COVID-19 EU Briefing 21 September 2020

Synopsis
The Commission has published recommendations for a common COVID-19 testing approach in Europe and also proposed to harmonise data used for making travel restrictions decisions. Internal Market Commissioner Breton also noted that the EU will prevent further border closures in a second wave of the pandemic.

General

Recovery Fund

- Politico reported that Poland has threatened to bloc the EU’s recovery plan if it imposes the rule of law conditionality in the disbursement of funds.
- Meanwhile, negotiations between the Institutions are not moving fast over disagreements about increasing the budget for the EU programmes.

Borders

- In an interview at France’s Inter Radio Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton noted that the EU will prevent border closures in a second wave of the pandemic.
- Breton also said he will convene with representatives from the tourism industry across the EU at the beginning of October to discuss the sector’s recovery.

Testing

- The Commission has published a set of recommendations for a common COVID-19 testing approach in Europe.
  - Testing of all cases across the population with COVID-19 compatible symptoms, including mild symptoms, should be the priority.
  - Specific testing schemes and rapid intervention teams for testing and contact tracing should be available for schools, and be established by regional and local authorities.
  - Countries should aim to have as a target a turn-around-time of 24h hours (from request to be tested to the result shared with the individual tested and public health officers), in order to ensure the effective implementation of mitigation measures as well as swift contact tracing.

Travel Restrictions

- Politico has seen a Council Presidency document that proposes harmonizing data used for making travel restriction decisions. It calls for the ECDP to provide a weekly dataset of ‘key indicators’.
They are: the 14-day notification rate of new cases per 100,000 inhabitants, the testing rate per 100,000 inhabitants, and the test positivity rate. However, Politico note that several country are calling for the use of more detailed data. The document was presented to EU Ambassadors during a meeting on Friday.

**Vaccine**

- The European Commission **signed** a second contract for a COVID-19 vaccine with Sanofi-GSK. The contract will allow all EU Member States to purchase up to 300 million doses of the vaccine.
- The companies started a Phase 1/2 study in September, followed by a Phase 3 study by the end of 2020. If successful, and subject to regulatory considerations, the companies aim to have the vaccine available by the second half of 2021.

**Member States**

**Infection Rate** (measured by positive cases per 100,000 over 14 days)

- There have been several significant increases in infection rates across the EU27+1 over the past 3 days (17/09 – 20/09).
- Spain (287.2 – 300.5), France (166.9 – 185.8), the Czech Republic 143.3 – 193), Luxembourg (105.7 – 140.7), Belgium (80.7 – 105.4) and the Netherlands (82.5 – 104.4) have all recorded rises of +20.
- However, Malta (127.2 – 125.4), Sweden (29.4 – 28.4) and Bulgaria (27.7 – 26.6) have all recorded marginal declines in their infection rates.
- The average rate amongst the EU27+1 has risen from 67.1 to 76.7.

**France**

- Previously unreported cases in one hospital near Paris **increased** the death toll in France by 154.
- According to a Lancet **study**, France has one of the lowest vaccine confidence rates in the world — and four out of 10 French adults wouldn’t get a coronavirus vaccine if it were available, according to an Ipsos poll.
- French President Emmanuel Macron has **said** that he will scrap plans to impose an environmental tax to airlines “at a time when the state is pumping 18 billion euros into the sector through various forms of aid to keep it afloat”, as Reuters reported.

**Spain**

- As of Monday, and for the next 14 days, people living in 37 areas of Madrid will be asked to stay home as much as possible, but they will be allowed to go to work and school, and look after the elderly or vulnerable.
- Social gatherings will be cut back in size from 10 to six people, and caps will be reimposed on the number of people allowed in shops, libraries, places of worship, cinemas, sporting facilities and theatres.
Leisure facilities, hospitality businesses and shops will have to close by 10 pm

Ireland

- The Irish government on Friday 18 September announced strict new COVID-19 restrictions for Dublin, banning indoor restaurant dining and advising against all non-essential travel, after a surge in cases.

Source: DeHavillandEU