distance between ministers).

Remote sessions of government are possible according to the Rules of Procedure (Article 38/3) by casting votes by phone or e-mail. Decisions taken in this way must be confirmed first following a session in the physical presence of ministers. This type of session was very seldomly organised prior to the pandemic, but since the beginning of the crisis, the Government has held several sessions by phone (13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 24, 30 March 2020).

Article 17 of the Law on Government stipulates that in extraordinary circumstances when the Government cannot convene, decisions can be taken by the “narrow cabinet” (prime minister and deputy prime

ministers). This provision could theoretically be applied to the situation of a pandemic, but it has not been applied so far.

CZECH REPUBLIC

A state of emergency was declared on 12 March by the Government in accordance with the Crisis Act of 2000. The Parliament has the power to revoke a declaration of a state of emergency but did not do so in this case. The state of emergency is in force for one month, renewable with the approval of the Parliament. During the week following the declaration, the Government issued a series of executive decrees on the basis of its emergency powers concerning, as with most other countries, closure of schools, limits on gatherings, export controls on medicines, etc. Given the geographical location of the country, a significant number of emergency measures focused on cross-border movements of people and goods and, in particular, which workers and goods are exempt from the provisions of the decrees. One particularity of the Czech Republic that was picked up by international media is its early adoption of the use of face masks, which was taken up proactively by the population – production of masks by each village, reconversion of businesses to manufacture masks, and so on – and has become a symbol of national solidarity.

The Prime Minister works through an ‘inner circle’ of key ministers, notably Interior, Health and the Deputy Prime Minister in the Government Office, rather than through normal Cabinet sessions.

Regional assemblies are expected to continue to work normally via teleconferencing or other means.

DENMARK

Official government sessions are still not remote, but physical meetings have been limited to the absolute necessary. All political parties have been asked by the Speaker of the Parliament to review their legislative agenda and cut down on new legislative initiatives. No quotas have been issued but all parties are expected to contribute. Parliamentary committees have for the first time taken up remote sessions/videoconferencing on important issues.

ESTONIA

The Government continues to work; it is possible both physically and by electronic means. The Government Office ensures the technical support. If needed, people can work in shifts to ensure that technically the Government sessions can take place anytime requested.

Everything continues as usual regarding publishing the agenda of Government sessions prior to the meeting and organising press briefings. There is a live broadcast and physical press conference as usual, however ministers now sit 2 metres apart from each other, as well as the journalists who are present.

FINLAND

The Government is meeting regularly, however, the meetings are held in bigger rooms. External experts are consulted using remote connections.

FRANCE

At the beginning of the crisis, the Government met by video-conference and also physically, respecting the recommended social distances. For the last Councils of Ministers, the meetings were held by video-conference. The Head of State, meanwhile, asked most of his advisers as of 17 April to telework like all French people, saying "we are in an exemplary regime".¹

¹ https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2020/03/19/palais-de-l-elysee-deserte-conseil-des-ministres-en-visio-et-dossiers-a-l-arret-le-quotidien-fantomatique-d-un-pouvoir-confine_6033620_823448.html

GERMANY

The Federal Government is still sitting with personal presence. When Chancellor Merkel was in quarantine, she chaired the cabinet meetings over the phone, not by video-conference. The general principles of the rules of procedure of the Government still apply and ministers are generally present at the meetings, or send their deputies. Remote meetings are not foreseen².

HUNGARY

The Government continues to function. It takes decisions and functions normally. The Rules of Procedure of the Government (1144/2010 (VII.7.)) allow for distance work/teleconferencing.

IRELAND

The Government continues in place despite the recent election resulting in a hung parliament. A new Government is expected shortly. The Government is mainly operating on a caretaker basis, though for the COVID-19 crisis it is operating substantively. However, the response to COVID-19 is cross-Government and public health-led, founded on well-established and evidence-based approaches in dealing with outbreaks of infectious disease. All parties are supportive of this approach. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the public are happy with the current approach and there is no strong demand for a change in Government yet. The necessity for a new government relates to a deadline for appointing a new Upper House for the bicameral Parliament; if the deadline passes, no legislation may be enacted.

Cabinet Sub-Committee will deal with day-to-day political matters surrounding COVID-19. In line with public health policy, the Cabinet meets on an incorporeal basis; this has been practice from time to time even before the crisis.

ITALY

During this crisis period, the Council of Ministers (CoM) has continued holding frequent meetings, discussing and approving important measures³ to manage the emergency and address immediate risks and challenges. The Government meetings, chaired by the Prime Minister, are being held at Palazzo Chigi (the official meeting place of the CoM).⁴ The CoM have not had any official meeting by video-conferencing but the Prime Minister (PM) and ministers have had frequent conference calls using video and telecommunication tools. Meetings are also being held with external partners and business groups. For example, the Prime Minister organised a virtual meeting using video-conference with ministers, business and trade union representatives on 14 March 2020 to discuss the impact of the crisis on SMEs, enterprises, the economic initiatives and workers' rights.⁵

Additionally, the decree #CuraItalia⁶ allows the regional and municipal councils and state-owned enterprises to have remote deliberations and meetings (using video-conferencing where possible).

LATVIA

The Government is fully functional and is holding regular virtual meetings and remote sessions. Provisions for those are explicitly described by the Rules of Procedure of Government⁷. Those amendments were introduced in 2016 following lessons learned from regular crisis management trainings of the Government. The State Chancellery ensures functioning of the Government during the state of emergency. This includes

² <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/geschaeftsordnung-der-bundesregierung-459846>

³ <http://www.governo.it/it/articolo/comunicato-stampa-del-consiglio-dei-ministri-n-38/14376>

⁴ <http://www.governo.it/it/tipologie-contenuto/riunioni>

⁵ <http://www.governo.it/it/articolo/coronavirus-informativa-del-presidente-conte-alla-camera/14380>

⁶ Adopted on 17 March 2020, at the 37th meeting of the Council of Ministers

⁷ Rules of Procedure of the Government (in Latvian): <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/190612-ministru-kabineta-kartibas-rullis>

the smooth running of the e-sessions software (introduced already in the early 2000's) that allows to access all documents from any place in the world, as well as casting a vote remotely, if needed.

LITHUANIA

On 26 February, Lithuania declared a state of emergency as a preventive measure against the spread of COVID-19. The Government enacted the state of emergency upon the recommendation of the State Commission of Emergency Situations issued on 24 February 2020. On 27 February, the Prime Minister appointed the Minister of Health as the Head of the Emergency Situations Operations Centre.

In response to growing criticism towards the work of the Emergency Situations Operations Centre, on 26 March the Government established an Emergency Situations Committee headed by the Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis. The mandate of the Committee is to help the Government, the Emergency Situations Commission, and the Head of Emergency Situations Operations Centre in managing a state level emergency on COVID-19. In addition to the Prime Minister, the Committee includes the Chancellor of the Government and the Ministers of Energy, Finance, National Defence, Social Security and Labour, Transport, Health, Education, Justice, Foreign and Home Affairs. The Chancellor of the Government may set up working groups to analyse and evaluate information on the state level emergency regarding COVID-19, to prepare and submit proposals to the Committee on its consequences and to monitor the implementation of the Committee's recommendations.

As it is necessary to pass numerous urgent decisions regarding the fight against COVID-19, the Government has organised six additional extraordinary Government sessions (including two held on the weekend) between 26 February and 2 April.

On 17 March 2020, the Parliament, upon proposal by the Government, adopted amendments to the Law on Government that regulate the organisation of remote Government sessions as well as their transmission in crisis periods⁸. The amendments entered into force on 19 March 2020. The first remote Government session was organised on 26 March and the second on 1 April.

The new articles in the Government law:

"6. In time of war, emergency, mobilisation, quarantine or when it is necessary to address urgently the issues necessary to ensure the state's military defence and other vital state functions, and if in these cases non-adoption of the draft legislation would immediately have negative consequences for state and public security and stability, as well as when it is necessary to declare mourning, Government meetings and consultations may take place remotely in real time by electronic means (hereinafter referred to as "remote mode"). The adoption of resolutions, decisions and resolutions of the Government in this way shall ensure the identification of a member of the Government and the results of his voting."

"3. Where, in the cases specified in Paragraph 6 of Article 37 of this Law, meetings and consultations of the Government are held at a distance, the provisions of Paragraph 1 of this Article may be waived if there are no technical possibilities for that. If the Government meeting on technical possibilities has not been broadcast on the Internet and the issues discussed are not subject to the restrictions on publicity set forth in paragraph 1 of this Article, where there is technical possibility, a video of this meeting shall be made public. A video of a government meeting held remotely may be made public depending on the technical possibilities and the nature of the issues under discussion. If a remote Government meeting or conference has not been broadcast on the Internet and its video has not been made public, the Government shall immediately inform the public of the decisions taken during that meeting."

NETHERLANDS

There are remote sessions but there also regular meetings for critical subjects, with the obligation of hygienic measures and social distancing (keeping a 1.5 metre distance etc...).

⁸ <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/4647256068f711eaa38ed97835ec4df6>

POLAND

Government (Council of Ministers) meetings are organised virtually by remote sessions.

The relevant legislation (the Law on the Council of Ministers) which should provide for a legal basis for this type of work has not yet been amended.

Remote work is organised based on the internal rulebook of the Council of Ministers which apparently does not prohibit this solution.

PORTUGAL

The Council of Ministers has held sessions and approved decisions online during the crisis. According to the rules of procedure "In case of urgency or exceptional public interest, resolutions can be taken by written decision, through the Government's IT network" provided the required quorum exists.

ROMANIA

Government meetings are possible both in remote sessions and with the presence of the members.

Between 13 and 27 March, when the Prime Minister and some members of the Government were suspected of coronavirus, only remote sessions were organised.

The Government is currently holding the sessions in presence of its members, after all of the members of the Government were tested with negative results.

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

A state of emergency was declared by the outgoing Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini a week before he left office. The response to the crisis in the Slovak Republic has been strongly influenced by the coincidence of the crisis with this political transition. The new Government is a complex coalition of different parties with very different priorities.

The outgoing Prime Minister Pellegrini, who was also Minister for Health, had been praised for reacting quickly to contain the spread of the virus through a declaration of a state of emergency several days before many of its neighbours. The Government implemented a range of measures to delay the spread of coronavirus, including social distancing, and closing borders, schools, and entertainment and hospitality premises. Despite this, the new Government has been quick to criticise the lack of preparation of its predecessor, citing lack of preventive clothing and medical equipment and a poor purchasing strategy. The new coalition Government, which was sworn in on 21 March, has pledged additional measures to both contain the spread of the disease and limit the economic fallout, which are expected to be approved shortly.

Some ministers have been appointed and Government meetings have been held in person with all participants wearing facemasks. However, appointments to senior positions are still being made and most key policies are still being developed and negotiated among the coalition partners. As yet, no coalition agreement has been published.

In practice, the response to the crisis is led directly by the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister for Investment, and details of economic and social measures are starting to be announced, but the Government's strategy is still in flux and depends on political negotiation. A Central Crisis Staff unit has been set up composed of staff from the CoG and key line ministries (Health, Interior...) to ensure the smooth implementation of the basic rules relating to the state of emergency, and this body will be responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of the Government's strategy once it is developed.

SLOVENIA

The Government holds sessions both with the presence of its members and remotely. Sessions with ministers physically present are held taking into account social distancing measures and all persons present wear protective masks.

Remote sessions have been practiced for a number of years and are regulated in the Rules of Procedure of the Government. They are envisaged for matters of urgency. Remote sessions are convened by the Prime Minister and technically executed by the Secretary General of the Government. Ministers are informed about the sessions, agenda items and timing via short telephone messages. They can comment on the proposal and cast their vote through the government information system (“e-sessions”). If at least three ministers oppose dealing with an item in remote session, the agenda item is transferred to a regular session. In remote sessions, special rules apply as to quorum and the majority needed for taking a decision. Namely, the decision is considered approved if the majority of Government members does not oppose the decision. This means that there exists a strong presumption of approval of the proposal.

SPAIN

Online Government meetings are now possible and valid in emergency situations (“...may hold sessions, adopt agreements and approve minutes at a distance by electronic means”), after amendment of the Law on Government.

SWEDEN

No changes to normal routine. The general recommendations of not arranging physical meetings with many participants (max 50) is followed.

THE UNITED KINGDOM

The UK Cabinet continues functioning fully. It held its first-ever virtual meeting on 31 March 2020. This practice is likely to continue in the near future, considering that the Prime Minister (PM) and the Health Secretary are currently ill with COVID-19 and are isolated. The video connection was organised using the Zoom platform, and there followed reports in the media about risks to privacy and confidentiality (especially after the PM published a screenshot of the virtual Cabinet meeting, showing the Zoom meeting room number). However, as the meeting was password-protected, there were no subsequent issues. Additional Cabinet committees have been established to deal with the current situation, with more frequent meetings. Daily briefings and advice are issued by the PM’s Office/Number 10.

KOREA

Korea has been widely credited with having one of most effective overall policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis, combining effective preventive measures with the use of technology and fast-tracked innovations to monitor the spread of the disease and better-targeted policy responses. While some measures have been controversial -for example, people who are confirmed to have COVID-19 are tracked by GPS, and a live map of their locations (without their names) is available for anyone wishing to avoid them – overall, the policy has been based on transparency and engagement with citizens and civil society organisations.

Korea’s Government has expressed its willingness to share its quarantine and treatment experience in the COVID-19 outbreak as well as relevant clinical data with the international community, and has been contacted by EU members (e.g. Bulgaria, Denmark) for advice.

The Government continues to meet in person, though usually as a restricted Cabinet of senior ministers, all wearing face masks and with an empty seat between each participant. At present, these meetings take place on a daily basis.

**How are the crisis management and external communications co-ordinated within the Government?
What is the role of the CoG in this? Is there a central strategy/guidance?**

AUSTRIA

Each ministry has formed a crisis management team, responsible for the agenda of the very institution. The cabinet of the Chancellor is permanently/physically present.

BELGIUM

Although the Belgian Constitution does not contain an emergency clause – on the contrary, Article 187 explicitly states that no provision of the Constitution can be suspended – Belgian constitutional law provides an instrument called ‘special powers’ legislation (based on Article 105 of the Constitution). These allow unusually wide delegations of legislative powers from the Parliament to the Government. They even include the power to abolish, complement, amend or replace existing Acts of Parliament.

Special powers legislation has to meet a number of requirements. First, the presence of a “crisis” or “exceptional circumstances” is required. This is largely a political qualification – judicial oversight is deferential. Second, special powers can only be granted for a limited period, ideally a matter of months. Third, the goal and object of the special powers has to be narrowly defined. Fourth, special powers legislation does not allow the Government to violate higher norms (including the Constitution, European law, and federalism). If special powers touch upon matters that are constitutionally reserved for Parliament, the decrees taken in application of those special powers need to be ratified by the Parliament within a specified period of time. Failure to do this means that the decrees are deemed to have never existed. Parliament can subject the granting of special powers to other conditions, such as reporting.

Special powers legislation can be attacked in the Constitutional Court. Special powers decrees taken in application of the legislation can be taken to the Council of State, Administrative Litigation Section (unless they are ratified by the Parliament, in which case the body to turn to is the Constitutional Court).

At the federal level, the process was delayed until 19 March 2020, as the current Federal Government was a caretaker Government with limited powers until then. Although it would have been technically possible to grant special powers to a caretaker Government (it can, in any case, take “urgent” measures), this would have created a strange political situation. On 19 March 2020, a minority Government received the confidence of the Parliament and also of the opposition, with the explicit aim of addressing the COVID-19 crisis. A special powers bill provides a wide range of possibilities to combat the COVID-19 crisis from a public order and healthcare perspective, but it also allows for support measures to companies and families, to safeguard economic continuity and financial stability, to secure the continuity of the courts, and to implement European decisions with regard to the crisis. The right to rule by power of Decree is valid for a maximum of six months and to be evaluated by Parliament after three months. The Government can decide rapidly on measures related to public health, social, economical and security issues without discussion and approval in Parliament. The Government can ignore the advice of the Council of State for some decisions, including public order and healthcare measures.

CROATIA

The Government has not established any special co-ordination structures. Normal co-ordination structures are in place and decisions are being co-ordinated in government committees and government sessions.

In line with the law regulating the system of prevention, protection and rescue in cases of disasters, operational crisis management is performed by a dedicated structure organised across national territory (civilna zaštita). In line with the recent change of the law (in the framework of anti-corona measures), the structure is co-ordinated by the central co-ordination body (centralni stožer civilne zaštite) led by the minister of the interior and composed of representatives of numerous institutions responsible for crisis management (ministries, public health institution, firefighting institution etc.). In emergency situations,

such as a pandemic, the central co-ordination body has the prerogative to issue regulations addressing the crisis. In the case of the COVID-19 crisis, main regulations concerning rules of social distancing, on public transport, on passes for travel or agricultural work, on the opening hours of stores or closing of shops and restaurants were issued by this body.

CZECH REPUBLIC

According to the Crisis Act, a Central Emergency Committee should have been created and co-ordinated directly by the Minister of Interior. However, the Prime Minister opted to manage the initial stages of the crisis response directly before establishing the Committee 10 days later, with a Deputy Minister of Health as Chair, to oversee implementation of the emergency measures. At the same time, the Deputy Prime Minister in the Government Office and the Minister of the Interior remain the key actors with respect to actions outside the health sphere and with respect to non-health related communications. The Prime Minister continues to take primary responsibility for strategy in close consultation with the Interior, Finance and Health Ministers and the CoG.

DENMARK

At the highest political level, external communication is handled by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), with the Prime Minister herself making regular briefings to the public, and the OPM is closely co-ordinating with the Danish Health Authority and the Employee and Competence Agency of the Ministry of Taxation.

While the activity levels of Government and Parliament are down to the lowest possible levels, the daily operational handling of the crisis has been handed over to the National Operative Unit (NOST). NOST was established in 2008 as a response to poor handling of the 2005 East Asia tsunami crisis, to provide a central co-ordination body in times of crisis (following evaluations that criticised the co-ordination and communication efforts). It is only activated in times of crises. All Government crisis management, across central and regional level institutions, is handled here. NOST is operationally headed by the police force, but permanent members also include the intelligence agencies, defence, emergency management authority, foreign ministry, traffic authority, and in this case, the health authority is also a core member. In addition, the energy authority, IT and food safety authority are also present. The same institutions meet in another crisis management body, the Central Operative Communication Unit, to co-ordinate communication. The last time NOST and the related Communication Unit were activated was when Denmark experienced a terror attack five years ago.

ESTONIA

According to the Constitution, it is in the mandate of the Government of the Republic to declare an emergency situation. On 12 February 2020, the Government declared an emergency situation until 1 May 2020, nominated the Prime Minister in charge of the emergency situation and applied the governance arrangements provided for in the Emergency Act.

The Government also formed an Emergency Situation Government Committee (hereby the Government Committee) to stop the spread of the virus and to solve public health and economic problems. The Government Committee is chaired by the Prime Minister, with 9 cabinet ministers and the State Secretary as members. The Government Committee convenes three times a week, one of which is the regular Cabinet Meeting day, when the whole Cabinet participates in the Committee Meeting.

The Government Committee formed a scientific advisory board on 20 March, which collects and analyses expert information for the Government Committee. There are 5 members consisting of professors and doctors.

There is also a working group on economy, formed by the Minister of Finance, which prepares economic measures. In addition to 3 ministers, there are also a number of experts from ministries and Central Bank.

On 27 March 2020, a planning working group at the Government Office was formed to prepare strategy for the exiting emergency situation.

There is a centrally co-ordinated communication process, managed and supported by the Cabinet Office. They have set up a **comprehensive website** www.kriis.ee, where information is updated on a daily basis in three languages (Estonian, Russian and English). There is also a well-structured FAQ section with Q&A in plain language. On this website, there is an **answering robot/bot**, which works reasonably well for basic information.

To avoid inundating the single emergency number with calls, there is a **special crisis information number** which provides guidance and advice on how to behave in the emergency situation.

The Cabinet Office is organising **daily press briefings**, which are broadcasted online. Journalists can also attend in person, sitting away from each other. The list of speakers can vary on a daily basis, depending on the latest developments and news. Usually there are 3-5 spokespersons from different state authorities.

On the **national broadcasting channel**, there is a **daily special program at noon** to inform citizens about the latest developments.

FINLAND

The Government of Finland has set up a COVID-19 co-ordination group at the central Government level in February 2020 and it was expanded at the end of March.

The group is responsible for 1) implementing the decisions made by the Government to curb the coronavirus epidemic and 2) co-ordinating co-operation between the ministries.

In addition, under the Prime Minister's office, three bodies (operations centre, communications co-ordination and Government situation centre) are responsible for monitoring implementation made by the COVID-19 co-ordination group, co-ordination of external and internal communication and providing situation updates. Some of these bodies are a permanent function in the Prime Minister's Office, but their monitoring of the current picture has been channelled to a large extent to monitor the coronavirus situation.

FRANCE

- **Preparing the state for risks:** The French State has a set of sectoral plans, developed at local or national level, in anticipation of large-scale crises and disasters. Each corresponds to a previously-identified risk or threat. All of these plans are updated whenever the circumstances require and new plans are created when major new risks arise.
- Whatever the nature of the crisis, a **crisis management process** is defined and applied. This process also provides for the creation of an **inter-ministerial Crisis Unit** (Cellule Interministérielle de Crise - CIC) and entrusts its operational management to a minister designated according to the nature of the events. On 17 March, the Prime Minister activated the CIC. Hosted in the basements of the Ministry of the Interior, Place Beauveau, the CIC is responsible for co-ordinating the action of all the ministries concerned in real time. A kind of army staff (état-major de guerre). The CIC is made up of representatives of the ministries concerned as well as experts or operators and four units: "situation", "anticipation", "decision" and "communication". In the same process, two additional assessments are planned: one for the end of the crisis and a final one concerning the preparation of the next crises.
- The "**external communication**" unit draws up an appropriate communication plan and manages all the actions of the communication system. The communication plan notably makes it possible to inform the population about the events and the measures taken and it promotes the dissemination of the necessary recommendations.
- Likewise, **different crisis units** have been created at the level of each key ministry: interior, foreign affairs, health and national education. These crisis units operate under the aegis of their respective

- ministers. That of the Ministry of Health plays an essential role in steering all health aspects and provides a daily information point by the Minister and/or the Director General of Health.
- Since the beginning of the epidemic, a **Scientific Council** (Conseil scientifique) set up by the Minister of Health at the request of the President of the Republic, provides the Government with information on the evolution of the health situation in order to shed light on the management of the coronavirus crisis. The scientific council produces summary documents that are made public after each meeting.
 - At the regional level, crisis management is the responsibility of the prefects of the départements. In terms of health, the essential cog is the regional health agency (agence régionale de santé -ARS) which is a public establishment operator for the State and for social security (therefore competent both for the provision of care and funding).
 - **Several National Plans** already existed in order to be able to react and take the necessary measures in the event that the life of the population or the regular functioning of the institutional, economic or social life of the country is called into question: among these plans: the pandemic influenza plan and the EBOLA plan.
 - **The National Plan to Prevent and Combat the “Influenza Pandemic”⁹** is a document to assist preparation and decision-making that was prepared in 2011 by the French Government, drawing lessons from the management of the pandemic episode of 2009 and the various feedback and evaluations that have been conducted. This plan describes the State’s response strategy, emphasising flexibility and adaptation to the characteristics of the pandemic. It includes a preparation phase so that everyone in their area of responsibility can be ready, when the time comes, to face the crisis. This plan also concerns all public authorities, health professionals and socio-economic actors, and elected officials from all local authorities who are all strongly involved, in particular mayors.

During the lockdown implemented since 17 March, each time you leave your home, you must have a special travel certificate or professional justification, in paper format, which specifies the reason for the movement. It was not until 6 April that a digital version presentable on a smartphone or tablet was possible and accepted. The police force organises fixed and mobile control missions throughout the territory. If these rules are not observed, people risk a fixed fine of EUR 135 (with a possible increase to EUR 375). In the event of a repeat of this violation (for two violations in 15 days), the fine is EUR 200 (with a possible increase to EUR 450) and becomes an offense punishable by a fine of EUR 3,750 and six months in prison maximum in the event of recurrence more than three times within 30 days.¹⁰

GERMANY

Legal Basis:

According to the **Basic Law**, crisis management in the event of a disaster or damage situation of national importance is primarily a matter for the federal states and municipalities. Therefore, the lockdown decision is taken at the state or even local level, and not at the federal one. The Federal Government has been meeting with state leaders to co-ordinate restrictions on movement. Bavaria, Hamburg, Hesse, Lower Saxony, Rhineland-Palatinate, and Saarland, went into partial lockdown around 21 March. The closing of non-essential economic activities came from an agreement between the federal state and federated states¹¹.

In order for the Federal Government to react quickly and effectively to a global infection like Corona, it has been given additional competencies within the legal package adopted on 27 March 2020.

Organisation: Joint crisis team of the Ministries of Interior and Health

⁹ https://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/risques/pdf/plan_pandemie_grippale_2011.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Actualites/L-actu-du-Ministere/Attestation-de-deplacement-derogatoire-et-justificatif-de-deplacement-professionnel>

¹¹ Draft The Territorial Impact of COVID-19: Managing the Crisis Across Levels of Government

Since the appearance of the first corona virus cases in China, all federal departments concerned have held close and regular exchanges. After cases of corona infections occurred in Europe and Germany, this exchange was intensified and a joint crisis team between the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Home (BMI) and the Federal Ministry of Health (BMG) was founded.

In order to support the handling of specific danger or damage situations in the federal states, which are essentially subject to the technical co-ordination of an individual department, a separate crisis management structure is always available, the "**National Crisis Management Department Group**". It is led by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, offering a platform for departmental co-ordination on conceptual, organisational and procedural issues of crisis management. This committee co-ordinates the inter-ministerial co-operation, provides information and co-ordination on current specialist planning, jointly prepares basic documents (e.g. information document on crisis management from the Federal Government departments, overview of capabilities in crisis management) and event-related co-ordination. The **Inter-ministerial Co-ordination Group of the Federation and the Länder (IntMinKoGr)** is a joint co-ordination committee of the Federation and the Länder. It has an important complementary function for the existing system of crisis management in the Federal and State Governments in a few special, long-lasting, cross-border situations of danger or damage.

Crisis management in the Länder:

On the basis of the Constitution, the federal states have formed their own structures within the framework of their legislative competence. The co-operation of the states, regional councils, districts, cities and municipalities in the event of an incident is guaranteed by a system of crisis teams now activated for the management of the Corona crisis. Inter-ministerial crisis teams are called upon to co-ordinate the ministries at the state level or the liaison officers of the ministries concerned are included in the lead crisis team.

Strategy:

The Federal Corona Crisis Strategy is based on the Federal government's "pandemic" risk analysis from 2012. This risk analysis was developed against the background of the statutory mandate of the Federal Government to carry out risk analyses in civil protection (section 18 (1) sentence 1 of the Federal Civil Protection and Disaster Relief Act (ZSKG)).

Communication on national level:

On 18 March 2020, Chancellor Merkel gave a **speech on National TV** about the Corona crisis, explaining the measures taken and urging citizens to follow them. This was a widely noticed approach, as usually in Germany, the Chancellor only speaks on TV at New Year.

Comprehensive information, updated daily, is available on the website of the **Federal Government**¹², the **Federal Ministry of Health**¹³, and other responsible institutions such as:

The **Robert Koch Institute (RKI)**, which is the Government's central scientific institution in the field of biomedicine. The Robert Koch Institute is continuously monitoring the situation, evaluating all available information, estimating the risk for the population in Germany and providing health professionals with recommendations. The President of the RKI currently gives **daily press conferences**.

Information on the novel coronavirus and hygiene for the general public is available on the website of the **Federal Centre for Health Education**. Additionally, lots of authorities and health insurances have set up hotlines.

The **Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance (BBK)**, established on 1 May 2004 within the remit of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, is Germany's central organisational element working to ensure the safety of the population, combining and providing all relevant tasks and information in a single place.

¹² <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de>

¹³ <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de>

HUNGARY

Hungary's national response to COVID-19 is supported by a dedicated governance structure to ensure a public health-led, whole-of-society approach. The main co-ordinating body for the day-to-day pandemic crisis management is the so-called Operational Group, that has been set up by the Government Decree 1012/2020 (I.31.). It is comprised of various medical professionals, police, military officials, members of the Government, etc. and is led by the Prime Minister.

The Operational Group is meeting on a daily basis, reviews the international and national data on the pandemic, makes recommendations to the Government to take actions related to preparation and mitigation and holds daily press briefings on the situation. The Action Plan of this Group was adopted during its first meeting on 31 January.

(<https://www.kormany.hu/hu/beluagyminiszterium/hirek/az-operativ-torz-s-akcioterve-a-koronavirus-jarvany-elleni-vedekezesert>).

The national response is also following advice from the WHO and ECDC, as well as following the response of neighbouring countries, too. Since 20 March, the Operational Group daily briefings are held on-line and the press can provide their questions only in writing, in advance. Questions (some of them) are answered with a delay and not on-spot.

In addition to the normal government machinery, The Prime Minister has also set up special Action Teams to handle different aspects of the virus mitigation. These teams are mostly led by members of the Government, but some are led by external professionals. The teams are:

- Team to organise digital education;
- Team to manage the setup of mobile pandemic hospitals;
- Team to ensure the functioning of essential companies;
- Team to manage international affairs;
- Team to handle the communication to the public;
- Team to manage the legal affairs under the extraordinary (emergency) situation;
- Team to handle the budget and finances;
- Team to support the re-start of the economy;
- Team to co-ordinate pharmaceutical R&D;
- Team to manage border control;
- Team to co-ordinate volunteering;

Teams are producing regular reports on the situation and proposals for short- and longer-term actions. In terms of additional communication channels, the Spokesperson of the Government is also an active communicator (mainly through virtual channels), as well as the Minister of the Prime Minister's Office who is holding weekly press briefings after the Government sessions, mostly about decisions taken by the Government related to the pandemic. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is also an active communicator on international affairs, including communication around the special legal measures authorising the Government to govern under the emergency situation and, to some extent, to govern even by taking over some Parliamentary powers.

The most prominent announcements are coming from the Prime Minister, mainly through his personal Facebook channel.

Special COVID-19 communication platforms have been set-up: <https://koronavirus.gov.hu> (perhaps worth noting that the website structure and messaging is quite similar to the Serbian COVID-19 page, <https://covid19.rs>).

IRELAND

Ireland's national response to COVID-19 is supported by a dedicated governance structure to ensure a public health-led, whole-of-society approach. The National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) for COVID-19 met for the first time on 27 January 2020. Chaired by the Chief Medical Officer, it oversees and provides direction, guidance, support and expert advice on the development and implementation of a strategy to respond to COVID-19 in Ireland. It meets weekly to assess the international data, receive guidance regarding the outbreak and to review Ireland's ongoing preparedness in line with advice from the WHO and the ECDC. The NPHE is supported by an Expert Advisory Group and a number of subgroups. The NPHE works closely with the HSE National Crisis Management Team which leads and manages the HSE's response. The Government established the Special Cabinet Committee on COVID-19 Response chaired by the Taoiseach on 3 March 2020. The Committee is being supported by a committee of senior officials across all Departments and the Health Service Executive and a dedicated Communications Group which co-ordinates a whole-of-Government communications response.

ITALY

The Italian Government approached the emergency with a series of decrees that introduced various limitations and restrictions within the so-called 'red' regions and areas. These restrictions were later expanded to cover the whole country.

A **new coronavirus Task Force (COVID-19)** was established on 22 January 2020. The Task Force is a committee involving experts and scientists with a mission to provide the Government with relevant evidence and data so that the decisions and policies of the Government are evidence-based. The task force is chaired by the Secretary General of the Ministry of Health and includes: (the Directorate General for Prevention, other relevant directorates of the Ministry of Health, Carabinieri, the Higher Institute of Health, the National Institute for Infectious Diseases "Lazarus Spallanzani", the Offices of Maritime, Air and Border Health, the Italian Pharmaceutical Agency, the Italian Agency for regional medical services and the Diplomatic Advisor of the Minister).¹⁴

There is also a dedicated department, the Department of Civil Protection, which has been functioning within the offices of the Presidency of the CoM since 1982. It has an advisory role, working with the regional and local governments on projects and activities regarding prevention, prediction and monitoring of risks and intervention procedures to ensure national co-ordination of policy and response. The Head of the Department of Civil Protection was appointed as the **Special Commissioner for the COVID-19 emergency**, and is entrusted with special functions to co-ordinate interventions to fight the emergency across the country.¹⁵ The main activities co-ordinated by the Special Commissioner included rescue and assistance efforts for people likely to be affected by the virus, controls in airports and port areas, the repatriation of Italian citizens from abroad and the return of foreign citizens to their home countries.¹⁶

At the Civil Protection Department, an **Operational Committee** exists, which ensures the co-ordination of all operations and activities of the National Civil Protection Service.¹⁷ The Prime Minister has chaired the meetings of the Civil Protection Operational Committee to co-ordinate activities (e.g. a meeting on 6 February 2020 in Rome and another meeting on 25 February 2020 with the Ministers, the Presidents of the Regions and the technical specialists of the Ministry of Health were held at the Civil Protection Department offices).

In addition, a **multidisciplinary task force** was established on 31 March 2020 by the Minister for Technological Innovation and Digitalisation, in agreement with the Ministry of Health, to evaluate and propose data-driven technological solutions and address the health, social and economic emergency linked

¹⁴ <http://www.salute.gov.it/portale/home.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.governo.it/it/approfondimento/coronavirus/13968>

¹⁶ <http://www.protezionecivile.gov.it/risk-activities/health-risk/emergencies/coronavirus>

¹⁷ http://www.protezionecivile.gov.it/media-communication/press-release/detail/-/asset_publisher/default/content/coronavirus-sono-83-049-i-positivi

to the spread of COVID-19 in Italy.¹⁸ In particular, the task force is developing an online application to monitor movement of people.

The Prime Minister has been giving regular briefings and press conferences to the media and public to announce important decisions approved during the meetings of the Council of Ministers and other emergency co-ordination structures and committees. The Government has issued advisory notes for the press limiting the number of journalists access to the Prime Minister's building.¹⁹ Daily briefings are also provided by the Department of Civil Protection.²⁰

LATVIA

As foreseen by the Law on National Security,²¹ the Crisis Management Council is a key operational level co-ordinating body during the state of emergency. The Chairman of the Council is the Prime Minister, and most of the ministers are members. Secretariat functions are ensured by the Ministry of Healthcare (in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior). Based on the decisions taken by the Crisis Management Council, public institutions prepare relevant legal acts that are later submitted to the Government and the Parliament for approval. Virtual press conferences following the Government remote session are held to inform the media and citizens about the decisions taken. Some of the Government's press conferences (even on weekends) are broadcasted on the public TV channel. External communication of the Government is co-ordinated by the State Chancellery with support from all relevant public institutions.

LITHUANIA

The COVID-19 crisis is managed by the Emergency Situations Operations Centre, headed by the Health Minister Aurelijus Veryga. The Emergency Situations Operations Centre consists of the Head of the Centre and six groups: 1) Operational Assessment and Emergency Prevention Group; 2) Information Management Group; 3) Logistics Group; 4) Public Information Group; 5) Administration Group; 6) Electronic Communications Organisation and Support Group.

External communications are managed by the Public Information Group of the Emergency Situations Operations Centre. The Public Information Group is the main channel for communication between the Government and the public. On 19 March, the head of the Emergency Situations Operations Centre passed a decree that obliges public health institutions and other health care-related institutions to publish information in co-ordination with the Public Information Group²².

The head of the Group maintains relations with the Press and Communication Division of the Communications Department of the Prime Minister's Office. The head of the Public Information Group is the Adviser to the Prime Minister. Under this arrangement, the head of Public Information Group is subordinated to, and also reports to, the Head of the Operations Centre.

External communication is carried out through daily press conferences at the Ministry of Health, the Government Office (currently most press conferences are virtual) or other locations. The information is also presented to society and business groups by the Ministry of Health²³ and a specially created website²⁴.

The CoG does not have a specific/new role in the process of fighting the COVID-19 virus. The Government Office is the secretariat to the Emergency Situations Committee chaired by the Prime Minister. There is no central strategy/guidance. The majority of the instructions and guidance are issued by the Head of the

¹⁸ <https://innovazione.gov.it/nasce-la-task-force-italiana-per-l-utilizzo-dei-dati-contro-l-emergenza-covid-19/>

¹⁹ <http://www.governo.it/it/articolo/nuove-regole-di-accesso-alla-sala-stampa-di-palazzo-chigi/14272>

²⁰ <http://www.protezionecivile.gov.it/media-communication/press-release>

²¹ Law on National Security (in Latvian): <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/14011-nacionalas-drosibas-likums>

²² <https://sam.lrv.lt/uploads/sam/documents/files/KORONA/V-446.pdf>

²³ <https://sam.lrv.lt/koronavirusas>

²⁴ <http://koronastop.lrv.lt/lt/>

Emergency Situations Operations Centre. Decisions requiring legislative means are taken by the Government or Parliament.

NETHERLANDS

At political level, there is a Ministerial commission on crisis control, chaired by the Prime Minister or the Minister of Justice and Security. Other members of the Cabinet are also members of the commission and take part when their policy field is involved. The main policy departments involved right now, apart from Justice, are the Ministries of Healthcare, Education (closing of schools) and Defence (assistance to medical professionals and logistics). There are regular teleconferences and sometimes meetings with the Security Council, involving the 25 mayors of central municipalities in the 25 security regions. There also is an inter-ministerial commission with top civil servants, advising the Ministerial commission (see <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0038503/2016-09-13>).

POLAND

The Government Centre for Security (GCS) (<https://rcb.gov.pl/en/>) is a governmental body designed to provide services to enable the co-ordination of activities of the Government in a crisis situation. GCS is a supraministerial structure which aims to optimise and standardise the perception of threats by individual government departments, thereby increasing the degree of ability to cope with difficult situations by the competent services and public administration authorities in the event of natural disasters. GCS shall ensure services to the Council of Ministers, Prime Minister, the Government Crisis Management Team and a minister competent for internal affairs within the scope of crisis management. Moreover, the Centre serves as a national centre for crisis management. The organisational structure and operating mode of the Centre is regulated by a Regulation of the Prime Minister of 11 April 2011 on the organisation and operating mode of the Government Centre for Security. It is a state budget unit subordinated to the Prime Minister. The Centre has the following organisational units: Department for Crisis Planning and Reacting, Administrative and Financial Department, Department for Civil Planning and Protection of Critical Infrastructure.

PORTUGAL

See below on state of emergency.

Co-ordination:

- National Commission of Civil Protection, chaired by the Minister of the Interior

Communication:

- About country measures: <https://covid19estamoson.gov.pt/> and corresponding smartphone application.

Health related information: <https://covid19.min-saude.pt/>

ROMANIA

In accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, the Romanian President issued Presidential Decree no. 195/16/03/2020 and declared the state of emergency for 30 days in response to the growing number of COVID-19 cases. The Decree was countersigned by the Prime Minister and approved by the Parliament.

Based on the Presidential Decree and taking into consideration the evaluations of the National Committee for Emergency Situations, the Ministry of Internal Affairs issued seven military ordinances regulating different aspects in relation to the evolution of the COVID-19 crisis.

Integrated co-ordination of the medical response and civil protection measures for the emergency situation generated by COVID-19 is carried out by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (through the Department for Emergency Situations), in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, under the supervision of the Prime Minister.

A special unit - the Strategic Communication Group (made up of communication experts from several institutions) - was established for public information regarding the evolution of the COVID-19 crisis.

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

The Central Crisis Staff, which is co-ordinated by the CoG, is responsible for developing guidance, instructions and draft decrees to implement measures relating to the crisis under the powers provided for by the state of emergency. The Central Crisis Staff, composed of senior officials from key ministries endorse the need for a particular action and then the relevant authorities are tasked with preparing the legal texts and related communications. For example, after the meeting of the Crisis Staff on 28 March, the Chief Health Officer was mandated to develop instructions on quarantine arrangements for persons coming to the country from abroad. The Ministry of Health was instructed to prepare a proposal for legislation to allow pharmacies to develop antiseptic liquids and another to require hospital administrators to extend the working hours of doctors and nurses currently working part-time. As such, there is an overall co-ordination body that takes strategic decisions about priorities and then issues instructions to implementing bodies.

Communication is still handled by the CoG via daily press briefings, with journalists attending in person (though limited to one person per newspaper plus one photographer/cameraman).

SLOVENIA

The COVID-19 crisis coincided with the change of government. A new, centre-right Government was formed on 13 March and held its first session on the same day. In its first session, the Government approved stricter measures for limiting the spread of the virus and, inter alia, established a crisis management task force at two levels: political (Prime Minister and all ministers) and senior civil service level (key top officials), supported by working groups. After nine days, the decision was repealed and the Government continued with crisis management using the regular mechanisms of co-ordination existing under the Rules of Procedure, arguing that a parallel co-ordination structure was no longer needed as the Government was fully operational.

In the Slovenian Government, co-ordination is rather effective, both technically (the Rules of Procedure put a lot of emphasis on inter-ministerial co-ordination) and politically (all coalition party leaders are members of Government – Prime Minister and three vice-Prime Ministers – and they meet regularly to co-ordinate the issues of high political relevance). The CoG consists of several offices, the most important being the Prime Minister's Office (Cabinet) and the Secretariat General. The Prime Minister and his office have a very powerful role in co-ordinating the crisis management, whereas the Secretariat General traditionally has a rather technical role in several CoG functions (checking compliance with rules on regulatory quality, including impact assessment and inter-ministerial co-ordination).

SPAIN

The national Government declared a state of alarm (the lowest level of three states of emergency) on 14 March for 15 days (based on the Constitution and on the Law on States of Emergency^o. According to the Constitution, the Parliament is to be informed and should give consent to any extension. The state of alarm has recently been extended until 12 April.

Four ministers (Health, Interior, Transportation and Defence) assume the COVID-related decision-making, under supervision of the Prime Minister. They can directly adopt any kind of action or resolution, without any prior administrative procedure, on their own initiative or as proposed by regional and local governments.

Formally speaking, these ministers have taken control over some regional Government services, such as health, police (the two regions with their own police) and civil protection. Day-to-day service management is retained by the regions and, in practice, is mostly business as usual, except for purchasing and distribution

of COVID-related supplies. In the near future patients will potentially be transferred between regions to avoid the collapse of medical services.

The national Government has created a Technical Committee for COVID Crisis Management (Comité Técnico de Gestión del Coronavirus) chaired by the Prime Minister and composed of the Ministers of Health, Interior, Defence and Transportation, and a number of top officials from these ministries: the Director of the Centre of Health Emergencies, the Chief of the Defence Staff (the highest-ranking military officer), the Deputy Operational Director of the National Police, the Deputy Operational Director of the Guardia Civil (national police corps mainly operating in rural areas and customs) and the Secretary General of Transport. The Prime Minister is holding regular videoconferences with the 17 presidents of regions (autonomous communities) to listen to their views and co-ordinate actions across levels of Government.

The national Government has created a Scientific Committee (Comité Científico del COVID-19), to provide scientific advice composed of a number of public health specialists and researchers.

The mass media are obliged to publish any message or communication sent by the authorities.

SWEDEN

Sweden has not applied any lockdown, with most measures being voluntary. The Swedish constitution prohibits ministerial rule and mandates that the relevant government body, here an 'expert agency': the Public Health Agency — must initiate all actions to prevent the virus. On agency recommendation, the Government can follow, as it has with legislation limiting freedom of assembly, temporarily banning gatherings of over 50 individuals; as well as physically closing secondary schools and universities. Primary schools have remained open, in part to avoid healthcare workers from needing to stay home with their children.

The Public Health Agency and Government issued recommendations to work from home, if possible; for people over 70 to stay at home; and issued general recommendations to avoid unnecessary travel within the country and to keep a social distance between people. Those with even minimal symptoms, which could be COVID-19, are recommended to stay home. The 'karensdag' or initial day without paid sick-leave has been removed by the Government and the length of time one can stay home without a doctor's note has been raised from 7 to 21 days.

There is a Crisis Management Council established since 2008 under the Minister of Interior. The State Secretary under the Minister is co-ordinating the work within the Government. This Council consists **normally** of the Heads of the Police, Security, Defence and some other key departments. There is also a Crisis Management Office linked to this Council that co-ordinates the crisis work within the Government administration. It is on constant duty. The Government office provides general guidance and instructions in close consultation with the expert authorities.

THE UNITED KINGDOM

The UK Government published its **strategy on fighting COVID-19** in an [Action Plan](#) released in early March 2020. In addition to essential information about the pandemic and the response plan, the Action Plan also sets out the roles and responsibilities of various Government bodies, primarily in the health sector, for organising and leading the pandemic preparedness and response. (Source <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan>). The Coronavirus Action Plan itself is building on the advice and information included in the **UK Influenza Pandemic Preparedness Strategy** (2011). The strategy sets out the Government's strategic approach for responding to an influenza pandemic. It helped refine and reshape the Government response to the current pandemic, providing clinical, scientific and health advice and information about influenza pandemic. Additionally, UK has a Strategy/Concept of Operations for [Central Government Response during emergencies](#). The Strategy sets out the main principles of emergency response and roles and responsibilities of various government bodies in co-ordinating and leading the Government response during crisis situations. The availability of these strategic documents and guidance even before the start of the crisis have helped preparatory work.

The Cabinet Office, including the PM's Office/Number 10, is the main centre-of-Government (CoG) institution with an objective to support the PM and ensure the effective running of Government. It supports policy co-ordination across various departments and agencies and has a particular role during emergencies and crisis. External Communication of Government is led and co-ordinated directly by the PM's Office/Number 10. There are daily media briefings held by the PM, Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Officer. The briefings do take place with a video connection (no physical presence of journalists).

The PM has set up **new ministerial structures** to co-ordinate, prioritise and respond to COVID-19. In particular, four new implementation committees were established (**health, public sector preparedness, economy and international response**). The committees will regularly meet with key representatives from relevant sectors to inform their decision-making. The Committee on Public Sector Preparedness will look at preparedness across the rest of the public and critical national infrastructure, excluding NHS. They will provide input on a daily basis to Government C-19 meetings. (Source: [Government Press Release](#)). These committees are in addition to regular meetings of the **Civil Contingencies Committee (COBRA)**, which focus on national strategy and overall progress in the efforts against COVID-19.

Some departments that are heavily involved in COVID-19 response, for example the Department for Business, responsible for various schemes supporting businesses, labour markets and the energy industry, have created **new co-ordination teams**. The teams provide a policy co-ordination hub, respond to Ministerial requests, co-ordinate actions from COVID-19 Ministerial committees and provide project management for reporting on implementation of the departmental response.

KOREA

Crisis management is led directly by the Prime Minister and co-ordinated by the Office for Government Co-ordination within the Prime Minister's Secretariat. Implementation and roll out of decisions is the responsibility of a cross-departmental crisis team (the Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasures Headquarters) which allocates departmental roles and responsibilities. Korea has long experience with natural disasters and, more recently, financial and public health crises. As such, the crisis management system is highly advanced, particularly with respect to cross-government co-ordination, public-private partnerships and communication with citizens.

External communication was seen from the start of the crisis as a crucial element in the success of the Government's strategy. During the outbreak of Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2015, the Korean Government withheld key information, including where the infected patients were being treated. This created anxiety, even though the disease was in fact difficult to catch through casual contact. Under the Infectious Disease Control and Prevention Act (IDCPA), amended after the MERS outbreak, the Minister of Health exercises wide power to collect private data of confirmed and potential patients. At the same time, the law grants the public a "right to know," requiring the minister to "promptly disclose information" — including the movement paths, transportation means, and contacts of patients — to the public. This bargain was crucial to legitimising the Government's track-and-trace strategy and mobilising the public's co-operation in their fight against COVID-19.

Any arrangements (rules, working procedures) which aim to streamline and accelerate the government decision-making process (as regards deadlines, public consultations, transparency, impact analysis)?

AUSTRIA

The crisis management team of each ministry is responsible for ensuring speedy and accurate information management and co-ordinating the supporting (health/statistics modelling) experts.

BELGIUM

Although the Belgian Constitution does not contain an emergency clause – on the contrary, Article 187 explicitly states that no provision of the Constitution can be suspended – Belgian constitutional law provides an instrument called ‘special powers’ legislation (based on Article 105 of the Constitution). These allow unusually wide delegations of legislative powers from the Parliament to the Government. They even include the power to abolish, complement, amend or replace existing Acts of Parliament.

Special powers legislation has to meet a number of requirements. First, the presence of a “crisis” or “exceptional circumstances” is required. This is largely a political qualification – judicial oversight is deferential. Second, special powers can only be granted for a limited period, ideally a matter of months. Third, the goal and object of the special powers has to be narrowly defined. Fourth, special powers legislation does not allow the Government to violate higher norms (including the Constitution, European law, and federalism). If special powers touch upon matters that are constitutionally reserved for Parliament, the decrees taken in application of those special powers need to be ratified by the Parliament within a specified period of time. Failure to do this means that the decrees are deemed to have never existed. Parliament can subject the granting of special powers to other conditions, such as reporting.

Special powers legislation can be attacked in the Constitutional Court. Special powers decrees taken in application of the legislation can be taken to the Council of State, Administrative Litigation Section (unless they are ratified by the Parliament, in which case the body to turn to is the Constitutional Court).

At the federal level, the process was delayed until 19 March 2020, as the current Federal Government was a caretaker Government with limited powers until then. Although it would have been technically possible to grant special powers to a caretaker Government (it can, in any case, take “urgent” measures), this would have created a strange political situation. On 19 March 2020, a minority Government received the confidence of the Parliament and also of the opposition, with the explicit aim of addressing the COVID-19 crisis. A special powers bill provides a wide range of possibilities to combat the COVID-19 crisis from a public order and healthcare perspective, but it also allows for support measures to companies and families, to safeguard economic continuity and financial stability, to secure the continuity of the courts, and to implement European decisions with regard to the crisis. The right to rule by power of Decree is valid for a maximum of six months and to be evaluated by Parliament after three months. The Government can decide rapidly on measures related to public health, social, economical and security issues without discussion and approval in Parliament. The Government can ignore the advice of the Council of State for some decisions, including public order and healthcare measures.

CROATIA

Rules of Procedures allow for flexible procedural arrangements, which enable accelerated decision making of the government in situations of crisis. Besides, critical regulation can be issued by the co-ordinating body indicated above (2).

No formal decision on the deadlines in administrative or judicial procedures has been issued. The deadlines for public consultations, impact assessment and access to information procedures have been respected at the same level as usual.

CZECH REPUBLIC

According to the OECD iREG indicators, the Czech Republic has a well-developed and well-established system of regulatory impact analysis and stakeholder consultation with regard to primary legislation and secondary laws and regulations. However, for the period of the state of emergency, line ministries have been instructed that their principal responsibility is to monitor compliance with emergency measures in their sectors. Implicitly, compliance with other regulatory requirements is relaxed. A series of decrees have clarified that during the state of emergency deadlines and reporting requirements are suspended. Each ministry manages its own work, but the overall guidance from the CoG is that each must identify and focus on priority tasks and ensure the smooth implementation of emergency measures.

A series of ad hoc regulations have been published by ministries in order to facilitate enforcement of emergency provisions. For example, the Ministry of the Interior has developed a taxonomy of 'international transport and critical infrastructure workers' who are exempt from restrictions on travel. Similarly, the Ministry of Health has published a definition of 'health' and 'social services' workers who have special status with respect to crisis-related regulations. These regulations and rules of application have not been subject to any mandatory consultation or impact assessment process. Indeed, some have had to be subsequently amended because of omissions or new circumstances (e.g., locksmiths had to be added to trades that could continue to trade during the crisis).

DENMARK

No, the general direction is to slow down activities of the Government and Parliament. All political parties have been asked by the Speaker of the Parliament to review their legislative agenda and cut down on new legislative initiatives. No quotas have been issued but all parties are expected to contribute.

ESTONIA

No new measures have been officially adopted. The existing regulation allows the Government to arrange sessions remotely, a special secure e-government sessions solution having already been created many years ago.

In general, the regular working arrangements and application of general administrative procedures continues during the emergency situation, unless otherwise stated in the Emergency Situation Act. There are no special rules for the Government decision-making process during the emergency situation.

In practice, the package of laws for emergency measures does not go through public consultation because of the urgent need to proceed with legal amendments to respond quickly to the emergency situation, as explained in the explanatory letter.

FINLAND

The Government has set up a COVID-19 Co-ordination Group, which is responsible for implementing the decisions made by the Government to curb the coronavirus epidemic and to coordinate co-operation between the ministries.

FRANCE

The two chambers of the French Parliament approved legislation stipulating that France would enter a "state of health emergency for two months". This state of emergency came into effect on 24 March. This law - n° 2020-290 of 23 March 2020 - makes it possible to confront the epidemic of COVID-19 and "gives power to the Prime Minister to take by decree, on the counsel of the Minister of Health, the general provisions limiting the freedom to come and go, the freedom to conduct business and the freedom to assemble, and making it possible to requisition all goods and services necessary to combat the health disaster. These measures are proportionate to the risks incurred and appropriate to the circumstances of

time and place [and] the measures can be terminated without delay (...) once they are no longer necessary.”²⁵ This legislation provided the legal basis for all measures already introduced and authorised the Government to enact new measures. During the three meetings of the Council of Ministers between 25 March and 1 April, 37 decrees²⁶ were issued to deal with the epidemic. The National Assembly and the Senate are informed "without delay" of the measures taken during this particular period. The Head of State announced the postponement of the second round of municipal elections and of all the reforms in progress, including that of pensions.

GERMANY

Rules and working procedures continue to be applied as usual. Existing emergency and urgency rules are activated and applied.

HUNGARY

The work of the Government is co-ordinated under the Rules of Procedure (RoP) of the Government. To the best of our knowledge, as there is no publicly available information about the current decision-making processes, and no specific rules were initiated to streamline the procedural rules stemming from the RoP. Laws proposed by the Government are still substantiated with a detailed justification, etc.

IRELAND

A Stakeholder Forum chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach has been established. This is an authoritative platform to disseminate important public health information and support public health measures; as well as to inform Government on emerging downstream social and economic impacts of COVID-19 in Ireland. The Stakeholder Forum comprises bodies from a wide variety of sectors (business, education, health, childcare and social services, sport, tourism etc.) with membership currently at 120 organisations. This Stakeholder Forum has been convened in Government Buildings on three occasions since Monday 2 March. All sessions have been well attended. Further sessions, most likely via teleconferences, will convene as required.

ITALY

Almost all new efforts and initiatives of the Government are aimed at addressing the crisis and are being processed through expedited procedures. There does not seem to be any formal decision or changes in working procedures and rules relating to other areas and policies. Following the declaration of a six-month state of emergency on 31 January 2020, the CoM has approved several orders and decrees²⁷ and some draft laws have been sent to the Parliament for approval (the parliament has 60 days to turn a decree into law or reject it).

LATVIA

On 3 April 2020 the Parliament adopted a Law on Functioning of Institutions during an Emergency in connection with COVID-19²⁸. This Law was drafted by the Government and approved during its meeting on 31 March 2020. The law defines the functioning, rights and responsibilities of public institutions, as well as rights and responsibilities of citizens.

²⁵ https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?sessionId=DB880D16C146684E42FA9E35815999B3.tplgfr31s_3?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000041746313&dateTexte=20200401

²⁶ <https://www.gouvernement.fr/comptes-rendus-du-conseil-des-ministres>

²⁷ <http://www.governo.it/it/approfondimento/coronavirus/13968> & <http://www.governo.it/provedimenti>

²⁸ Law on Functioning of Institutions during an Emergency in connection with Covid-19 (in Latvian)

LITHUANIA

For the organisation of extraordinary Government meetings and adoption of urgent decisions, the Government is using provisions of the Rules of Procedure of the Government, which regulate handling of urgent matters. There have not been any special rules or working procedures introduced for the purpose of COVID-19 outbreak management.

NETHERLANDS

There are arrangements to accelerate the decision-making process. Besides the security regions, the main advisors on health care are the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (see <https://www.rivm.nl/en>), organisations of medical professionals, national co-ordination centres for intensive care units, etc.

In the economic field (measures for compensation) the trade unions and the employers organisations (VNO-NCW and MKB) of the bigger and smaller companies are consulted, as well as organisations for specific sectors (schools, universities, etc.).

POLAND

No information available.

PORTUGAL

In the exercise of his constitutional and legal powers (Constitution and Organic Law regulating the States of Siege and of Emergency), the President of the Republic, after consulting the Government and obtaining authorisation from the Assembly, declared a State of Emergency by means of Decree No. 14-A/2020, of 18 March, on the basis of a public calamity situation. This decision entered into force immediately. It is a temporary measure lasting 15 days, subject to renewal.

Under the terms of the Presidential Decree, the following fundamental rights shall be partially suspended: a) Right of movement and settlement in any part of the national territory; b) Property and private economic initiative; c) Workers' rights; d) International travel; e) Rights of assembly and demonstration; f) Freedom of worship, in its collective dimension; and g) Right of resistance.

The law governing the State of Siege and the State of Emergency is an organic law (which needs approval by absolute majority) and therefore has reinforced legal hierarchy (valor reforçado); this implies that all ordinary legislation should respect these laws and no new ordinary law has capacity to amend the existing organic laws.

The effectiveness of the measures that may be adopted by the Government during this period is ensured by the security forces and the Armed Forces.

The violation of the Decree declaring the State of Emergency, or of any the enforcement measures approved by the Government, constitutes a crime of disobedience, provided for and punished with imprisonment of up to 1 year or with a fine of up to 120 days.

ROMANIA

The Government holds consultations with the representatives of the National Tripartite Council for Social Dialogue, the trade unions and employers, as a permanent mechanism to mitigate the economic and social effects of COVID-19 epidemic.

The Government has issued an Emergency Ordinance for adopting measures that will allow the use of documents in electronic form for communication in digital format between the state authorities and institutions, as well as between the Government and natural and legal persons. The documents issued in this format will be signed with a qualified electronic signature and will be assimilated to official documents.

The new regulations will also allow digital processes for procedures vital to state functioning, such as the legislative process exercised by the Parliament and the executive process exercised by the Government.

SLOVAK REPUBLIC

According to the OECD Regulatory Policy Outlook, Slovakia has, in general, an advanced regulatory system, with Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) and consultation provisions that meet average OECD standards. The state of emergency provides the executive with the usual powers to issue decrees without the normal legislative or judicial scrutiny nor the normal process of public consultation or RIA. So far, the volume of decrees has been limited because of the political transition.

One extremely sensitive issue is the treatment of the Roma population, where some mandatory testing has been carried out, which has raised some human rights concerns.

SLOVENIA

No new arrangements were needed, as the Rules of Procedure envisage simplified and accelerated procedures in urgent matters, and shortening of deadlines is possible. For urgent matters, standards of inter-ministerial consultation, public consultation and impact assessment are significantly softened. Theoretically, for very urgent matters the decision can be prepared, put on a government session and approved on the same day, even without formal inter-ministerial consultation and without public consultation.

SPAIN

(idem 2)

Four ministers (Health, Interior, Transportation and Defence) assume the COVID-related decision-making, under supervision of the Prime Minister. They can directly adopt any kind of action or resolution, without any prior administrative procedure, on their own initiative or as proposed by regional and local governments.

Formally speaking, these ministers have taken control over some regional Government services, such as health, police (the two regions with their own police) and civil protection. Day-to-day service management is retained by the regions and, in practice, is mostly business as usual, except for purchasing and distribution of COVID-related supplies. In the near future patients will potentially be transferred between regions to avoid the collapse of medical services.

SWEDEN

No special arrangements so far. The Parliaments Committee on the Constitution has agreed to table its examination of the Government until further notice.

THE UNITED KINGDOM

In terms of the normal policy-making procedures and rules, so far there have been no changes introduced to the Impact Assessment and public consultation processes in order to speed up the introduction and application of new measures. There are internal discussions within the Department for Business (Better Regulation Executive) to introduce easements and more formal changes in the existing rules. However, nothing has been decided and announced yet. In any case, most of the regulations and measures considered by Departments relate to the COVID-19 and the impact of any simplification in this area would be possible to observe later. Current procurement rules for public sector organisations were relaxed, after the Cabinet Office issued a guidance to recognise the current situation as an exceptional circumstance. This allows normal rules for buying goods and services to be bypassed.

The UK Parliament passed the [Coronavirus Act 2020](#) (it became a law on 25 March 2020) to provide a legal and regulatory basis for more effective response to the crisis. The Law grants the Government additional **temporary powers** to handle the pandemic more efficiently. It contains temporary measures designed to either amend existing legislative provisions or introduce new statutory powers, which are designed to mitigate these impacts. New measures can include: suspension or limitation of public gatherings, detaining individuals suspected of being infected by COVID-19, and to intervene or relax regulations in a range of sectors to limit transmission of the disease, ease the burden on public health services, and assist healthcare workers and the economically affected. The Coronavirus Act 2020 was **fast-tracked** (passed through all the normal stages of passage in each House, but on an expedited timetable) through Parliament in just four sitting days (Source: [UK Parliament](#)). This resulted in weaker scrutiny as it reduced the time available for MPs and Peers to deliberate on a bill and propose changes, thereby increased the likelihood of legal errors or of the legislation having unintended consequences. No impact assessment was done either. Under the Coronavirus Act 2020, directions/decisions made by a minister relating to potentially infectious people and limitation of events and gatherings do not need to be put before Parliament. Other measures must be taken by statutory instrument – requiring parliamentary scrutiny and approval.

The Coronavirus Bill gave the Government new powers to tackle the spread of COVID-19. This was in addition to several emergency powers already available to the Government under existing legislation (Source: [UK parliament](#)). Before the Coronavirus Bill was introduced, the Government introduced **emergency regulations** to prevent the spread of COVID-19 - the Health Protection (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 (Source: [UK parliament](#)). Emergency legislation is not subject to the better regulation rules.

KOREA

Korea has been widely credited with having one of most effective overall policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis, combining effective preventive measures with the use of technology and fast-tracked innovations to monitor the spread of the disease and better-targeted policy responses. While some measures have been controversial -for example, people who are confirmed to have COVID-19 are tracked by GPS, and a live map of their locations (without their names) is available for anyone wishing to avoid them – overall, the policy has been based on transparency and engagement with citizens and civil society organisations.

Korea's Government has expressed its willingness to share its quarantine and treatment experience in the COVID-19 outbreak as well as relevant clinical data with the international community, and has been contacted by EU members (e.g. Bulgaria, Denmark) for advice.

The Government continues to meet in person, though usually as a restricted Cabinet of senior ministers, all wearing face masks and with an empty seat between each participant. At present, these meetings take place on a daily basis.