

A collaborative report in the times of the Coronavirus:

Government measures in key jurisdictions



Introduction

We are in the midst of incredibly challenging times. Uniquely, businesses and individuals in most countries in the world have been negatively, and severely, impacted by Covid-19. Individuals are all subject to a number of measures which restrict personal movement, and this has had an immediate impact on businesses and the economy.

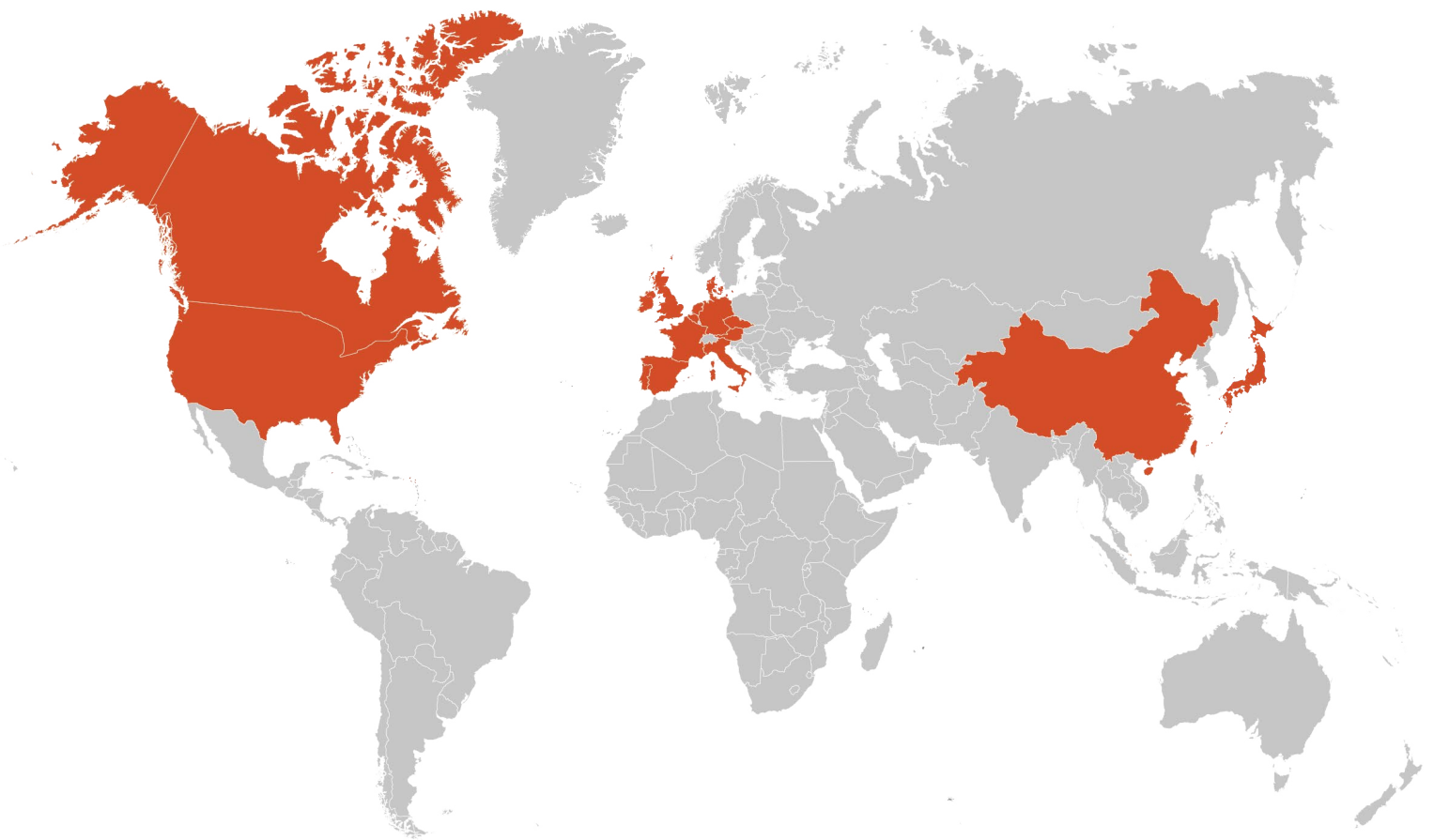
There is also uncertainty. We do not know how long the current restrictions will last and what the impact on the economy and businesses will be when these restrictions are lifted, and we all return to normal working life.

One of the important responses to the Covid-19 pandemic has been the interventionist role that Governments in many countries have taken to mitigate the economic impact of the virus. Governments have had to react incredibly quickly, and to be very creative in the measures available to businesses in order to prevent lasting economic damage to businesses and those that work in them.

Governments have therefore stepped in to support their economies by providing cash to businesses, especially in the form of loans, and by underwriting specific costs, notably employment costs. These are generally short-term measures with the expectation that they will be in place to support the economy only for the period when the impact of the virus is most critical.

A number of independent law firms have contributed to this briefing, offering clients that operate in multiple jurisdictions some practical advice on issues ranging from available state funding, employment and tax, to property and insolvency. We hope you will find it a useful tool to guide you and your business through these difficult, and ever-changing times.

Please note, this bulletin does not constitute legal advice. The law is accurate to 20 April 2020 and the position is moving rapidly. We recommend that the latest government guidance is checked as this is changing daily. This publication is a general summary of the law. It should not replace legal advice tailored to your specific circumstances.



This report has been put together as a collective effort from the following firms.

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Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

Financial assistance is available under several schemes that have been introduced in Austria, such as:

- EUR 15 billion emergency fund which is primarily intended for companies in sectors particularly affected by the crisis and which had to close down due to government regulations (mainly companies in the retail, tourism and leisure industries). A combination of governmental guarantees for new loans and grants for the coverage of fixed costs provided to companies which suffered a loss of turnover of at least 40% in 2020 caused by the crisis will be made available to ensure the liquidity of the companies. Grants do not have to be repaid.
- AWS State guarantee in the amount of 80% in order to secure credit facilities of up to EUR 2.5 million granted to the SME by its house bank. Not eligible are associations and SMEs (i) with an annual turnover of more than EUR 50 million, (ii) in need of reorganisation, (iii) meet the statutory requirements for the opening of insolvency proceedings at the request of creditors, (iv) in the tourism and leisure industry, (v) in the banking and insurance sector, (vi) in the real estate sector, and (vii) in the fishing and aquaculture industry or in the primary agricultural sector.
- ÖHT State guarantee to be granted only to SMEs in the tourism and leisure industry (SMEs with mixed business operations are also eligible). Guarantee in the amount of 80% in order to secure bridging loans (overdraft facilities) granted to the SME by its house bank.
- OeKB credit line granted to export companies is based on a bill guarantee. Conditions of the assumption of liability are determined individually. The amount of the loan is limited to 10% (large companies) or 15% (SMEs) of the company's last year export turnover. The individual loan is subject to a maximum upper limit of EUR 60 million per company group.
- [Corona Relief Fund – Guidelines for the issuance of guarantees and direct loans from the EUR 15 billion Corona-Relief Fund](#)

Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- Restricted working hours scheme (Kurzarbeit): Compensation available for employers at the flat rate for each hour of work that is no longer required by an employee due to COVID-19 for a maximum of 3 months (extension of a further 3 months is possible). During such period and for at least one month thereafter, the employer may not terminate the employment. Part-time employees, self-employed managing directors and board members are not eligible for such compensation schemes. Irrespective of reduced working hours, the following salaries must be paid to the employees: (i) for a monthly gross salary (before COVID-19) of less than EUR 1,700, 90% of the net salary; (ii) for a monthly gross salary (before COVID-19) between EUR 1,700 and EUR 2,685, 85% of the net salary; (iii) for a monthly gross salary (before COVID-19) of more than EUR 2,685, 80% of the net salary; and (iv) apprentices should receive 100% of their previous net salary. Companies are required to report to the Public Employment Service (Arbeitsmarktservice, AMS) the number of hours lost (via a payroll list) on a monthly basis. No reimbursement will be due for any income above EUR 5,370 gross.
- Social Security Deferral: There is an automatic deferral of social security contributions for February, March and April 2020 for companies which had to close down due to government regulations or are subject to a ban on entry relating to COVID-19.

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Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- The duty to file for bankruptcy due to over-indebtedness is suspended until 30 June 2020, if the over-indebtedness occurred after 1 March 2020.
- To the extent the insolvency was caused by COVID-19, the mandatory deadline to file for bankruptcy has been extended to 120 days following the insolvency.
- [Dispute resolution insider special edition: COVID-19](#)

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Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- Loans entered into prior to 15 March 2020 and granted to a consumer or a microenterprise (i.e. a company which employs less than 10 persons and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 2 mio.) will be subject to a moratorium to the extent the consumer has suffered a loss of income due to the COVID-19 crisis as a result of which it cannot be expected to continue the debt repayment or the microenterprise is unable to continue the debt repayment or it cannot be expected to continue the debt repayment without impairment the economic basis of its business due to the COVID-19 crisis. This regulation encompasses any payment obligation under the relevant loans which would fall due between 1 April 2020 and 30 June 2020. The mentioned payment obligations are deferred for a period of three months from the initial due date and the lender may not terminate the loan on the grounds of a material adverse change or the non-payment during the period of the moratorium.
- To the extent a party under an agreement entered into prior to 1 April 2020 fails to make a payment which falls due between 1 April 2020 and 30 June 2020 as a result of a material impairment of its economic basis due to the COVID-19 crisis, the other party may not claim an agreed default interest in excess of 4%. Furthermore, such party would not be required to pay out-of-court enforcement costs.
- To the extent a party under an agreement entered into prior to 1 April 2020 defaults on an obligation due to a material impairment of its economic basis as a result of the COVID-19 crisis or due to performance being impossible as a result of the trade restrictions, the other party may not claim a contractually agreed penalty, irrespective of whether it was stipulated to apply irrespective of the obligor's fault or not.
- COVID-19 is generally considered to constitute an event of force majeure under Austrian Law. Various legal doctrines are available to legally assess the legal consequences resulting from the permanent or temporary non-performance of contractual duties caused by COVID-19. However, due to the multitude of possible factual constellations, it is difficult to state in general whether and to which extent COVID-19 provides an exemption from performance obligations. Rather, such analysis depends on the underlying circumstances of or affecting a contractual arrangement or the specific contractual agreements in place.
- [Does COVID-19 constitute Force Majeure?](#)

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Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

- If a tenant of a private apartment does not pay rent (or a part thereof) due from 1 April 2020 until 30 June 2020 because he or she has been significantly economically impaired by the crisis, the underlying lease agreement may not be terminated by the landlord solely based on the payment default. Moreover, the landlord may neither enforce these outstanding payments nor draw a deposit provided by the tenant, before 31 December 2020.
- An eviction is to be postponed at the request of the tenant if the apartment is indispensable for urgent housing needs of the tenant and other persons living in the same household, unless the eviction is necessary to avert serious personal or economic disadvantages of the landlord. Before the decision on suspension is made, the landlord shall be given the opportunity to make a written statement.
- Under the Austrian Civil Code tenants may be entitled to a rent relief provided that their premises cannot be used as contractually agreed due to COVID-19; in practice, this currently mostly concerns leases in the retail and leisure industry, as most of such businesses had to be closed due to respective ordinances. However, as these provisions of the Civil Code are not mandatory and can therefore be deviated from (which in practice rarely has been the case, though), the question if and to which extent a rent relief actually applies, needs to be reviewed on a case by case basis.

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Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- Procedural periods at civil courts and administrative courts, which had not expired as of 22 March 2020 are suspended. This applies to both court and administrative proceedings. These time limits will restart as of 1 May 2020. Furthermore, the statute of limitations for prosecution (the time period subsequent to the offence within which an authority may commence proceedings) is also interrupted with respect to administrative offences. However, performance periods in civil courts (an executive order in a judgement or decision within which time performance must be rendered to the opponent) are not interrupted.
- Arbitration is also affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, many arbitration institutions have signalled that they will continue their work as far as possible. The Vienna International Arbitral Centre (VIAC) is working remotely and its case management is fully operational due to the new electronic case management system that was introduced in 2019.

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Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- Taxpayers affected by a liquidity shortage due to COVID-19 may, until 31 October 2020, apply for a reduction of (corporate) income tax prepayments for the year 2020 to the lower amount of (corporate) income tax expected for 2020 or even to zero. No interest will be charged in case the (corporate) income tax ultimately assessed for 2020 turns out to be higher than the (corporate) income tax prepayments.
- Taxpayers affected by a liquidity shortage due to COVID-19 may apply for a deferral of tax or payment in monthly instalments by 30 September 2020. Late payment interest may be reduced or altogether waived.

- Taxpayers may apply for a waiver of late payment fines already imposed, if the belated payment of taxes was due to a liquidity shortage related to COVID-19.
- The general filing deadline regarding (corporate) income tax declarations and annual value added tax declarations for the year 2019 has been extended from 30 June 2020 to 31 August 2020. Up to 1 September 2020 there will be no fines for missing tax filing deadlines.
- Legal transactions necessary for the proper handling of the COVID-19 crisis are exempt from stamp duty if concluded any time from 1 March 2020 to 31 December 2020 (e.g., sureties granted to ensure the liquidity of a company during the COVID-19 crisis).
- Bonus payments of up to EUR 3,000 made by employers to their employees in the calendar year 2020, which are solely being granted due to the COVID-19 crisis and would not have been granted otherwise, are exempt from income tax.
- Public grants to be offered from 1 March 2020 onwards to maintain sustainability during the COVID-19 crisis are tax-free.
- An exemption from fees and federal administrative charges for all documents and official acts related to COVID-19 applies. In particular, registrations of mortgages to secure loans taken out by companies to bridge their liquidity problems due to the COVID-19 crisis shall be exempt from court fees, provided that the application for registration has been received by the court before 1 July 2020.

Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- Meetings of all types of Austrian companies can be held without the physical presence of the participants. In principle, an acoustic and optical connection is necessary in order to hold virtual (general) meetings, whereby a common video conference solution should be sufficient. In exceptional cases, participants can only participate acoustically. Special rules apply, inter alia, to the general meetings of a listed companies: it may be provided that submitting an application for a resolution, voting and raising of an objection in the virtual general meeting can only be made by a special proxy instructed by the company. In such case, the company has to propose at least four suitable and independent proxies, whereby at least two of such special proxies must be lawyers or notaries.
- To the extent a notarial deed or a certification is required with respect to e.g. M&A transactions, capital measures and any legal document, notaries are entitled to use electronic tools to render their services. Such regulation applies until December 2020 and substitutes the requirement of physical meetings in front of a notary.
- The deadline for the ordinary general meetings has been extended to twelve months following the balance sheet date.
- Furthermore, the deadline for submitting the annual financial statements has been extended by three months, so that the annual financial statements of companies must be submitted to the responsible commercial register court no later than twelve months following the balance sheet date.

1

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

- In Belgium, the federal and regional governments have put in place numerous financial support measures. Such measures include one-off compensation to enterprises which are required to temporarily close down (such as the hotels and restaurants), deferral payment of bank loans, government guarantees, and other measures oriented to support specific sectors or SMEs.
- At the federal level, the federal government decided to allow a deferral of payment for existing credits, including mortgages for households and corporate loans for viable non-financial enterprises, SMEs, self-employed persons and non-profit organizations. The deferral can be requested for a maximum period of 6 months for payments due (ending on 31 October 2020). In addition, in respect of new loans granted between 1 April 2020 and 30 September 2020 for a maximum term of one year, the federal government provides guarantees and undertakes sharing of losses with the financial sector. For more details on this topic, please refer to our [Corona Desk website](#).
- At the regional level, in Flanders, the coverage of PMV (Flemish corona crisis guarantee) has been extended. PMV can now also grant medium-term subordinated loans to healthy SMEs for a term of 3 years. The repayment of following loans: start-up loans 'startlening', the so-called 'Co-financiering' and 'Co-financiering +' can be automatically deferred for 3 months. In addition, enterprises with government grant can also request extension of deadlines with VLAIO (the Flanders Innovation and Entrepreneurship).
- In the Brussels-Capital Region, the enterprises can request loans with reduced interest rate from Finance and Invest Brussels. Emergency loan start-up investment fund can provide loans for cultural and creative enterprises. In addition, Brussels Waarborgfonds (Brussels guarantee fund) also can provide guarantees on bank loans.
- In the Walloon Region, there are also similar support measures provided by SRIW, SOWALFIN and Groep SOGEPA (guarantees, loans and deferrals).

2

Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- Employers in non-essential businesses must guarantee teleworking and/or social distancing for their employees. If this is not possible, the company must close. In that case, the employees can apply for "temporary unemployment" ("tijdelijke werkloosheid"/ "chômage temporaire"). Temporary unemployment can also be invoked, for instance, if the company suddenly has insufficient work for its employees, if an employee is not able to find childcare for his/her children or if an employee has been put in quarantine abroad. In addition to a very flexible scope of application, the Belgian authorities have also significantly eased the application procedure. The employee will receive an allowance of 70% of his average salary (capped), and the government will grant a supplement of 5.63 euro per day.
- Self-employed persons can rely on a "bridging right" ("overbruggingsrecht", "droit passerelle"), which has also been made more flexible in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. Are eligible: self-employed who are obliged to cease their activities (in whole or in part) or self-employed who are practically forced to cease their activities for at least 7 consecutive calendar days. The monthly allowance amounts to 1,291.69 without family charge and 1,614.10 with family charge. The authorities also provide for premiums: the "nuisance premium" if the company was obliged to close completely (one-off 4,000 euro or 5,000 euro and possibly an additional daily premium of 160 euro, depending on the region) or the "compensation premium" (one-off 3,000 euro) if the company is still active but suffers a heavy loss of turnover. For the relevant topics, please refer to section Personnel at our [Corona Desk website](#).

3

Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- For the time being, no legal regulation protecting entrepreneurs in difficulty against bankruptcy has yet been approved. In practice, it appears that, depending on the judicial district, when the entrepreneur itself applies for bankruptcy, priority is given to those bankruptcies that are considered urgent, mainly those enterprises employing staff.
- In the meantime, a draft decree is in the legislative process. It wishes to introduce a temporary moratorium for all companies that have run into difficulties as a result of COVID-19. The measures are expected to contain the following:
 - the company will be protected against seizure proceedings,
 - companies cannot be declared bankrupt at the request of their creditors (but can be declared bankrupt at the request of the public prosecutor, or with the agreement of the debtor himself),
 - current contracts cannot be terminated on grounds of non-payment,
 - the debtor is temporarily not obliged to file a declaration of bankruptcy, and
 - the company judge decides whether a debtor can benefit from this suspension if he invokes it as a defence.
- There is an anti-abuse mechanism. The president of the competent court can at all times, at the request of the creditor, lift the temporary suspension. The scheme is not intended for those companies that were already in a state of bankruptcy prior to 18 March 2020, but only for those companies that were still in good financial shape until 18 March 2020 but have run into difficulties as a result of COVID-19.
- The draft decree has already been approved by the federal government, but still needs to go through the remaining legislative process before it can be implemented.

4

Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- Currently there have been no specific legal regulations to reinforce contracts.
- Parties will have to analyse the applicable contractual provisions in order to establish whether the current governmental measures can be invoked to suspend performance under the contract or to lift liability for non or late performance. Contracts in Belgium often include clauses relating to force majeure or hardship.
- If parties did not include such provisions, Belgian law and jurisprudence of the highest court provide for several mechanisms to protect contracting parties against adverse events. Principles of good faith and obligations to renegotiate contracts can be invoked under strict conditions. Application of these principles are casuistic and must be assessed in detail.
- For more details on this topic, please refer to section Contract at our [Corona Desk website](#).

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

- In respect of payment of rent, the current pandemic does not constitute force majeure for tenants. They have to pay rent and may not suspend payment of rent. However, there are measures to mitigate the impacts of this pandemic. For instance, in the Flemish Region:
 - it is possible to extend the lease agreement by e-mail if the agreement is about to expire during the confinement period,
 - a social tenant who has lost his or her income due to temporary unemployment as a result of force majeure will be able to ask the social landlord for a temporary adjustment of the rent, and
 - social landlords will be able to provide temporary shelter, directly or through an intermediary institution, to individual or families in an emergency situation as a result of the COVID-19 virus measures.
- In addition, due to social distancing requirements, some procedures or meetings with physical attendance requirements have been either postponed or allowed for alternative attendance means, this is the case for the participation in the general meeting of association of co-owners. In immovable heritage application procedures, flexibilities are granted in terms of (and amongst others) extension of time limits for public enquiry on the establishment of the architectural heritage inventory or for the appeal on certain decision.
- For more details, please refer to our [Corona Desk website](#).

6

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- Due to social distancing requirements, access to the courthouses has been restricted. Until at least 3 May 2020, only persons who, for professional reasons, have to be present in the building or persons who, exceptionally, have to be present within the context of a legal proceeding are allowed to enter.
- If a trial is required and no delay is possible, the case will be set at a fixed hour in order to avoid a concentration of persons at one place. All persons present are also asked to keep the necessary distance, at least one and a half metres, in the courtrooms and outside.
- The clerks' offices still open to the public, but physical contacts are limited by organizing a central reception, communication through electronic ways and, if necessary, work by appointments only.
- Until 3 May 2020, the courts only deal with urgent proceedings but should try to ensure continuity of justice, to the extent that the health regulations can be adequately complied with.
- In terms of civil proceedings, according to the measures under Royal Decree No. 2, all civil cases scheduled to be pleaded between 11 April 2020 and 3 June 2020 will automatically be trialled by written procedure, on the basis of exchanged statements and exhibits. If all parties oppose to the written procedure, the case for oral submissions will be postponed. For more details, please refer to our [Corona Desk website](#).

- In terms of criminal proceedings, the following measures have been taken in accordance with Royal Decree No. 3 concerns various measures on criminal procedure and the enforcement of penalties. During the period between 18 March 2020 and 3 May 2020 (with certain exceptions):
 - in respect of Chamber of Indictment, written procedure will apply, and
 - the Criminal Enforcement Court will only hear the following persons: (i) the applicant's counsel (in the case referred to in Article 3, §3 of the Act of 17 May 2006 on the external legal position of persons sentenced to a custodial sentence); (ii) the counsel for the convicted, for the victim and for the prosecution (in the cases provided for in Articles 53, 61, 63, 68, 75/2, 78, 79, 95/1, 95/6, 95/13, 96/16, 96/18, 96/19, 96/23 and 95/30 of the same Act of 17 May 2006).
- To consult the relevant Royal Decrees, please refer to: [Royal Decree No. 2](#), [Royal Decree No. 3](#)

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

In Belgium, the federal and regional governments have provided many tax supports measures. At the federal level:

- Federal Public Services Finance can foresee repayment schemes for existing fiscal debts for businesses that find themselves in difficulties due to the COVID-19 outbreak. It applies to withholding tax, VAT, personal income tax, corporate tax and legal entities tax.
- Deferment for the filing of tax declarations for Corporate Tax, Legal Entities Tax, and Non-resident Corporate Tax with deadlines from 16 March up to and including 30 April 2020.
- Deferment of VAT-declaration and intracommunal statements filing.
- Deferment for the payment of VAT, personal income tax, corporate tax and payroll withholding tax.
- COVID-19 virus should be considered as an exceptional circumstance justifying the exemption of a write-down on a trade receivable.
- According to Circular 2020/C/46, with respect to qualifying donations:
 - no VAT on donations of medical supplies to hospitals,
 - for natural persons: tax reduction for gifts,
 - for companies: deduction as professional expenses, and
 - for self-employed persons: deduction as professional expenses
- Accelerated VAT refunds for all monthly VAT declarations of February 2020, submitted up to and including 3 April 2020.
- Deferment for the payment of the special VAT declaration 629.
- Modification of the prepayment rates of income tax.

- Tax shelter film and theatre: extension of the period within which the producer must incur expenditure in order to meet the conditions for the “tax shelter” for audiovisual works and performing arts.
- Non-taxable telework compensation up to 129,48 EUR per month to cover costs like electricity and small office supplies.
- Exceptional teleworking measures for cross-border workers due to COVID-19 virus:
 - The presence of cross-border workers Belgium – Luxembourg in their place of residence will not be taken into account for the calculation of the 24-day period.
 - The presence of French cross-border workers in their place of residence in France will not be taken into account for the calculation of the 30-day period.
- For more information, please view [here](#).

At the **regional level: Flanders**

- Assessment notes for property withholding taxes will be sent as from September 2020.
- Exceptional premium of 4000 EUR for companies that are obliged to close down completely.
- Road taxes: The payment period for companies is extended by 4 months.
- Extension of periods to meet tax obligations for inheritance tax and registration tax.
- Facilitating repayment plans.
- Additional period for municipalities to adjust surcharges on property tax.
- For more information, please view [here](#).

At the **regional level: Brussels-Capital**

- Exceptional premium of 4,000 EUR for companies that are obliged to close down completely.
- Suspension of the “city tax” in the Brussels-Capital Region for the first half of 2020.
- A two-month extension of the deadlines for the payment of property tax for the 2020 tax year.
- Exemption from tax for taxi services or chauffeur-driven vehicles for the 2020 tax year.
- Suspension of LEZ fines.
- For more information, please view [here](#).

At the **regional level: Wallonia**

- Suspension of the deadline for the payment of Walloon taxes according to the duration of the COVID-19 measures.
- Exceptional premium of 5.000 EUR for companies that are obliged to close down completely.
- With regard to disputes concerning regional taxes, the deadlines for lodging appeals and negative administrative decisions are frozen; reimbursements following positive decisions are accelerated.

- Recovery procedures in progress / to be initiated are made more flexible, including at the level of the judicial officers.
- Repayment plans are facilitated.
- Moderation of the administrative fines related to road pricing.
- Adaptation of the time limit to benefit from the favorable regime in the event of a resale of a property within two years.
- Exceptional reduction of the registration fee for mortgage mandates to 0%.
- Reduction of the tax to 1/12 per month of compulsory closure for automatic leisure equipment.
- For more information, please view [here](#).



Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- The Belgian government published on 9 April 2020 a Royal Decree to allow deviations from the conditions of convening shareholders' meetings under the Code of Companies and Associations, due to social distancing requirements.
- In respect of shareholders' meetings which have been called or will be called between 1 March 2020 to 3 May 2020, or which must be held between 9 April 2020 and 3 May 2020, or which should have been held between 1 March 2020 and 9 April 2020, the following deviations are possible:
 - Firstly, the shareholders' meeting can be held remotely (through videoconference), and/or through a proxyholder, even if the articles of association does not provide this possibility.
 - Secondly, the shareholders' meeting can be postponed to a later date of the choice of the company. In particular, for annual shareholders' meeting which needs to approve financial statements of the company and file them with the National Bank of Belgium within six months following the closing of financial year, a postponement of the approval and filing is possible within maximum 10 weeks. However, certain general shareholder's meetings (for example, when the net asset drops below zero) cannot be postponed.
- For more details on this royal decree, please refer to: [Royal Decree No. 4](#)

1

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

- The BVI Government is consulting with various banking institutions in relation to loan repayments. Some banks are already offering deferred payments, special loan financing and other concessions. Arrangements are currently made on a case by case basis.
- The BVI Government has stated that the economic response to the COVID-19 pandemic is to be implemented in a phased approach. The Government has allocated USD 12 million dollars to ensure the procurement of the necessary supplies and structure. Further details of the economic stimulus package, to assist BVI residents and businesses are expected to be published soon.

2

Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- As detailed above, further details of the BVI Government's economic stimulus package to support businesses and individuals are expected in due course.

3

Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- The legislation has not been changed as a result of the pandemic but the Charging Orders Act 2020, which was published in the Government Gazette on 26 March 2020, confers jurisdiction on the High Court to make orders imposing a charge for securing the payment of money due under judgments or orders of the High Court. As at 20 April 2020, the Act is not yet in force.

4

Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- We are not aware of any intervention into the workings of contracts governed by BVI law and the normal rules apply.
- The majority of commercial contracts under BVI law will have force majeure clauses providing for situations when a party may terminate the contract and/or be excused for failure or delay in complying with the terms of the contract due to a specified event. The contract will usually list force majeure events. The question of whether COVID-19 as a pandemic is a force majeure event will depend on the drafting of the clause in each case.

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

- No laws have been amended. However, the BVI Government has appealed to landlords to be flexible with tenants.



Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- Yes, the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court remains open and fully operational. Measures and practice directions have been put in place to ensure the continuation of court proceedings while protecting the health and safety of the court employees and other court users. These measures include provision for electronic service and filing and remote hearings via video conferencing technology.
- [COVID-19 Emergency Guidelines for Conducting Court Procedures in the BVI](#)



Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- No.
- See below regarding economic substance.



Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- The BVI Registry of Corporate Affairs is operating as usual with some minor changes to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- There is no requirement for BVI companies to hold annual general meetings.
- There is also no requirement for board meetings to take place in the BVI or for board members to be in the same physical location. Meetings by telephone or video conference are acceptable, provided that all of the directors participating in the meeting can hear each other clearly.
- The COVID-19 global pandemic has been declared an exceptional circumstance under the Financial Services (Exceptional Circumstances) Act 2020, which provides a framework for stability of financial services operations conducted in and from the BVI during exceptional circumstances. The Act allows regulated persons to relocate outside and elsewhere within the BVI during or after any period of occurrence of an exceptional circumstance and outlines how outstanding regulatory obligations and liabilities are to be applied or modified.
- In relation to economic substance requirements, the BVI International Tax Authority has confirmed that only those board meetings relating to a BVI company's "core income generating activities" are required to be physically held in the BVI. Alternate directors based in the BVI may be appointed to attend physical board meetings whilst regular travel is restricted. If it is still not possible to have a board meeting in the BVI or to meet some other economic substance requirement due to restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 outbreak, BVI entities should retain documentary evidence for the applicable periods of time affected.
- Please see our update on [Overcoming barriers to completion of corporate transactions amidst COVID-19-challenges](#) and our [Caribbean Regulatory Update](#).
- All the most recent Mourant updates relating to COVID-19 are available at [Mourant COVID-19 Updates](#).

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

In Canada, the federal government has introduced the COVID-19 Economic Response Plan (**CERP**), which includes a comprehensive set of economic measures to help combat the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Business Development Bank of Canada and Export Development Canada will provide more than \$65 billion of support to ensure businesses have credit through the Business Credit Availability Program (**BCAP**), largely targeting small and medium-sized businesses. These entities are also working with private sector lenders to coordinate solutions for individual businesses. The objective of the BCAP is to improve access to financing for credit-worthy Canadian businesses with viable business models whose access to financing would otherwise be restricted.

To access the BCAP, businesses should first contact their financial institutions, which will contact Business Development Bank of Canada and/or Export Development Canada, where appropriate. The BCAP includes:

- **Canada Emergency Business Account:** Under this program, financial institutions will be able to provide loans of up to \$40,000 to small businesses and non-profits, which will be guaranteed by the federal government and interest free for the first year. To qualify for these loans, small businesses and non-profits need to have paid between \$20,000 and \$1.5 million in total payroll in 2019 and need to have been operating as of March 1, 2020. Businesses will be forgiven for up to 25% of the loan, up to \$10,000, if the balance of the loan is repaid on or before December 31, 2022. If the loan is not repaid by December 21, 2022, the remaining balance will be converted to a three-year term loan at 5% interest. The funds from this loan can only be used to pay non-deferrable operating expenses, including payroll, rent, utilities, insurance, property tax and regularly scheduled debt service. This program is now available at various financial institutions and credit unions.
- **Loan Guarantee to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs):** Export Development Canada is working with financial institutions to help them issue new operating credit and cash flow term loans up to \$6.25 million to existing SME clients, with 80% guaranteed by Export Development Canada. Export Development Canada is also supporting certain businesses by offering banks a guarantee on loans up to US\$10 million, per business, to ensure these businesses can access cash immediately.
- **Co-Lending Program for SMEs:** The Business Development Bank of Canada is working with financial institutions to co-lend term loans to SMEs to help meet their operational cash flow requirements. The loans available under this program are as follows: (i) loans of up to \$312,500 for businesses with under \$1 million in revenue; (ii) loans of up to \$3.125 million for businesses with revenues between \$1 million and \$50 million; and (iii) loans of up to \$6.25 million for businesses with revenues exceeding \$50 million. The loans under this program are interest-only for the first 12 months, with a 10-year repayment period.

Further discussion on the government funds available for businesses can be found [here](#).

2 Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

As part of the CERP, the federal government has implemented the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (**CEWS**) program, providing a 75% wage subsidy to eligible employers for up to 12 weeks, retroactive to March 15, 2020. Eligibility is assessed based on the degree of revenue lost in the relevant 4-week eligibility period.

- **Eligible Employers:** Eligible employers can include individuals, taxable corporations, registered charities (other than public institutions such as school boards, colleges, or hospitals), and partnerships (all members of which are eligible employers). Eligible employers must demonstrate a qualifying drop in revenue during the eligible period. Notably, the lost revenue threshold for eligibility for the CEWS in March of 2020 was lowered from 30% to 15% to reflect the fact that the most significant consequences of the pandemic began in mid-March. Employers will be required to re-apply for the CEWS each month.
- **Eligible Employees:** An eligible employee is an individual who is employed in Canada other than those who have been without remuneration for 14 or more consecutive days in the eligibility period.

More information on the CEWS can be found [here](#) and further details on the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (**CERB**) and support for essential workers are discussed [here](#).

The federal government has also amended the Canada Labour Code by creating a new job-protected leave of absence of up to 16 weeks for employees in federally-regulated workplaces who are unable or unavailable to work for reasons related to COVID-19. Several Canadian provinces have similarly amended the applicable provincial employment standards legislation to create job-protected leaves of absence for employees who are unable to work due to COVID-19.

For more information regarding the amendments to the Canada Labour Code and provincial employment standards legislation, please visit the Cassels Comments located [here](#) and [here](#).

3 Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

While Canada's main insolvency statutes, the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act (**BIA**) and Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act (**CCAA**) have not been amended at the time of writing, new legislation and amendments to existing legislation do impact the insolvency process. In addition, guidance from other participants in the insolvency regulatory process will affect insolvency practice and procedures. The following are some examples:

- As part of the federal government's CERB program, the income support benefit provided will not be subject to the operation of any law relating to bankruptcy and insolvency.
- Several provinces have enacted legislation to temporarily suspend limitation periods, which apply to the insolvency process.

The Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy Canada, which regulates Licensed Insolvency Trustees (**LITs**) and is the regulator under the BIA and CCAA, has recommended that LITs work with debtors and third parties to ensure that they are handling insolvencies in a flexible manner that is the least prejudicial to individuals in financial distress. Under the BIA, the courts have broad authority to allow bankruptcy cases to move forward in irregular circumstances if the courts believe it is appropriate.

4

Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

Each Canadian province has its own legislation outlining the requirements for doing business electronically and using eSignatures. In Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta, barring a few important exceptions, eSignatures may be utilized for closing transactions to create binding obligations.

Documents requiring a traditional “wet ink” signature include:

- wills, codicils and trusts created by wills or codicils,
- powers of attorney regarding an individual’s financial affairs or personal care,
- negotiable instruments (such as certificated securities and negotiable promissory notes),
- beneficiary designations (such as for life insurance),
- certain real estate matters, and
- documents that are from time to time prescribed or that belong to a prescribed class.

With regard to real estate matters, parties may use eSignatures to sign documents that create or transfer an interest in land. However, it is important to note that certain restrictions may apply depending on the applicable province.

For a more detailed explanation, see the Cassels Comment located [here](#).

Other contractual matters, including material adverse effect and material adverse change provisions and Force Majeure clauses, have been impacted by the effects of COVID-19. For more information, see additional Cassels Comments located [here](#) and [here](#).

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

The federal government has announced plans to provide additional support for small businesses through the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA) program. The program is intended to provide rent support to small and medium-sized businesses that have been impacted by COVID-19 for the months of April, May, and June 2020. The federal government will be working closely with the provincial governments to implement the program. Additionally, the federal government announced it will be offering loans, including forgivable loans, to commercial landlords who offer rent reductions to businesses across Canada. Further details on the program are anticipated in the upcoming days.

Provinces and municipalities across Canada have implemented various measures providing relief for both landlords and tenants in residential and commercial leasing matters, including:

- municipal property tax relief measures,
- suspension of eviction orders and hearings related to eviction applications for non-urgent issues,
- temporary rental supplements,
- rent freezes,
- deferral of late fees on late rental payments, and
- commercial rent deferral programs.

The government of Ontario has introduced the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Support and Protection Act, which includes amendments to the Planning Act authorizing the Minister to make regulations respecting the calculation of time for development applications in connection with the emergency declared under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (**EMCPA**).

Regulations have been released to provide municipalities with additional flexibility during the COVID-19 emergency to process and advance development applications, particularly where there is no dispute, without concern that appeals may be filed on the basis of non-decision. This should also come as welcome news to applicants and new homebuyers, who have faced technical challenges to project delivery and new home closings during this emergency.

More information on the new provincial legislation in Ontario can be found [here](#).

The Ontario government has made an order under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act suspending limitation periods and procedural time periods (the Suspension Order). The suspension is retroactive to March 16, 2020, and continues for the duration of the emergency, for a maximum of 90 days, unless extended by further order.

An apparent unintended consequence of the Suspension Order was its impact on the timing of the release of statutory holdback on construction projects across Ontario. Since the expiration dates for liens was suspended, holdback that would otherwise have become due and payable during the suspension period could be expected to not be released by owners until potential lien claims had expired, after the suspension period had been lifted. This, in turn, would have significant cash flow implications for an already suffering construction industry.

The government of Ontario has recognized the financial impact suspended lien periods would have on contractors and subcontractors due to the inability of owners to release holdback and has, accordingly, decided to order that the Construction Act be exempted from the Suspension Order.

Additionally, the government of Ontario has made several orders with respect to the closure of all non-essential businesses. The list of essential workplaces has been reduced to 44.

Certain construction projects have been deemed essential and are exempt from the orders. These essential construction projects include healthcare sector projects, critical infrastructure projects, critical industrial projects, and certain residential projects that have specific permits already granted. In addition, the government of Ontario has now added construction projects that are due to be completed before October 4, 2020 and that would provide additional capacity in the production, processing, manufacturing or distribution of food, beverages or agricultural products. This added category of essential construction projects is intended to keep key supply chains running and to avoid food and beverage shortages.

Additional discussion on the impact on construction lien periods and construction projects can be found [here](#).

6

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

Courts across Canada have closed and nearly everything before them has been adjourned indefinitely. Only urgent matters can be brought before a judge. Some courts are now implementing email filing measures and holding hearings by video or teleconference. But when the courts re-open, they are likely to prioritize criminal cases, because of the constitutional obligation to resolve criminal cases within a reasonable period of time.

Many commercial disputes are well-suited to being resolved through arbitration. Arbitration's traditional advantages of greater speed, lower costs, and greater flexibility as compared to litigation give it an even greater edge when courts are closed.

More information can be found [here](#).

The Ontario provincial government has activated its powers under the EMCPA, which has had a significant impact on limitation periods in Ontario.

In accordance with the EMCPA, any limitation period has been suspended for the duration of the emergency. This suspends any time-limiting provision in any statute, regulation, rule, bylaw or order of the Ontario government for all proceedings in Ontario. The order is retroactive to March 16, 2020.

British Columbia has suspended filing deadlines of Family and Civil claims until May 1, 2020, but all other filing deadlines and limitation periods continue to apply.

Further details of the temporary changes to limitation periods are located [here](#).

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

The Canadian government has implemented a series of administrative tax measures as part of the CERP, including:

- extension of filing deadlines,
- tax audit deferral,
- sales tax and customs duty payment deferrals,
- income tax deferrals,
- objections and appeals extension, and
- collections activities on new debts will be suspended until further notice and flexible payment arrangements will be available.

A summary of the key income tax measures can be found [here](#) and further details regarding GST/HST relief and provincial income tax measures are discussed [here](#).



Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- Certain Canadian provinces, including Ontario, have temporarily extended the time frame in which public companies are required to hold annual meetings of shareholders and provided an exemption for corporations to hold virtual meetings despite any restrictions in the articles or by-laws.
- More information related to the extension and the relief for companies to hold virtual meetings can be found [here](#) and commentary on virtual annual general meetings can be found [here](#).

1

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

- A Low Interest Loan Programme, administered through the Cayman Islands Development Bank, will provide financial and non-financial support to 100% Caymanian-owned micro and small businesses affected by COVID-19. The programme will provide each borrower with a fully-backed government guarantee.
- Banks are generally providing customers with an initial three month grace period for mortgages and personal loans. A further three month extension may be available upon agreement.
- Some banks are offering business customers with a remaining loan principal of up to KYD 2 million, the option to pay interest only for the next three months. Business customers with higher value loans may be offered assistance by individual agreement.

2

Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- The Ministry of Commerce, Planning and Infrastructure announced that it will implement a number of relief measures to support micro and small businesses, including a Micro and Small Business Grant Programme, a Low Interest Loan Programme (as detailed above), a Technical Assistance Programme and a government funded Training Programme.
- The Cayman Islands Needs Assessment Unit provides financial assistance to individuals in need and this assessment is done on a case by case basis. The Government has announced that additional funding has been secured for this purpose. The Government has also provided a one-time stipend for certain persons working in the public transport industry.

3

Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- Not yet. However, a draft bill to amend the Companies Law with the introduction of a dedicated restructuring regime and restructuring officer, is currently in circulation for industry consultation. This has not yet been reviewed or passed by the legislative assembly.
- The introduction of a dedicated restructuring regime in the Cayman Islands has been in the pipeline for some time and is not a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4

Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- We are not aware of any intervention into the workings of contracts governed by Cayman Islands law and the normal rules apply.
- The majority of commercial contracts under Cayman law will have force majeure clauses providing for situations when a party may terminate the contract and/or be excused for failure or delay in complying with the terms of the contract due to a specified event. The contract will usually list force majeure events. The question of whether COVID-19 as a pandemic is a force majeure event will depend on the drafting of the clause in each case.

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

- No laws have been amended.
- However, the Cayman Islands Government is urging landlords to be flexible with tenants. Most Cayman banks have also offered mortgage relief as a result of the pandemic.

6

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- Yes, the Cayman Courts and Judicial Administration remain fully operational. Measures and practice directions have been put in place to ensure the continued administration of justice while protecting the health and safety of the court employees and other court users, including provision for electronic filing and remote hearings via video conferencing technology.
- See our legal update [Litigating in the Cayman Islands during these unprecedented times](#).
- The latest update from the Cayman Islands Judicial Administration can be accessed [here](#).

7

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- No. The Cayman Islands does not have any direct taxation.
- See below regarding economic substance.

8

Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- The Cayman Islands Registrar of Companies is operating as usual with some minor changes to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Cayman Islands exempted companies are not obliged to hold annual general meetings.
- The Cayman Islands Government has taken a number of initiatives to ensure that 'business as usual' can continue, such as extending the existing filing deadline for companies. In addition, the Registrar of Companies will accept affidavits or other documents that have been notarised/certified online or utilising audio-video technology during this time.
- Where board meetings are required to be held virtually during this period, the Cayman Islands Department for International Tax Cooperation will take that into consideration, on a case-by-case basis, when determining whether an entity has passed or failed the economic substance test in its reporting which is due in 2021.
- Please see our update on [Overcoming barriers to completion of corporate transactions amidst COVID-19-challenges](#) and our [Caribbean Regulatory Update](#).
- All the most recent Mourant updates relating to COVID-19 are available at [Mourant COVID-19 Updates](#).

1

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

- In February, a government policy is announced to strengthen financial support to enterprises. The central government will subsidize the interest payment of key enterprises engaged in epidemic containment.
- Financial institutions are asked to refrain from arbitrary withdrawing, cutting or delaying loans that are issued to severely affected industries, (e.g., wholesale and retail) and enterprises that are otherwise performing well but are under temporary difficulties due to the epidemic, and small and micro enterprises in particular.
- For enterprises that cannot repay loans on time due to severe impact by the epidemic, loans can be extended or renewed. Meanwhile, measures are taken to lower lending rates and increase unsecured loans and medium and long-term loans to help enterprises handle the impact of the epidemic.

2

Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- The Standing Committee of the State Council on February 18, 2020 adopted national policies to reduce the financial impact of the epidemic on employers as well as to help stabilize employment. Among the policies are the reduction of employer social insurance contributions and the delay of housing fund contributions. The policies have gradually been implemented by national and local notices and policies.
- On February 20, 2020, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, together with the Ministry of Finance and the General Administration of Taxation announced the following:
 - From February 2020, provinces may exempt small and medium-sized enterprises for up to five months from paying the employer portion of contributions for pension, unemployment, and occupational injury insurance.
 - Provinces may reduce by 50% the employer contributions for pension, unemployment, and occupational injury insurance for large enterprises for up to three months.
 - Hubei province may exempt all employers from paying the employer contributions for pension, unemployment, and occupational injury insurance for up to five months.
 - All employers that suffer serious difficulties in production and operation due to the outbreak may apply for deferred payment of contributions for all five types of social insurance for up to six months. Approved employers would not be liable for late payment fees.
- [Further employment policies issued relating COVID-19 epidemic.](#)

3

Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- During the COVID-19 outbreak, courts have allowed enterprises in bankruptcy proceedings to take measures such as resumption of production and operation or disposal of assets related to epidemic prevention and control, which has contributed to fighting the epidemic as well as increasing the creditors' debt repayment ratio.
- For additional information on measures taken related to enterprises in bankruptcy proceedings during the COVID-19 epidemic in Chinese, please click [here](#).

4

Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- Performance of contractual obligations could be delayed due to the COVID-19 Epidemic. Here is an analysis about if a developer can claim exemption from liability for the breach of contract arising from a delay in delivering houses on schedule.
- In practice, many developers see epidemics, major public health events, universal epidemic diseases, governmental policies and decrees relating to construction as force majeure events, or at least situations where developers are specifically entitled to postpone the time of delivery as agreed upon in their sales contracts. Thus, based on the principle of autonomy of will, sellers and purchasers can enjoy and undertake the rights and obligations to postpone the time of delivery as agreed upon in their contracts if it is valid.
- If there is no valid agreement, developers can apply for a force majeure or use the principle of change of circumstances. However, the legal consequences and outcome of such a declaration will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
- [Special Series regarding the Legal Impact of the COVID-19 Epidemic on the Real Estate Industry. Topic One: the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on the sale of commodity housing.](#)

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

Some local governments have introduced support and guidance policies for enterprises affected by the COVID-19 Epidemic, which also include the adjustment of lease agreement relationships. For instance, the Municipal Government of Beijing issued Several Measures on Dealing with the Impact of COVID-19 Epidemic and Promote the Sustainable and Healthy Development of Medium, Small and Micro Enterprise on February 5, 2020. According to those measures, for medium, small and micro enterprises which rent properties from city-owned or district-owned enterprises:

- the rent in February shall be exempt if such enterprises (i) rent properties for the purpose of manufacturing or operations; (ii) keep operating or stop operating in accordance with the policies for the prevention and control of the Epidemic; and (iii) do not lay off employees or only lay off few employees,
- the rent in February shall be reduced to 50% of the original amount if such enterprises rent properties for office work,
- it is encouraged that landlords (property owners) reduce or exempt the rent of other leased properties, which is subject to the negotiation of the contract parties, and
- for landlords that reduce or exempt rent for medium, small and micro enterprises, the municipal or district government would provide subsidies.

Although the policies above are only applicable to qualified “small, medium and micro enterprises”, it may also act as a guide for other leasing parties.

- [Special Series regarding the Legal Impact of the COVID-19 Epidemic on the Real Estate Industry. Topic Three: the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on property lease agreements.](#)



Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- A number of courts and arbitration institutions issued notice to encourage online filing and submission of materials. For example, court in Shanghai encouraged parties to initiate mediation and handle litigation related matters through online and mobile platforms. On January 28, 2020, the China International Economic and Trade Arbitration Commission issued a notice encouraging parties to submit arbitration applications and related documents through the online filing system.
- For additional information on the development of diversified dispute resolution mechanism to deal with emergencies in Chinese, please click [here](#).



Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- As of February 14 2020, the Ministry of Finance, the State Taxation Administration and the General Administration of Customs have jointly issued several circulars to support the epidemic's prevention and control, prompt the relevant enterprises' development and lighten the tax burden of the taxpayer affected by this epidemic. According to the contents specified in the relevant circulars, the tax policies can be categorized into the following five categories: 1. Corporate Income Tax ("CIT"); 2. Individual Income Tax ("IIT"); 3. Valued-Added Tax ("VAT"), Consumption Tax ("CT") and other taxes; 4. Imported Materials; and 5. Tax Administration and Collection. Below are selected policies.
- (CIT) Enterprises **significantly affected by the epidemic**: for the tax loss incurred in 2020, the maximum carry forward period is increased from five to eight years.
- (IIT) Medical staff and anti-epidemic workers participating in epidemic prevention and control: the temporary subsidies and bonuses obtained according to the standards specified by governments are exempt from IIT.
- (VAT) Revenue derived from providing public transportation services, consumer services and collection and delivery services for residents' daily necessities is exempted from VAT.
- (Tax Administration and Collection) Taxpayers and withholding agents subject to monthly tax filing (Nationwide): the statutory time limit for tax filing in February 2020 will be extended to February 24, 2020. Taxpayers and withholding agents affected by the epidemic who still face difficulties in filing tax returns after the said time limit extension in February 2020, may apply for a further extension in accordance with the law.
- [Summary of the PRC Tax Regulations issued in response to the COVID-19 Outbreak.](#)



Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- Since the outbreak of COVID-19, China's provinces, autonomous regions and province-level municipalities have successively launched public health emergency plans in their respective administrative regions and taken actions to contain COVID-19. Local governments in regions such as Zhejiang, Gansu, Anhui and Shanghai have set out requirements that enterprises should prepare emergency plans for the prevention and control of COVID-19 in the form of notices on the prevention and control of COVID-19 and the resumption of work. Some notices have emphasized that the responsible person in the enterprise should lead the preparation work personally.
- There are various factors to consider in drafting an emergency plan, namely, (i) regulatory requirements may differ depending on different regions (for instance, we have noticed that some local governments have publicized templates of the emergency plans specifically for enterprises' use, while other local governments have not), (ii) regulatory requirements may vary among different industries, and (iii) business features and characteristics may differ among enterprises.
- [For enterprises that are resuming operations: how to prepare an emergency plan for the prevention and control of Novel Coronavirus Pneumonia.](#)

1

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

- Yes, three waves of emergency loans have been handed to SMEs (small and medium enterprises). The first by way of outright government's bank loans, the second and third by way of guarantees for loans issued by the commercial banks. The total value was about 1,1 bn EUR.
- The Czech Export Guarantee and Insurance Agency (EGAP) is about to get approx. 12 bn EUR for facilities to support the funding of large Czech exporters, which employ more than 250 people.

2

Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- Limited support to employees, who must stay home to take care of children, who can't attend schools.
- Opt-in support to all affected self-employed people of about 18 EUR per day. Initially for a period of 50 days.
- Kurzarbeit / furlough: employers may apply for compensation of payroll costs a) 80% (capped at approx. 1 400 EUR) if their business was mandated to close; 60%, (capped at approx. 1 000 EUR) if they suffer indirectly (e.g. reduced orders).

3

Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- The debtor's duty to file for insolvency (and associated directors' liability for not doing so) is suspended. The suspension applies during the COVID-19 response measures and 6 months after they are terminated, but in no event beyond the end of 2020. The claw-back periods are not running during the suspension, so a longer period will be effectively available for clawing-back assets in future insolvencies.
- Creditors' right to file for insolvency is suspended until the end of August 2020.
- Extraordinary moratorium may be requested by debtors, but requests can be made until the end of August 2020 only. It would generally stay the enforcement of claims and also prevent the termination of long-term agreements. New debts can be given priority over pre-moratorium debts (by way of re-payment), but no provision is made for new security or priority in insolvency. Set-off would not be permitted during moratorium.

4

Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- NIL.
- Borrowers can request deferral of their debts, which are falling due (but interest continues to accrue) and lenders must grant such deferral.
- Exorbitant consumer interests were capped.

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

- Tenants (both, commercial and residential) have been temporarily protected from eviction for non-payment.
- Payment of rent by the affected businesses and individuals can be deferred (but not waived or reduced).

6

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- Yes, but hearings are often adjourned.
- Missing of certain procedural deadlines could now be waived, if caused by COVID-19.

7

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- Deadlines for most tax filings have been deferred.
- Some tax deposits, which are paid on a regular basis during the year, were waived (but the annual tax would still have to be paid in the full amount).
- Any tax loss from 2020 can be extraordinarily applied against income from previous years – and the resulting tax overpayments claimed.
- No new tax imposed and the government even indicated that it would not consider any new taxes or increase of the existing taxes. Some land-related taxes are relaxed.
- Some social and health security payments have been waived and other deferred.

8

Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- General meetings can be held remotely by all companies.
- Deadlines for approvals of accounts will be extended.
- Expiry of directors' appointments will be extended.

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

The Danish government has introduced the following schemes:

(i) a temporary compensation scheme to cover fixed costs of companies, which are particularly affected by the COVID-19 crisis, financed by the Danish state. All Danish companies expecting a decline in turnover (Danish turnover) of more than 40 percent in the period 9 March 2020 until 9 June 2020 due to COVID-19 can apply for compensation for fixed costs,

(ii) a temporary compensation scheme aimed at self-employed and freelancers. In order to apply for compensation under this scheme, a number of conditions must be met. The compensation will amount to 75 per cent of the expected revenue loss in the period compared to the average revenue in the last financial year. However, the compensation may not exceed DKK 23,000 per person per month. The compensation may amount to up to DKK 46,000 per person per month, if the self-employed has an employee spouse,

(iii) a guarantee scheme to facilitate financing to small and medium-sized companies affected by COVID-19, and

(iv) a guarantee scheme to facilitate financing to large companies affected by COVID-19.

- Under the schemes listed in item (iii) and (iv) above, the Danish Growth Fund (In Danish: Vækstfonden) will provide a guarantee of 70 percent for new bank loans to companies which have suffered or expect to suffer a turnover loss of at least 30 percent as a result of COVID-19.
- Furthermore, the Danish Export Credit Agency has introduced a liquidity guarantee scheme for Danish exporters impacted by COVID-19. This scheme is aimed at small and medium-sized companies, and the Danish Export Credit Agency will provide a guarantee of 80 percent of any loss incurred by banks on new lines of credit.
- A political agreement has been reached regarding the schemes listed in item (i) and (ii), however, this has not yet been implemented. The political agreement stipulates that the schemes will be expanded and that they will apply until 8 July 2020. Companies utilising the scheme in item (i) are likely to be covered by certain restrictions in respect of declaring dividends or initiating share buy-backs for the financial years 2020 and 2021. We note that in addition to the above, the Danish government has adopted certain schemes aimed at specific businesses, which are not covered here.
- For additional information about the temporary compensation scheme to cover fixed costs of companies, please view [here](#).
- For additional information about the temporary compensation scheme aimed at self-employed and freelancers, please view [here](#).
- For additional information about the guarantee schemes supported by the Danish Growth Fund (in Danish), please view [here](#).

2 Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- The Danish government has introduced a temporary wage compensation scheme for employees at risk of being laid-off. The temporary compensation scheme will apply from 9 March 2020 to 9 June 2020.
- The compensation scheme applies to all private Danish companies regardless of size, however, it is a requirement that the company is materially adversely affected financially by COVID-19 and is facing having to lay-off at least 30 per cent of its employees or more than 50 employees. If this is the case, the company can apply for state salary compensation whereby the Danish state will compensate 75 per cent of the salaries of the employees concerned, but a maximum of DKK 30,000 per employee per month. For hourly wage earners, the state wage compensation amounts to 90 per cent of the salaries of the employees concerned, but a maximum of DKK 30,000 per employee per month.
- It is a condition for receiving compensation under this scheme that the employees are sent home with full salary and that they do not work during the period for which compensation is received. Furthermore, as a starting point, employees are obliged to take holidays and/or take time off in lieu of overtime amounting to a total of five days in connection with the compensation period.
- Companies receiving compensation under this scheme undertake not to lay-off employees due to financial reasons during the period in which they receive the compensation. If employees are laid-off during the compensation period, compensation of wages will cease as per the date of the dismissals.
- The Danish government has announced that they will start negotiations with the Danish Employers' Confederation and the Danish Trade Union Confederation on an extension of the wage compensation scheme; however, such extension is not yet adopted.
- For additional information about the temporary wage compensation scheme, see [here](#).

3 Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- The Danish government has not introduced any changes to insolvency legislation.

4 Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- The Danish government has not implemented any specific measures to reinforce contracts.
- While some countries have implemented specific legislation on force majeure, this is not the case under Danish law. Accordingly, whether COVID-19 will constitute a force majeure event under Danish law comes down to a case specific assessment of (i) the legal framework, contracts etc. of the individual relationship, and (ii) the very specific matters surrounding each case of non-performance, both in terms of geography, business sector and market conditions.
- However, part of the legislation adopted by the Danish government, as a consequence of COVID-19, directly or indirectly affects contracts. As an example, the Danish government has implemented two Executive Orders under which the Danish Medicines Agency has a right to order Danish manufacturers, importers and distributors to supply

certain types of medical devices, personal protective equipment and disinfectants to regions and municipalities against payment from the region or the municipality. As the Danish Medicines Agency has a right to decide the terms of payment and delivery, this may potentially have an impact on the companies' ability to enter into other contracts or fulfil existing contracts. Similarly, the Danish government has implemented an Executive Order which gives the Danish Medicines Agency authority to i.e. decide that prices on medicine may not rise.

- For additional information about COVID-19 as force majeure event under Danish law, please view [here](#).
- For additional information about the Executive Orders under which the Danish Medicines Agency can impose extensive obligations on companies, please view [here](#).

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

- The Danish government has not introduced any changes to the laws around property, rent and enforcement.
- However, the Danish government has implemented a temporary ban on the opening of shopping malls, department stores, arcades, bazaars etc. and places where food, beverages or tobacco are served. These bans have raised a number of issues for both lessors and lessees related to business leaseholds in the retail, catering and tourist industries, i.e. whether the government actions constitute force majeure. It is likely that the government actions can constitute force majeure in relation to some of both lessor's and lessee's obligations under a lease agreement as (i) the fulfillment of terms of the lease agreement can be impossible due to the extraordinary situation created by the outbreak of COVID-19 virus and the bans imposed by the government, and (ii) the extraordinary situation – at least for the lease agreements drafted prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 virus – must be assumed to have been unpredictable for the parties.
- For additional information about the restrictions on business leaseholds due to COVID-19 and the related issues for lessors and lessees, please view [here](#).

6

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- The Danish courts have been closed down since 13 March 2020, but will be open again from 27 April 2020. Accordingly, for pending cases this means that from 13 March 2020 until 27 April 2020, the courts have only heard cases within 'critical areas of practice', as the employees of the courts have been sent home to the greatest extent possible. Hearings of cases in all non-critical areas of practice are discontinued and will be adjourned until 27 April 2020.
- For additional information about COVID-19 consequences for pending court and arbitration cases, please view [here](#).

7

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- The Danish government has within the tax area adopted several measures to help secure small, medium and large companies' liquidity. The measures include:
 - (i) postponement of the deadline for payment of VAT and specific taxes for the months April, May and June,

(ii) a temporary increase to DKK 10 million of the amount that companies are allowed to keep on a so-called “tax account”,

(iii) possibility for some companies to apply for an exemption to pay interest and fees incurred for late payment of specific taxes in March 2020, and

(iv) extension of deadline for submission of tax return for 2019 to the Danish Tax Authorities to 1 September 2020. The deadline extension applies to everyone.

- A political agreement has been reached regarding implementation of further measures within the tax area, however, these have not yet been implemented. One of the measures comprised by the political agreement relates to item (ii) above as a temporary suspension of the upper limit of the amount that companies are allowed to keep on the “tax-account” has been introduced.
- For additional information about the postponement of payment of VAT and specific taxes for the months April, May and June, please view [here](#).
- For additional information about the exemption to pay interest and fees incurred for late payment of specific taxes in March 2002 see (in Danish), please view [here](#).
- For additional information about the extension of deadline for submission of tax return for 2019 see (in Danish), please view [here](#).

Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- The Danish government currently maintains restrictions on large gatherings, and on 13 March 2020 a temporary ban was imposed on holding or participating in events, activities or the like where more than 10 people are gathered. This ban will most likely be upheld until 11 May 2020, however, after 11 May 2020, the ban may be amended and gatherings of more than 10 people may be allowed although that is still uncertain at this stage.
- As a consequence hereof, the Danish government has implemented an Executive Order whereby the deadline for submitting the annual report to the Danish Business Authority has been postponed. The deadline has been postponed by three months, which means that the annual report must be submitted on 31 July 2020 for listed companies with the calendar year as fiscal year and on 31 August 2020 for other companies with the calendar year as fiscal year.
- If the restrictions on large gatherings continue to remain in force, the deadline for submitting annual reports to the Danish Business Authority will be postponed further. In that case, companies must submit their annual report to the Danish Business Authority no later than 8 weeks after the restrictions on large gatherings have been revoked. The extension requires that (i) the restrictions on large gatherings still exist at the end of the extended deadline for submitting the annual report (i.e. 31 July 2020 or 31 August 2020, respectively), and (ii) the companies have not been able to hold the general meeting whereby the annual report is approved before the deadline.
- The Executive Order furthermore introduces a possibility for general meetings, which are held no later than 8 weeks after the termination of the restrictions on large gatherings, to be held completely electronically, irrespective of the fact that the company’s articles of association may not provide for this.
- For additional information about the company law related measures put in place to accommodate social distancing see (in Danish), please view [here](#).

1 Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

- The Government has provided for a guarantee scheme to support bank financing for businesses. Until December 31, 2020, companies (with the exception of property companies & banks) may apply for State-guaranteed bank loans which represent up to 25% of 2019 revenues (or two years of payroll for so-called “innovative” companies or companies created since 1 January 2019). No repayment will be required during the first year of the loan. For companies or groups of companies of important size (>5000 employees or >1.5 billion EUR revenues in France), this loan implies renouncing to distributing dividends in 2020.

2 Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- The mechanism of “partial unemployment” has been facilitated for companies whose employees cannot work because of the COVID situation. Employers get a reimbursement of 70% of their gross salaries (100% for low salaries), up to a (relatively high) monthly threshold.

3 Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- No substantial rules were enacted on insolvency. Deadlines have been extended to take into account the lockdown situation and commercial courts, who are in charge of insolvency proceedings, have put in place specific emergency procedures in order to be able to handle urgent matters. One specific rule presumes that the financial situation of companies filing for insolvency shall be assessed as it was on March 12, 2020.

4 Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- Specific rules have been enacted to suspend the effects of certain contractual deadlines. The principle is that periodic penalty payments, penalty clauses, termination clauses sanctioning the failure to fulfil an obligation within a specified period shall be deemed not to have commenced or to have taken effect if that period has expired during the “lockdown period” (as defined by the government). They shall take effect from the expiry of a period of one month after the end of that period if the debtor has not performed his obligation before that time. In addition, when an agreement may be terminated only during a specified period or when it is renewed if no termination is notified within a specified period, that period shall be extended, if it expires during the “lockdown period”, by two months after the end of the “lockdown period”.

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

- A specific rule has been enacted for companies or businesses that are below certain thresholds: they cannot be held liable for not paying rent and building charges that are due from March 12 to the end of a period of 2 months after the end of the “lockdown period”. The thresholds are relatively low and should only benefit small businesses that are strongly impacted. In particular, they require (i) either that the business activity was stopped by the authorities or that it suffered a loss of 70% of revenues, as well as (ii) various thresholds linked to the size of the business (e.g. less than 10 employees, less than 1 million EUR annual revenues).

6

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- Courts are theoretically operating and emergency regulation has made it easier to hold proceedings remotely, but in practice most courts have simply postponed all hearings and deadlines until further notice and currently focus on extremely urgent matters. On a case by case basis, certain courts can simply not be contacted anymore, while others have put in place emergency contact procedures, which can only be used in limited circumstances.

7

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- Various measures have been adopted to postpone the payment of both taxes and social contributions, in principle for a limited period of a few months (but individual solutions can usually be negotiated with the authorities) without penalties. It has also been announced that the reimbursement of various tax credits would be accelerated. There are no general measures of tax exemption at this stage but such exemptions can be negotiated on a case by case basis in circumstances of severe financial distress.

8

Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- Various deadlines that are normally applicable under company law, such as for the approval of annual accounts, have been extended by several months.
- Rules have been enacted in order to facilitate shareholder meetings and board meetings, in particular by allowing the use of visio-conference systems, even when the bylaws do not provide for that possibility.

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

- Lending is available under a number of new schemes that have been introduced in Germany. These range from schemes for large corporations to schemes for SMEs, start-ups, micro-enterprises and self-employed individuals. Some of the most relevant schemes are:
 - The “KfW Instant Loan” – this scheme provides funding to medium-sized enterprises with more than 10 employees if the enterprise showed profits in 2019 or on average over the last three years. The credit volume per company is up to 3 monthly turnovers, with max. EUR 800,000 for companies with more than 50 employees, and max. EUR 500,000 for companies with up to 50 employees.
 - The “KfW Special Programme” – this scheme is designed for medium-sized enterprises and large companies. It aims at mobilizing the willingness of companies’ principal banks to grant substantial amounts of loans to strengthen liquidity. Under this scheme, the German state-owned development bank KfW assumes up to 80% of the risk, but no more than 50% of the total debt. The KfW risk share amounts to at least EUR 25 million and is limited to 25% of the annual turnover in 2019 or double the wage costs in 2019 or the current financing requirements for the next 12 months.
 - The “KfW Entrepreneur Loan” – this scheme aims at companies that have been on the market for more than five years. The scheme shall increase their chances of being granted a loan commitment. If they apply for a loan for investments and working capital, the German state-owned development bank KfW assumes up to 80% of the bank’s risk for large companies and up to 90% of the bank’s risk for SMEs. Companies can apply for up to EUR 1 billion per company group. A similar program exists for companies that have been on the market for less than five years.
- State-owned banks also offer to guarantee loans provided to companies by their principal banks if the company has not been in financial difficulties. Guarantees may cover max. 90% of the loan risk, i.e., the companies’ respective principal bank must assume at least 10% of exposure.
- In addition to the programs of the federal government, each federal state has put in place accompanying programs to support regional businesses.
- [Liquidity support through “unlimited” loan guarantees](#)

Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- Employers may choose to temporarily reduce the working time of their employees if the company is affected by the corona crisis (e.g. if a company is closed down or if there are difficulties in the company due to missing orders or supplies). The remuneration of the employees will be reduced correspondingly. This measure shall avoid layoffs and enable companies to keep qualified workers during the crisis.
- Affected employees can receive so-called “short-time working allowance”. This benefit must be applied for by the employer. If granted, the government will generally refund 60% (employees without children) or 67% (employees with children) of the difference between the regular net income and the reduced net income. The German government has introduced legislation to increase the short-time working allowance to 70% or 77% starting from the fourth month and to 80% or 87% starting from the eighth month.
- [Coronavirus: FAQ Employment Law Part 2](#)

- The German government has passed legislation to facilitate access to the short-time working allowance. Also, the additional income opportunities during short-time work have been extended. To find out more, see: [Coronavirus: FAQ Employment Law Part 3](#)
- The base period of unemployment pay will be extended by three months for those whose entitlement ends between 1 May and 31 December 2020.
- In case the government orders a (regional) quarantine, the employer pays the regular salary and the regional government will refund the money. After six weeks, the employees will receive sick pay by the government. To find out more, see: [Coronavirus: FAQ Employment Law Part 1](#)

3

Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- The statutory obligation to file for insolvency within three weeks after a state of insolvency has been reached has been suspended until 30 September 2020.
- However, this does not apply if the insolvency is not a consequence of the COVID 19 pandemic or if there are no prospects of remedying an existing inability to pay. If companies were not insolvent on 31 December 2019, it is legally assumed that insolvency is based on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and that there are prospects of eliminating an existing insolvency.
- Companies' own applications for the opening of insolvency proceedings and applications by creditors (third-party applications) nevertheless remain possible. In the case of third-party applications, however, the opening of insolvency proceedings requires that the reason for insolvency already existed on 1 March 2020.
- If the obligation to file for insolvency is suspended, companies may continue to make payments in the ordinary course of business although a state of insolvency is reached.
- [Restructuring in times of Corona - legislator assists with suspending the obligation to file for insolvency](#)

4

Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- The German government introduced legislation that grants consumers and small companies the right to refuse performance of a contract (in particular payment) in order to protect them from financial hardship resulting from the measures taken to prevent the spread of infections. Small companies are those with less than 10 employees and less than EUR 2 million annual turnover.
- These measures generally require that it concerns claims from a continuing obligation established before 8 March 2020 which debtors are not able to fulfil due to the COVID-19 pandemic or, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the fulfilment of such claims would endanger their means of subsistence or the economic basis of their business. At the same time, the creditor must not be unreasonably affected as a consequence.
- The provisions do not apply to employment contracts, tenancy agreements and loan agreements.

- For consumer loan agreements concluded before 15 March 2020, lenders' claims for interest or repayment of instalments due between April and June 2020 are deferred for a period of three months from the due date if the borrower suffers a loss of income due to extraordinary circumstances caused by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic which makes it inappropriate for the borrowers to fulfil their obligations. After expiry of this moratorium, the payment obligation will resume. The individual payment dates as well as the end of the term of the loan will be postponed by three months in each case, unless the parties agree otherwise. The regulations are to apply to consumer loan agreements only. However, there is the possibility of extending the scope of application of the law by means of a statutory instrument to small companies as well.
- [Corona-info: the legislator acts – we summarise for you.](#)

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

- The German government has passed legislation that excludes terminations of tenancy agreements in the event of late payment of rent for the period from 1 April 2020 to 30 June 2020 if the failure to pay is due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The correlation between the failure to pay and the COVID-19 pandemic is not assumed but must be shown credibly by the tenant.
- The period from 1 April to 30 June 2020 can be extended by decree until 30 September 2020, i.e. to a total of six months. Any extension beyond this requires the approval of the German parliament.
- The exclusion of termination ends on 30 June 2022, i.e. by this date the rent in arrears (including default interest) must be paid to avoid a termination.
- Other termination rights remain unaffected, i.e. the ordinary termination right for unlimited rental contracts as well as the extraordinary termination.
- For more information, please see [here](#).

6

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- In general, the courts are operating normally. Despite of social distancing and travel bans, court deadlines must be met and court hearings have to be attended.
- Currently, court hearings are often postponed due to the corona crisis. With the consent of both parties, the court may switch to written procedure in appropriate proceedings. Alternatively, if the necessary technical equipment is available, hearings may also be permitted via video conference without the consent of the parties.
- [Dispute resolution before state courts and arbitral tribunals in times of the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- The German Federal Ministry of Finance and the supreme tax authorities of the federal states have issued decrees containing new guidance in light of the corona crisis.
- The tax authorities are instructed to make straightforward and quick adjustments of assessed tax advances upon request (trade tax, corporate income tax, income tax and VAT).
- Upon application and to the extent that tax payments cannot be made due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, tax payments due are generally supposed to be deferred without interest until 31 December 2020. There are no tax deferrals for withholding taxes, in particular wage tax and capital gains tax.
- The tax authorities have been instructed to suspend the enforcement of overdue tax debts (corporate income tax and income tax) until 31 December 2020. Late payment surcharges incurred as a matter of law shall be waived.
- VAT on restaurant meals and other food in the catering industry will be reduced from 19% to 7% starting from 1 July for a limited period until 30 June 2021.
- SMEs may offset expected losses against advance tax payments already made for 2019.
- [Measures under German tax law to create or preserve liquidity](#)

Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- The German government has passed legislation that allows Annual General Meetings (AGMs) to be held electronically in 2020.
- There are two options for this: Either a physical meeting can be held with the option of shareholders attending electronically and casting their votes electronically or by letter. Alternatively, a completely virtual AGM can be convened without any shareholders being present.
- For additional information, please view [here](#).

1

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

- The States of Guernsey has agreed to underwrite 80% of any qualifying loan made by participating banks to any trading business with less than GBP 10 million turnover.
- Businesses regulated by the Guernsey Financial Services Commission (**GFSC**) are excluded.

2

Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- The States has introduced a payroll co-funding scheme similar to that in the UK whereby employers can access a grant to cover 80% of the statutory minimum wage (GBP 8.50 an hour) on the understanding that the employer pays at least the other 20%. The scheme will run initially up to mid-June for a limited number of sectors. Detailed advice should be sought as to whether your sector would be covered.
- In addition, any business with less than 10 staff as well as the self-employed may apply for a one-off hardship grant of GBP 3,000.
- Other measures to support business include the deferral of Social Insurance contributions, local business rates and rent owed to States entities.
- Mourant has outlined some [key questions for employers to consider during COVID-19](#)
- [Employment update as at March 2020](#)

3

Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- Consideration is being given by the Guernsey government to potential temporary changes to Guernsey's insolvency laws, in particular regarding wrongful trading, though there are no clear proposals to date. Guernsey's wrongful trading provisions are somewhat more relaxed than the UK equivalent. Once a director concludes (or ought to have concluded) that there was no reasonable prospect of the company avoiding insolvency winding up, the director has a duty to take every step to minimise losses to creditors "he ought reasonably have taken". The Guernsey test introduces a reasonableness qualification on the every step test not expressed in the UK statute.
- Significant amendments to the insolvency laws were passed by the States on 15 January 2020 and are expected to come into effect shortly.
- [Changes to Guernsey's Insolvency Regime](#)

4

Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- The Guernsey government has not introduced any legislative measures to deal specifically with contractual issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Any contractual concerns will be dealt with according to Guernsey contract law.
- The main contractual provision which governs the enforceability of a contract upon the existence of an unforeseen event is the force majeure clause. In general terms, the force majeure clause seeks to list the situations in which the parties to a contract may suspend or terminate the contractual relationship due to the occurrence of certain events that are outside the control of the parties.
- Depending on the construction of the force majeure clause in individual contracts, the COVID-19 pandemic may cause the contract to be suspended or terminated.
- Businesses should review their existing contractual relationships and seek legal advice to ensure they are aware and fully understand their ongoing legal obligations and identify any areas of uncertainty

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

- No.

6

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- Yes – special measures are in place for managing trials and other hearings. Parties are being asked to consider whether matters are urgent but, if they are, matters can proceed, generally in a virtual format.
- [Conducting civil litigation in Guernsey during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- No.
- See below regarding economic substance.



Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- The Guernsey Corporate Registry is functioning normally in respect of searches and company incorporation, although some services, especially where hard copy documents are required, are more limited. Mourant can advise on any specific issue.
- The GFSC has simplified some of its measures to reflect the changed environment including allowing more time for certain regulatory returns – see '[Commission allows more time for Firms to complete Key Financial Returns](#)' – and more flexibility on verifying client identities remotely – see '[Can video calling be used to verify the identity of individuals](#)'.
- The Data Protection Commissioner has assured business that it will respond pragmatically to the new challenges arising – see its update [here](#).
- For guidance on corporate formalities in a world without face to face meetings, see our updates on '[Overcoming Barriers to Completion of Transactions amidst COVID-19 Challenges](#)' and '[ICSA Guidance on holding virtual board meetings](#)'.
- A pragmatic approach to economic substance has been promised by the Guernsey Revenue Service. We anticipate this will follow the guidance issued in Jersey where, if a company's operating practices have to be adjusted to compensate for the COVID-19 pandemic, the company will not be deemed to have failed the economic substance test. See release from the [Guernsey International Business Association](#).
- Mourant has produced a briefing regarding regulatory considerations for licensed financial services businesses in the Channel Islands when responding to the COVID-19 outbreak, found [here](#).
- All the most recent Mourant updates relating to COVID-19 are available at [Mourant COVID-19 Updates](#).

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

Yes. The Covid-19 crisis has prompted the Irish Government to announce a range of supports for impacted businesses and individuals who are experiencing financial difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic. The range of measures introduced by the Irish Government are as follows:

- **The Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland COVID-19 Working Capital Loan Scheme (the “Irish Liquidity Scheme”):** the Irish Liquidity Scheme is designed to support lending to Irish Small and Medium Enterprises (“SMEs”) only and is not available to larger firms. Loans under the Irish Liquidity Scheme (the “Loans”) can be provided to SME’s to fund future working capital requirements in order to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Loans will be available through Allied Irish Banks, p.l.c., Bank of Ireland and Ulster Bank in amounts of between €25,000 and €1.5m per eligible enterprise, with a maturity of between one and three years. In addition, the Loans will bear a fixed rate of interest negotiated with the lending bank, subject to a maximum of 4% per annum. For loans of up to €500,000, no security will be required, however any Loans in excess of this amount will require collateral to be posted. The SBCI has stated that an interest-only option may be available for the initial period of the Loan. However, it is not clear under what circumstances and for how long repayments may be deferred. For more information on the Irish Liquidity Scheme, please see our recent article available [here](#),
- **The Credit Guarantee Scheme (the “CGS”):** the CGS was originally launched in 2012, however **in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the CGS was amended in April 2020 to assist SMEs whose businesses have been impacted by the virus.** The CGS is directed at commercially feasible SMEs which, under normal lending criteria, are unable to obtain new or additional facilities from their bank due to insufficient collateral or because they are impacted by COVID-19. In addition, the CGS is targeted at commercially viable SMEs which due to their sectors, markets or business models are perceived as a higher risk under current credit risk evaluation procedure. The CGS will be available to COVID-19 impacted firms through the pillar banks and provides lenders with a State guarantee, covering eligible credit facilities for 80% of the facility value, over a maximum seven-year period. Essentially, the CGS is an additional form of security provided to the lending bank by the Irish Government on behalf of the relevant borrower,
- **Microfinance Ireland COVID-19 Business Loan (the “MFI Business Loan”):** the MFI Business Loan is a government initiative to support small businesses through the current period of uncertainty and to protect job creation or sustainment in Ireland. The maximum MFI Business Loan available from Microfinance Ireland has been increased from €25,000 to €50,000 as an immediate measure to specifically deal with exceptional circumstances that micro-enterprises – (sole traders and firms with up to 9 employees) - are facing in order to alleviate the financial pressures arising from COVID-19. In addition, the terms of the MFI Business Loan include a six-month interest free period and a repayment moratorium of up to six months, with the loan then repayable over the remaining 30 months of the 36-month loan period at an interest rate of between 4.5% and 5.5%, and
- **Enterprise Ireland Supports:** the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation has implemented a €200m package for Enterprise Supports including a Rescue and Restructuring Scheme available through Enterprise Ireland for vulnerable but viable firms that need to restructure or transform their business.

In addition to the above, a range of measures have also been agreed between the Irish retail banks and the Irish Government as follows:

- **A 3-month payment moratorium:** banks, credit unions, retail credit firms and credit servicing firms will grant payment breaks on mortgages, personal loans and business loans for those businesses and individuals experiencing financial difficulties caused by COVID-19. As at 16 April 2020, the Banking & Payments Federation Ireland is involved in ongoing discussions with the Central Bank of Ireland to extend the payment moratorium to 6 months, which will coincide with the majority of the EU and the EBA guidelines,
- **Support for buy-to-let customers with affected tenants:** flexible repayment arrangements will be made available to buy-to-let customers with tenants affected by COVID-19. This includes a mortgage payment moratorium of up to three months, which will allow, and hopefully encourage, landlords to pass that break on to their tenants. As outlined above, this may be extended to six months,
- **A Deferral of court proceedings:** legal proceedings including repossessions will be deferred for three months. At the time of writing, it is unclear whether this applies to the issuing of new proceedings and/or refraining from progressing or staying existing proceedings,
- **Extensive supports for SME customers:** banks are working to ensure that a wide range of measures are made available to businesses who are trying to manage the financial pressures arising from COVID-19. The measures include the provision of cash flow and credit facilities as well as supply chain supports. The deferral of loan repayments for up to three months will also be available to SMEs, and
- **A customer focused approach:** banks have committed to providing suitable tailored supports for business including the extension of credit lines, risk guarantees and trade finance.

These supports are intended to complement the range of government supports, including the Irish Liquidity Scheme detailed above. For more information on the above measures, please see our recent article, available [here](#).

2 Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- The Irish Government has introduced a Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme. Under the scheme, employers may continue to pay their employees via their usual payroll system, up to a certain limit, for a period of 12 weeks, from 26 March 2020. Those payments will be reimbursed to the employer by the State within two working days.
- The Irish Government has introduced a COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment of €350 per week which is available to employees who have either lost their job entirely or who have been temporarily laid off as a result of the pandemic. The payment was originally made available at a rate of €205 per week from 13 March 2020, but was increased to €350 on 24 March 2020. The payment is also available to self-employed individuals whose trading income has ceased due to COVID-19.
- [COVID-19 Emergency Employment Supports](#)

3 Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- Not directly.
- There have, however, been some changes to legislation in other areas such as, for example, landlord / tenant or employment law that will impact on insolvency practitioners, particularly receivers and liquidators, during this emergency period.

4 Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- There has been no recent legislative intervention in respect of the reinforcement of contracts and the usual contractual rules apply.
- Due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 outbreak and the extensive Government restrictions, many businesses, as a precautionary measure, may wish to review their current contracts in order to determine whether they are protected or can avail of some form of relief, in case they are unable to perform their obligations.
- Such relief may take the form of a force majeure clause within a contract or relying on the doctrine of frustration if the circumstances permit.
- Force majeure clauses are interpreted strictly by the Irish courts, so businesses should evaluate the contents of their clauses in key contracts with their legal advisor in order to ascertain whether they cover the current COVID-19 crisis.
- In the absence of a force majeure clause, parties may wish to consider the doctrine of frustration as a possible form of relief, however, the threshold for frustration is extremely high in Ireland and the scope of events which may trigger the doctrine are extremely narrow. Seeking legal advice is recommended.
- While a force majeure clause or the doctrine of frustration may, in certain circumstances, be relied upon, we would recommend that businesses first discuss potential commercial workarounds with their contracting partners before attempting to rely on any such forms of relief.
- For more information, please view [here](#).

5 Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

The outbreak of COVID-19 has resulted in the introduction of the Health (Preservation and Protection and Other Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act) 2020 Act in Ireland which together with other emergency legislation has had a wide ranging effect on Real Estate transactions in Ireland. We consider certain elements below.

- In Ireland many commercial tenants are no longer able to operate, however leases continue and the obligations of tenants remain. Many tenants have requested a temporary adjustment to the rent payable under their leases, including rent holidays or deferment. A commentary on the current position regarding the collaborative approach required and the possibility of tenants extracting themselves from commercial leases is [here](#).
- The main statutory interventions in the context of real estate have been in relation to residential property which arise primarily from the enactment of the Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (COVID-19) Act 2020. A commentary on the current position for Residential Leases and the legislative amendments is [here](#).

- Separately completions of Acquisitions and Property Finance transactions were essentially prevented between 30 March and 20 April 2020 due to the Property Registration Authority (PRA) closing its doors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This had the effect of preventing the registration of charges and the carrying out of searches on completion. However, the recent re-opening will enable the safeguarding of priority following the completion of transactions and the carrying out of up to date property searches to facilitate closings. Read more [here](#).
- The construction industry has been severely affected and all construction sites, save those associated with the provision of essential services, have been closed since 27 March 2020. The following article reviews the impact and considerations, from the perspective of the construction sector, arising from the Health (Preservation and Protection and Other Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act) 2020 Act: [Construction Contracts – COVID-19 Impacts and Considerations](#).



Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- The Courts are essentially closed except for the most urgent matters. All motions and cases in all lists have been adjourned generally with liberty to re-enter. The Court offices are open but operating a very limited service by appointment only for urgent business (for example, issuing of proceedings where the Statute of Limitations is about to expire).
- It has been announced that it is currently hoped that from Monday the 27th April it will be possible for the High Court to pilot remote hearings, where they are suitable and where they can be conducted in a manner which is fair and where the parties and their representatives can comply with all Government guidance and direction for the time being in force.
- Further statements will be issued to update both the public and practitioners on these developments and on other measures designed to allow the maximum number of cases to progress and be ultimately decided subject only to that being capable of being done safely.



Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- Irish Revenue have implemented a temporary wage subsidy scheme for employees earning less than €76,000 per annum which enables certain employers to retain certain staff while at the same time paying staff nothing or a top-up on the Revenue subsidy paid by the Irish Revenue.
- SMEs experiencing cash flow and/or trading difficulties may defer payment of January/February VAT returns (which were due in March) and may also defer payment of February/March payroll taxes. Non-SMEs are being encouraged to talk to Revenue with a view to similar deferments if experiencing similar cash flow issues.
- All debt enforcement activity in respect of SMEs is suspended until further notice.
- For income tax purposes, an individual will not be regarded as resident in Ireland where they spend additional days in Ireland due to the pandemic.
- For corporation tax purposes, an individual will not be regarded as resident in or outside of Ireland for a company of which they are an employee, director, service provider or agent where they spend additional days in or outside of Ireland due to the pandemic.

- [The impact of COVID-19 on Tax Residence and Permanent Establishments](#)
- Corporation tax returns for accounting period ending 30 June 2019 onwards will not be subject to a late filing surcharge and late filing due to COVID-19 will not result in the usual restriction of reliefs, such as loss and group relief. In addition, various other tax filing deadlines have been extended, in particular in respect of employer returns regarding certain benefits supplied to employees (such as employee share schemes).
- A benefit-in-kind will not arise for employees where employers:
 - provide employees with equipment to allow them to work remotely,
 - reimburse flight or holiday cancellations for employees integral to the business, or
 - supply temporary accommodation to employees to mitigate the risk of transmission of COVID-19.



Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- The Irish Government has not put in place any measures which may accommodate social distancing in relation to corporate meetings but have recommended, in their COVID-19 Workplace Protection and Improvement Guide, the use of technology for video/ virtual meetings and limiting the number of meetings including length and proximity of gathering of employees and others. There are, in any event, a number of options already available to Irish companies which will allow them to respect the current social restrictions.
- Under the Companies Act 2014, companies may hold general meetings remotely through the use of any technology. Members are also allowed to appoint another person to vote on their behalf as a proxy. The use of these methods is subject to the provisions found in the company's constitution. Some constitutions may expressly forbid their use.
- Irish companies may also delay, postpone or adjourn their general meetings, however it should be noted that Irish law requires a company to hold a general meeting every calendar year and no longer than 15 months may pass between each meeting. Single member companies and private companies limited by shares may also dispense with the need to hold a general meeting by passing a written resolution.
- [Board meetings](#) are also capable of being convened through electronic means or by passing a written resolution.

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

Financial assistance is available under several schemes that have been introduced in Italy, such as:

- **Central SME Guarantee Fund (“CSGF”)**: the SME guarantee scheme, already existing prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, has been expanded - until 31 December 2020 - by the Italian Government. The guarantees will now be issued free of charge and the maximum guarantee per SME will be increased to €5 million. Such scheme is available to SMEs with fewer than 250 employees and annual turnover below €50 million or an annual balance sheet of up to €43 million. SMEs with “nonperforming” or “unlikely to pay” debt exposures or “in difficulty” cannot benefit from this scheme. Available to mid cap with up to 499 employees.
- **Support by way of Guarantee by SACE S.p.A. (“SACE”)**: the Italian Government has introduced the possibility for SACE to grant guarantees over new financing granted by banks, financial intermediaries and any other authorised financial entities to Italian companies negatively affected by the COVID-19 outbreak (the “**SACE Guarantee**”). The total commitment of SACE in relation to the SACE Guarantee will be equal to a maximum amount of €200,000,000,000 (of which, at least €30,000,000,000 is allocated to support SMEs (including self-employed persons and VAT-registered professionals) provided they have already made full use of the CSGF). The obligations of SACE arising from the granting of the SACE Guarantee are counter-guaranteed by the Italian State. Such scheme is available in relation to financings, granted to companies only **after** the entry into force of the Law Decree No. 23/2020:
 - i. with maturity no longer than 6 (six) years (with the possibility to set a pre-amortisation period of up to 24 (twenty-four) months),
 - ii. which do not exceed the higher of (a) 25% of the turnover (fatturato) made by the relevant company during the financial year 2019, as resulting from the relevant approved financial statements or tax declaration and (b) twice as much as the relevant personnel costs (costi del personale) incurred during the financial year 2019. In case the same company (or another company belonging to the same group) has already received other financings secured by the SACE Guarantee (or other public guarantee) (the “**Additional Financings**”), the amount of such Additional Financings shall be taken into account for the purposes of the calculation of the abovementioned maximum threshold, and
 - iii. whose proceeds will be applied to cover (a) personnel costs (costi del personale), (b) investments or (c) working capital, employed in manufacturing facilities (stabilimenti produttivi) and business activities (attività imprenditoriali) which are located in Italy.

Companies which benefit from the SACE Guarantee (and any other company of the relevant group, if any) cannot (i) distribute any dividends and/or (ii) repurchase their shares for the 12 months following the granting of the relevant financing. Companies with “deteriorated” debt exposures, or “in difficulty” cannot benefit from this scheme.

- **Loan repayment suspension**: SMEs may postpone payment of principal and interest on any loans. Revocable credit lines and factoring facilities cannot be revoked until 30 September 20 if the SME sends relevant notice to creditors. As to the applicability criteria, the same criteria as per the CSGF paragraph above will apply.

Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- The Italian Government introduced the following schemes to support businesses:
- **A. Social programs:** if an employer must suspend employees from work since the business activity has been suspended or reduced due to the COVID-19 emergency, it can apply for the following social funds (wage subsidy schemes):
 1. Cassa Integrazione Guadagni Ordinaria (CIGO): available to industrial companies staffed with more than 15 employees.
 2. Fondo d'Integrazione Salariale (FIS): available to non-industrial employers enrolled with FIS that are staffed, as an average, by more than 5 employees.
 3. Cassa Integrazione Guadagni in deroga (CIGD): available to all businesses, even very small ones, that are not covered by CIGO/FIS. It is managed at a Regional level and so each Region has its own procedure and bureaucracy.

Under the above schemes, which normally imply a consultation with the Trade Unions before being implemented, employees who are suspended from work receive an allowance from the social security authority ("INPS") equal to 80% of the lost salary with a cap of €1,129 net per month. These schemes can apply only to employees who were in force on 17 March 2020 and cover a period of 9 weeks.

In parallel, the Italian Government introduced a temporary firing ban: until mid-May it is not possible to make employees redundant either on a collective or an individual basis (some categories are excluded, such as executives or domestic employees). It is however expected that this ban will be extended.

- **B. Deferred payment of social security contributions:**
 1. The payment of social security contributions due in April and May 2020 is suspended (and can be made by June 30) for (i) companies that incurred at least in a 33% monthly turnover reduction if their yearly turnover is up to €50 million; (ii) companies that incurred at least in a 50% monthly turnover reduction if their yearly turnover is over €50 million. In both cases the reduction refers to the months of March and April 2020 compared to the same months of FY 2019.
 2. The payment of social security contributions is also suspended until 30 April (and can be made by 31 May 2020) for companies operating in business sectors severely affected by COVID-19 (such as sports, art, culture, tourism, transport, education, entertainment and catering).

The Italian Government also introduced the following new and exceptional schemes to support individuals:

- **A. Bonus for on-site employees:** a non-taxable salary increase of €100 pro-rated for the month of March if the employee worked on site and not at home (only if his/her annual income does not exceed €40,000 gross).
- **B. Paid Parental leave:** an extraordinary leave of 15 days (in the overall) is made available to parents of children under 12 (without age limits for disabled children) for the period of school closure (only if the other parent is not unemployed or suspended under a social program). The leave is paid by INPS with an allowance equal to 50% of the salary. As an alternative, parents may request a voucher of €600 for baby-sitting services.
- **C. Unpaid Parental leave:** an unpaid leave is made available to parents of children aged from 12 to 16 for the period of school closure that can be used by one parent (only if the other parent is not unemployed or suspended under a social program).

- **D. Additional leave for disabled people:** the ordinary leave granted to people with serious disabilities or employees who take care of people with serious disabilities (Law no. 104/92) is increased by 12 days in March and April 2020 (to be added to the ordinary 3 per month). The leave is paid by INPS (without salary reduction).
- **E. Employees affected by COVID-19 or quarantined:** in both cases employees must be considered on sick leave. If COVID-19 has been contracted on the workplace, the periods of quarantine and self-isolation are considered leaves due to accident at work and thus indemnified by the competent public insurance authority (INAIL).

3

Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

The Italian Government has adopted – among others – the following measures:

- the inadmissibility of petitions for bankruptcy and for insolvency of large companies filed from 9 March 2020 until 30 June 2020,
- the extension of the deadlines for performing/fulfilling composition with creditors plans and debt restructuring agreements already validated by the competent Courts, if expiring between 23 February 2020 and 31 December 2021,
- the possibility to file a new composition with creditors plan/debt restructuring agreement before the validation hearing or to request an extension of the term for the filing of the composition with creditors plan/debt restructuring agreement (if not filed yet),
- the postponement of the entry into force of the new Code of Crisis and Insolvency from 1 September 2021, and
- the disapplication until 31 December 2020, under certain conditions, of the provisions that require: either the reinstatement of the registered capital, when it has been reduced by more than 1/3rd as a consequence of losses, or the winding up of the company.

4

Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

No specific measures have been adopted to reinforce contracts, except for a general provision concerning delays or non-performance of contracts due to implementation of the emergency measures adopted by the Italian Government. Under such general provision, any action taken to ensure compliance with the measures adopted to contain COVID-19 emergency should be taken into account for the purposes of excluding debtor's liability – pursuant to the Italian Civil Code – for delayed or omitted performance, also in relation to the application of any related forfeiture terms or penalties.

Besides the above, all contractual remedies provided for under Italian civil law shall apply.

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

A tax credit equal to 60% of the rents due in March 2020 is granted to tenants of shops and similar properties falling within the C/1 properties category. Such tax credit can be used to offset future liabilities and cannot be claimed for refund.

The statute of limitations for natural persons willing to enjoy the “first home” registration tax regime is suspended between 23 February and 31 December 2020.

As to enforcement proceedings, reference can be made to the measures mentioned in the litigation section below.

6

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

During the period 9 March 2020 – 11 May 2020 the Italian Government provided for:

- (i) automatic rescheduling of all civil Court hearings scheduled in the reference period to a date after 11 May 2020 by operation of law,
- (ii) stay of all procedural deadlines in all civil proceedings, and
- (iii) stay of all procedural deadlines in mediation proceedings and in assisted negotiation procedures (jointly, the “**Urgent Measures**”).

The Urgent Measures shall not apply, inter alia, to certain proceedings which, therefore, shall not be rescheduled or stayed, among which:

- (a) interim proceedings regarding fundamental human rights,
- (b) proceedings for the suspension of the provisional enforceability of Court judgments/orders, and
- (c) any proceedings where delay could cause a serious detriment to the parties.

The urgent handling of proceedings under letter (c) above shall be decided by order of the President of the Court or to the Judge in charge of the case.

Hearings in proceedings to be handled with urgency shall be held via videoconference or in writing (e.g. through exchange of written briefs) only, with the sole exception of hearing requiring the attendance of third parties other than parties’ representatives or counsel, where in person hearing shall take place with the implementation of health safety measures (e.g. use of PPEs) to ensure the protection of the individuals attending the hearing.

During the period 12 May 2020 – 30 June 2020, special provisions shall apply for the management and rescheduling of hearings in order to ensure a smooth reorganization of the Courts cases workload. All Court Presidents have already issued the relevant Court orders implementing the organization measures that, in brief, provide for: the avoidance of a bulk rescheduling of hearings if at all possible, a strict planning of hearings during the days in order to ensure the orderly attendance to hearing rooms and the avoidance of any overlap between hearings, the implementation of virtual hearings and written hearings as much as possible, the need for all individuals attending hearings in person to wear PPE.

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- All payments to public administrations (including VAT payments, withholding tax payments and social security and welfare contributions) expiring on 16 March 2020, could be executed within 16 April 2020.
- Payment of VAT, payroll withholding taxes, and social security and compulsory insurance contributions due in April and May 2020 are suspended for companies that (i) incurred, respectively, a 33% or 50% reduction in monthly turnover in March and April 2020 compared with March and April 2019, taking into account an annual turnover up to or exceeding €50 million, or (ii) are active in sectors most affected by COVID-19. Suspended payments may be executed in one payment by 30 June 2020, or in five instalments from June 2020 onwards.
- A tax credit for 50% of expenses relating to the sanitation of offices and purchase of individual protection devices up to a maximum of €20,000 is granted to companies. The overall available benefit budget is capped at €50 million for 2020.
- A 30% deduction from income tax due is granted, up to an amount of €30,000, for donations in cash or in kind, by natural persons or non-commercial entities, to finance measures to contain and manage the COVID-19 emergency.
- Upon transfer of non-performing receivables carried out until 31 December 2020, companies can opt for the conversion in tax credits of DTAs generated by tax losses and surplus of notional interest deduction. The conversion applies for an amount equal to 20% of the nominal value of the transferred receivables.
- Tax collection by the tax authorities is suspended until 31 May 2020.

Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

All companies are allowed to hold shareholders' meeting by means of telecommunication – even in case their by-laws do not set forth specific provisions for such purpose – provided that identification of participants, their attendance and voting rights are guaranteed.

The requirement under which the chairman and the secretary of the meeting shall be in the same location – even when expressly provided for in the company by-laws – is also derogated.

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

- The Japanese government declared a State of Emergency on 7 April and the same day the Financial Services Agency (the “FSA”), Japan’s financial service regulatory authority, requested financial institutions to support borrowers’ cash-flow by:
 - (i) actively providing new loans, and promptly and flexibly rescheduling repayment terms of existing loans in light of changes to borrowers’ ability to repay,
 - (ii) cooperating with public credit guarantee associations (funded by local governments) to provide loans with zero interest and no collateral,
 - (iii) not automatically triggering acceleration of repayments when borrowers cannot comply with financial covenants but instead promptly and sincerely discussing relaxation of covenants if the borrower requests,
 - (iv) promptly and flexibly changing repayment terms of residential loans or loans for individual borrowers, or guarantees for either of them, and
 - (v) not recording borrowers’ delinquency information with credit information institutions when any default is due to the impact of COVID-19.
- On 16 April the FSA requested financial institutions to be flexible and not immediately trigger the suspension of transactions when borrowers fail to pay checks or promissory notes.
- On 17 April the FSA announced that it will delay raising the minimum leverage ratio requirement for banks whilst also disregarding banks’ deposits with the central bank from the calculation of gross assets as the denominator for calculating a leverage ratio, thus making it easier for banks to provide new loans or reschedule repayment terms for borrowers impacted by COVID-19.
- Japan Finance Corporation, a public financing corporation wholly-owned by the Japanese government, has launched a programme of lending with no interest for the initial 3 years for borrowers whose sales declined by 5% from the same period in either of the two immediately preceding years but who are still hopeful their business will recover in the mid or long term.
- On 16 March the FSA relaxed the maximum lending limit per borrower under the Money Lending Business Act.

Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- Japan currently has an “Employment Adjustment Subsidy” system; this system has been revised by the Japanese government to help businesses suffering as a result of COVID-19. The system is designed to help employers avoid termination by covering part of their employees’ salaries (up to a maximum of JPY8,330 per employee per day and a maximum of 100 days in any 12 months (but disregarding days in the period 1st April to 30th June 2020 if the subsidy was requested in that period)) during the period the employees are furloughed.
- For more information (including the requirements to be eligible for the subsidy), please visit our website [here](#).

3

Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- As of 19 April 2020, the government has not made any changes to insolvency legislation.

4

Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

Execution of Contracts

- It is common in Japan for companies to execute contracts by signing and/or affixing a company stamp on paper documents. In many cases, even before COVID-19, contract parties sometimes (i) executed agreements separately and then exchanged PDF copies on the contract date, and then (ii) sent the originals to be combined as a single agreement. This approach is legally effective and would be helpful in the COVID-19 situation.
- An electronic contract with electronic signatures without any paper-based documents is also permitted under Japanese law, save for exceptions, such as individual guarantees for a third-party business. The COVID-19 pandemic should encourage the greater use of electronic contracts by Japanese companies.

Force Majeure

- For a summary of issues on force majeure and frustration in the context COVID-19, please visit our website [here](#).

Subcontractors

- On 10 March 2020, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (“METI”) announced it had requested companies to take special care in transactions with mid- or small-size subcontractors (see more [here](#)), including (i) refraining from actions delaying supplies to them, (ii) bearing appropriate increased costs derived from price increases in raw materials and/or extra work of subcontractors, (iii) making payments on their due date, and (iv) refraining from cancelling or changing purchase orders.
- The Antimonopoly Act and Subcontractors Act also prohibit certain unfair trade practices and would still apply anyhow.

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

- As of 20 April 2020, there have been no changes to the laws that legally allow tenants to defer rent payments, but new legislation is being discussed. On 31 March, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (“MLIT”) requested landlords for commercial rents to accept a deferral of rent payments by tenants who have difficulty paying rent due to the COVID-19 situation. On 17 April, the MLIT also announced that it would extend a one-year grace period for the payment of taxes and social insurance contributions by building owners for commercial rents who agreed to defer or cancel rent payments.
- Prefectural governors are now able to instruct operators managing commercial facilities such as movie theatres, meeting halls, exhibition halls and department stores (not including office spaces itself) to restrict visitors or prohibit symptomatic persons to enter premises, etc. Land and housing may be requisitioned by prefectural governors when deemed essential to establish temporary medical facilities.

6

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- On 31 March 2020, the Supreme Court of Japan issued guidelines for the operation of courts in the event a state of emergency is declared. The Supreme Court has distinguished between matters which require an urgent response (such as domestic violence cases) and those to be treated case-by-case considering the specific circumstances in each court.
- Following the declaration of a state of emergency on 7 April 2020, some courts have temporarily limited the scope of the services they provide. Although these courts still accept new cases and continue to provide some other services, some scheduled dates for court proceedings may be cancelled.

7

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- As of 20 April 2020, no new tax measures have been introduced in relation to COVID-19. However, on 7 April, the Cabinet approved the following tax measures as part of emergency economic measures, and new legislation is expected to be introduced shortly.
 - One year grace period for payment of national and local taxes, and social insurance premiums by business operators whose income has materially decreased.
 - A tax refund system may be applied to firms capitalized at over 100 million yen but below 1 billion yen through tax loss carrybacks.
 - 1/2 or zero tax burden on depreciable assets to be taxed in fiscal year 2021 by small and medium-sized businesses suffering from severe business conditions.
 - Tax regime for capital investment for teleworking.
 - Donation deductions apply to spectators, etc. who give up the right to claim a refund from organizers who cancel an event based on the government’s request for self-restraint.
 - Stamp tax shall be exempted for future special loan contracts made by financial institutions to business operators whose business operations have been affected by COVID-19.



Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

General Meetings

- On 26 February 2020, METI issued a [guideline for hybrid virtual general meetings](#).
- Although the guideline did not originally target the COVID-19 pandemic, it is attracting attention from companies seeking to accommodate social distancing for the peak season for annual general meetings in the coming June.
- It is impossible under the Corporate Code to conduct a purely virtual general meeting. However, the following measures can be taken for social distancing:
 - encourage shareholders not to attend the general meeting but to vote in advance (by a voting paper or online),
 - limit the number of attending shareholders, require pre-registration to attend, and reject attendance by shareholders with symptoms of COVID-19, and
 - hold a hybrid virtual general meeting (i.e., a real meeting with online streaming) pursuant to the METI guideline in order to allow remote attendees to participate in the meeting.

Board Meetings

- The Corporate Code doesn't require a company to hold a physical board meeting; an online meeting and/or a resolution in writing are commonly used by Japanese companies.

Remote Working

- Although remote working is not yet well developed in Japan, the Japanese government has been encouraging remote working in light of COVID-19. There are subsidies for business operators who will introduce or have introduced a remote working system, especially for mid- or small-size businesses.

1

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

- Jersey has introduced a GBP 50 million business disruption loan guarantee scheme. The Jersey government will guarantee 80% of loans granted under the scheme. Businesses can borrow between GBP 5,000 and GBP 500,000.
- Certain eligibility criteria must be satisfied. This includes the business meeting the viability test, the business engaging in a commercial activity in Jersey which will be the subject of the loan, normal lending must not be available to the business and the business's annual turnover must not be more than GBP 10 million.
- Certain business sectors are excluded from the scheme. These include financial or professional services, real estate, property development, utility companies, agriculture and fishing.
- More detailed information on the scheme is available [here](#).

2

Employment Support to businesses

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- The Government of Jersey has launched the Government Co-Funded Payroll Scheme, which will refund businesses adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic a proportion of their wage bill. This will cover weekly wages up to the value of GBP 200 per employee. A business must show they have suffered at least 30% loss in turnover to be eligible.
- Mourant has outlined some [key questions for employers to consider during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).
- [Employment update as at 23 March 2020](#)

Support to individuals

- A COVID Related Emergency Support Scheme has been set up for workers who have lost their jobs due to COVID-19. This scheme is targeted at workers who have not gained their five year residency, as this group would ordinarily not be able to access the pre-existing government income support scheme. The scheme provides weekly payments of between GBP 70 to GBP 150 per person and an additional GBP 50 per child. It is in place until 30 June 2020.
- The Government of Jersey has also made various sickness and short-term incapacity benefit provisions for employees who are either sick or isolating due to COVID-19.

3

Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- Consideration is being given by the Jersey government to the relaxation of Jersey's wrongful trading rules. As yet nothing has been published to indicate what the revised rules would look like. Jersey's existing wrongful trading rules are more relaxed than the UK in any event. Once a director concludes (or should have concluded) that there was no reasonable prospect of the company avoiding a declaration of bankruptcy or an insolvent winding up, the director has a duty to take reasonable steps with a view to minimising the potential loss to the company's creditors (failing which the director may be made personally liable for the company's debts). In the UK the equivalent test is that the director must take every step with a view to minimising the potential loss to the company's creditors.

4

Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- The Jersey government has not introduced any legislative measures to deal specifically with contractual issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Any contractual concerns will be dealt with according to Jersey contract law.
- The main contractual provision which governs the enforceability of a contract upon the existence of an unforeseen event is the force majeure clause. In general terms, the force majeure clause seeks to list the situations in which the parties to a contract may suspend or terminate the contractual relationship due to the occurrence of certain events that are outside the control of the parties.
- Depending on the construction of the force majeure clause in individual contracts, the COVID-19 pandemic may cause the contract to be suspended or terminated.
- It is also possible that in certain situations the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic may have the effect of rendering a contract "frustrated" i.e. the changes in circumstances caused by the coronavirus pandemic has rendered the obligations under the contract impossible to perform.
- Businesses should review their existing contractual relationships and seek legal advice to ensure they are aware and fully understand their ongoing legal obligations and identify any areas of uncertainty.
- Mourant has set out some of the contractual issues that arise from COVID-19 in Jersey in [this article](#).

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

- Temporary amendments to residential and commercial tenancy legislation have been passed in Jersey. These make provisions to protect both tenants and landlords, taking into account the possible effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- They include the suspension of variations to tenancy agreements, by way of an increase in rent in the period up to 1st October 2020, even where the tenancy agreement allows for an increase at renewal.
- Another amendment effected is that where a tenant has failed to pay rent because of financial hardship, the breach would no longer constitute a breach whereby a landlord may apply for a termination and eviction order.
- The Government of Jersey has also published guidance for residential and commercial landlords and tenants. This outlines principles that must be adhered to in agreeing concessions and making voluntary arrangements for rent and other payments.

6

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- The Jersey courts remain open and directions have been made for civil cases during the COVID-19 pandemic. The courts will continue to hear cases but urgent / public law / family law cases will take precedence.
- Strict procedures are in place for essential hearings where attendants must adhere to social distancing guidance.
- Jersey's Employment and Discrimination Tribunal has adjourned all final hearings due to be heard before the end of May 2020. Case management and interim hearings will proceed but the parties are required to attend by video or telephone conference.
- The Royal Court has given directions on the remote execution of powers of attorney and affidavits.

7

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

Deferral of payment of Social Security contributions

- Small businesses with less than 80 employees are automatically eligible to defer their payments for the first two quarters of 2020, which are due in April and July 2020.
- Businesses with 80 or more employees may apply to defer their payments and will need to show significant adverse impact on them as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Deferral of payment of Goods and Service Tax

- GST payments for periods ending between 31 March and 30 June may be deferred for up to 12 months.
- For individuals, in respect of residential tax status and days spent in Jersey, the Government of Jersey has advised that the local tax authority will discount days spent in Jersey which are as a result of exceptional circumstances related to COVID-19. This includes, for example, where prohibition of travel orders have been made in response to the pandemic.
- See further regarding economic substance.



Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- The Jersey Companies Registry is fully operational and continues to provide a full service. It is demonstrating flexibility in its approach by accepting electronic signatures and the submission of information electronically to assist users during the current situation.
- The Jersey Financial Services Commission has similarly demonstrated a flexible approach in accepting electronic or scanned signatures with applications and filings to help overcome the challenges caused by the travel and social distancing restrictions imposed by the coronavirus pandemic.
- Jersey's Comptroller of Revenue has issued guidance to confirm that where companies' operating practices have to be adjusted to compensate for the COVID-19 pandemic, the Comptroller will not determine under Article 6 of the Taxation (Companies – Economic Substance)(Jersey) Law 2019 that a company has failed the economic substance test.
- Mourant has produced a [briefing](#) regarding regulatory considerations for licensed financial services businesses in the Channel Islands when responding to the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Mourant has also considered [the ways companies can overcome barriers to completing transactions during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).
- All the most recent Mourant updates relating to COVID-19 are available at [Mourant COVID-19 Updates](#).

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

Specific credit lines available for treasury support: credit line of up to €400 million for treasury support under the Capitalizar COVID-19 Programme preferentially for SMEs not covered by the specific credit lines below.

Credit lines for treasury support of companies in the following specific economic sectors:

- €60 million (tourism sector – microenterprises),
- €600 million (restaurant business),
- €200 million (travel agencies, tourist entertainment and event organisation companies),
- €900 million (touristic developments and accommodation), and
- €4.5 billion (credit line applicable to all companies, irrespective of the economic sector in which they are engaged, and covers, inter alia, textile industry, clothing and footwear, trade and services, transport, real estate, construction, extractive and manufacturing industries, mining and wood industry).

Specific Portugal 2020 incentives:

- Manufacturing Innovation COVID-19 (Inovação Produtiva COVID-19) (€46 million) for SMEs and large enterprises.
- Research and Development for Companies – COVID-19 (I&D Empresas - COVID-19) (€23 million) for companies and entities part of the National Investigation and Innovation System (Sistema Nacional de I&I).

Incentive package:

- Deferral of 12 months for repayment instalments due up to 30 September 2020 in respect of reimbursable subsidies granted under the incentive schemes of the National Strategic Reference Framework (Quadro de Referência Estratégico Nacional) or Portugal 2020 without interest charges or any other penalty.
- Expenses incurred by beneficiaries of such incentive schemes with events or actions cancelled or postponed as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, eligible for reimbursement.
- Negative impact of the COVID-19 outbreak causing failure to execute contractual obligations under the Portugal 2020 incentive scheme, may be deemed as force majeure.

Export support measures: increase of credit insurance lines guaranteed (i) for the metallurgical, metal-mechanical and mould sectors (increase from €100 million to €200 million); (ii) for work abroad and other supplies (from €100 million to €200 million; and (iii) for short-term export credit insurance line (from € 250 million to € 300 million).

Moratorium on debts: moratorium on debts until 30 September 2020, which provides for the prohibition of the revocation of contracted credit lines, the extension or suspension of credits until the end of September this year.

For more information please visit [here](#).

2 Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- **Simplified lay-off:** lay-offs, which comprise the temporary suspension of employment contracts or reduction of the working time, have been given more flexibility and the procedure has eased significantly (“simplified lay-off”).
- **Extraordinary financial support:** under the simplified lay-off procedure, the employer may temporarily reduce normal working periods or suspend employment contracts, and the employee is entitled, until 30 June 2020, to a compensation corresponding to 2/3 of the gross regular salary, with a minimum of €635 per month and a maximum of €1,905 per month. This compensation is paid by the employer, which in turn is entitled to financial support corresponding to 70% of the amount of the compensation, supported by Social Security. Employers are entitled to a financial incentive of €635 per employee, paid in one lump sum, to support the resumption of activity.
- **Exemption from contributions:** during lay-off, employers benefit from full exemption of their share of social security contributions (23.75%).
- **Protection of employment:** during the period of lay-off, as well as in the following 60 days, the employer may not terminate the employment contracts of employees covered by such measures, under the terms of collective dismissal and dismissal for termination of the job.
- For more information please visit [here](#).

3 Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- The suspension of procedural terms and authorized judicial proceedings referred to below is also applicable to insolvency proceedings, notably as regards the term for a debtor to file for insolvency. This suspension, however, does not prevent the courts from ordering the performance of any judicial steps that are necessary to prevent irreparable damage to the legitimate rights and interests of debtors.
- For more information please visit [here](#).

4 Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- Other than other measures already mentioned herein, there have been limited cases where specific measures aimed at reinforcing contracts have been put in place. It worthwhile noting that, in relation to public-private partnerships, during the state of emergency, contractual mechanisms allowing financing rebalancing are suspended (such financial rebalancing arising from the pandemic will result in the extension of the duration of the relevant contract).
- With the exception of the abovementioned measures, the Portuguese Government has not taken any further measures to specifically reinforce contracts and, therefore, the normal rules would apply.
- It should be taken into account that the force majeure term relates to the impossibility of the parties to perform their obligations as a result of an event that could not have been foreseen or that, if foreseen, would be inevitable. In this respect, the scope and applicability of force majeure would be subject to the specifics of each case, which shall be, in last instance, examined and determined on a case-by-case basis by judicial courts.

- Likewise, it should be considered that there is a provision on the Portuguese Civil Code that allows contracts to be reviewed or terminated whenever the circumstances in which the parties based their decision to contract have suffered an abnormal change. However, it should also be noted that Portuguese courts tend to apply this provision very cautiously and the impact on the performance of each contract should always be examined on a case-by-case basis. In the specific case of the impacts generated by the COVID-19 outbreak we are witnessing several cases but no judicial decisions have been issued yet.

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

- **Prohibition of termination of lease contracts by the landlords due to the mandatory closure of establishments and facilities:** mandatory closure of establishments and facilities and suspension measures determined by the Portuguese Government cannot be invoked as grounds for the termination, early break or other forms of terminating lease contracts for non-residential purposes or other atypical forms of occupational agreements regarding real property, nor as grounds for the eviction from the properties where such establishments or facilities are installed.
- **Suspension of termination of lease contracts and evictions:**
 - the duration of lease contracts (residential or non-residential) that would normally expire before the 60th day following the termination of the exceptional measures is extended until such date (except if the tenant agrees to the expiry of the lease at an earlier date),
 - the effects of all notices for termination, revocation or opposition to renewal/extension already served by the landlord are suspended until the 60th day following the termination of the exceptional measures,
 - eviction proceedings (either judicial or otherwise) are suspended in the cases where, as a consequence of a potential final eviction decision, the tenant could be put in a “vulnerable situation due to the lack of a place for permanent residence or to another overriding social reason”, and
 - the obligation of the tenant to return the premises to the landlord following the termination of the lease is also suspended until the 60th day after the termination of the exceptional measures.
- **Deferral on payment of rents:** eligible tenants may defer rent payment falling due in the period from 1 April 2020 up to the end of the month following the termination of the state of emergency and will be bound to pay the deferred rental payments in monthly instalments (which shall accrue to the monthly rents due and payable in the same period), with no interest or penalties, within 12 months after the deferment period lapses. Landlords shall not be entitled to terminate leases or evict tenants for default on the payment of rents during the deferment period. These measures will apply to standard lease agreements (residential and non-residential), shopping center leases and other atypical forms of occupational agreements regarding real property and limited to the following tenants:
 - certain residential tenants whose household income has been reduced as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak (they shall prove that they have suffered a decrease of more than 20% in their household income, as compared to the preceding month or the equivalent period of the previous year; and that the payable rent represents an effort rate above 35% of the reduced monthly household income),

- retailers and services open to the public who have been forced to shut down or to suspend activity as a result of the state of emergency, or by any other legal or administrative order (including if they keep trading online or through distance sales), and
- restaurants and similar establishments (even if they keep operating for take-away services or home delivery).
- For more information please visit: [COVID-19: Portuguese Government draft bill establishes an exceptional regime for deferral of rental payments](#), and [COVID-19: Main legislative or regulatory initiatives that have been taken in Portugal](#)

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- All procedural terms for all kinds of courts have been suspended and will resume when the state of emergency ends. This suspension is generally applicable to proceedings which are not urgent (notably those where fundamental rights are involved).
- For more information please visit [here](#).

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- **Postponement of CIT payments and obligations:** the following deadlines have been extended:
 - Extension of the first CIT special payment on account from March 31, 2020 to June 30, 2020.
 - Deadline to submit the Corporate Income Tax return (Modelo 22) was extended from May 31, 2020 to July 31, 2020.
 - Extension of the first CIT payment on account and additional payment on account from July 31, 2020 to August 31, 2020.
- **Tax deferrals:** payment of VAT and CIT/PIT withholding taxes due in the 2nd trimester of 2020 may, under certain circumstances, be deferred and paid in 3 or 6 monthly instalments, free of interest and without the need of providing guarantees. The first 1/3 or 1/6 has to be paid on the corresponding legal deadline.
- **Social Security deferrals:** possibility of, under certain circumstances, reducing to 1/3 the Social Security contributions due between March/April and May/June 2020 for companies and self-employed (the remaining 2/3 should be payable under the same instalment deferral rules set out above, i.e. payable between July and September 2020 or between July and December 2020, depending whether payable in 3 or 6 monthly instalments (free of interest and guarantees)).
- **Temporary exemption from Social Security contributions:** exemption which is, under certain circumstances, automatically applicable to entities benefiting from the exceptional and temporary measures set for labor protection in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak.
- For more information please visit: [COVID-19: Main legislative or regulatory initiatives that have been taken in Portugal](#), and [Tax Measures in Portugal in response to COVID-19](#).



Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- To accommodate social distancing, the Portuguese Government has extended until 30 June 2020 the deadline for holding annual general meetings which should take place by legal or statutory imposition until 31 March 2020 or 31 May 2020 (e.g. for approval of the year-end individual or consolidated financial statements, respectively).
- Without prejudice to the above, the use of distance communication mechanisms (i.e. video or teleconference) to hold meetings of the corporate bodies and pass resolutions is also admissible, provided that the participation via such means is duly recorded in the relevant minutes of the meetings.
- For more information please view [here](#).

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

- The Monetary Authority of Singapore (“**MAS**”) has established the MAS SGD Facility and MAS USD Facility to provide SGD and USD to funding markets in Singapore in order to support their effective functioning.
 - The MAS USD Facility, established on 26 March 2020, seeks to provide up to USSGD60 billion of funding to support stable USD liquidity conditions.
 - The MAS SGD Facility is established to provide low cost funding to banks and finance companies on the conditions that such financial institutions commit to pass on the savings in funding costs to small and medium enterprises (“**SME**”) applying for loans under Enterprise Singapore’s (“**ES**”) lending schemes for SMEs: the SME Working Capital Loan scheme and the Temporary Bridging Loan Programme.
- The SME Capital Working Loan scheme was enhanced pursuant to the Solidarity Budget 2020 for the purpose of aiding SMEs with their working capital and operational cashflow needs.
 - The maximum loan quantum was increased from SGD300,000 to SGD1 million.
 - The risk-share percentage is enhanced to 90% for new applications made from 8 April 2020 until 31 March 2021, i.e. lending institutions may make a claim against ES in the event of defaults by SME borrowers for 90% of the unrecovered amount.
 - SMEs under the enhanced scheme may apply for up to 1 year deferral of principal repayment to help manage their debt, subject to assessment and approval by the lending institution.
- The Temporary Bridging Loan Programme was established in March 2020 for the purpose of providing companies with access to up to SGD5 million working capital for business needs.
 - The Interest rate payable on the loan is capped at 5% per annum.
 - ES will provide 90% risk-share on loans extended under new applications made from 8 April 2020 until 31 March 2021 i.e. lending institutions may make a claim against ES in the event of defaults by SME borrowers for 90% of the unrecovered amount.
 - Companies may apply for up to 1 year deferral of principal repayment to help manage their debt, subject to assessment and approval by the lending institution.

Employment Individuals

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- The Temporary Relief Fund is a one-off SGD500 cash assistance to support Singapore citizens and permanent residents who are retrenched or suffered at least 30% loss of personal income due to COVID-19, subject to certain criteria being fulfilled.
- The COVID-19 Support Grant provides eligible Singapore citizens and permanent residents who have lost their jobs due to COVID-19 with a monthly cash grant of SGD800 for 3 months, subject to certain criteria being fulfilled.
- The Workfare Special Payment is a cash payout of SGD3,000 provided to all Singapore employees and self-employed who have received Workfare Income Supplement payments in 2019. The cashpayout will be paid over two equal payments of SGD1,500 each in July and October 2020
- The Self-Employed Person Income Relief Scheme provides quarterly cash payouts of SGD3,000 in May, July and October 2020 to eligible self-employed persons (“**SEP**”), if the SEP meets certain criteria.

Businesses

The Jobs Support Scheme (“JSS”) provide wage support to employers to assist them in retaining their local employees.

- The Government will co-fund 75% of the first SGD4,600 of gross monthly wages paid to each local employee for April 2020 across all sectors. This is to support firms during the ‘circuit breaker’ period.
- The Government will co-fund the first SGD4,600 of gross monthly wages paid to each local employee for the months of May to December 2020. The level of co-funding ranges from 75% for sectors classified as Tier 1, 50% for sectors classified as Tier 2 and 25% for sectors classified as Tier 3:
 - Tier 1 is the aviation and tourism sector, which include airlines, airport ground handlers, airport operators, qualifying licensed hotels, qualifying licensed travel agents, qualifying gated tourist attractions, cruise lines and cruise terminal operators, venue operators of purpose-built meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions.
 - Tier 2 is the food services sector, which include licensed food shops and food stalls.
 - Tier 3 is all other sectors not falling within Tiers 1 or 2.

Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

The SG government has introduced temporary relief for individuals and businesses who are facing financial difficulties.

Individuals

- The monetary threshold for bankruptcy has increased from SSGD15,000 to SSGD60,000.
- The statutory period to respond to demands from creditors has been lengthened from 21 days to 6 months.
- The monetary threshold for the Debt Repayment Scheme has been increased from SSGD100,000 to SSGD250,000.

Businesses

- The monetary threshold for insolvency has increased from SSGD10,000 to SSGD100,000.
- The statutory period to respond to demands from creditors has increased from 21 days to 6 months.

The Act also provides relief for directors from insolvent trading, as long as the debts are incurred in the ordinary course of business.

4

Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

The Singapore government has enacted legislation providing for temporary relief for the inability to perform a scheduled contract. It provides temporary relief from legal action over the following contracts:

- secured loans from a bank or finance company that are (a) made to a local SME; and (b) secured against non-residential property in Singapore, or against any plant, machinery or fixed asset used for business purposes,
- any hire purchase agreement for a commercial vehicle, or any plant, machinery or fixed asset used for business purposes,
- leases or licences for non-residential immovable property,
- construction or supply contracts,
- contracts for the provision of goods and services for events such as weddings and conventions, and
- tourism contracts such as cruises, hotel accommodation bookings.

6 month moratorium: A debtor under any of these contracts may issue a notification for relief if he finds that an obligation due on or after 1 February 2020 cannot be carried out due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon which creditors are prohibited from taking the following actions for **6 months**:

- court, domestic arbitration, and insolvency proceedings, as well as execution proceedings against the debtor's property,
- enforcement of security against immovable property or movable property used for business purposes,
- appointing a receiver and manager over the debtor's property,
- calling on a performance bond given for a construction or supply contract,
- terminating a lease or license over immovable property due to non-payment of rent, and
- exercising any right of re-entry or forfeiture under a lease or license over immovable property.

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

- The SG government has enacted legislation providing that terminating a lease or license over immovable property or exercising any right of re-entry or forfeiture under a lease or license over immovable property will be prohibited for 6 months if the lessee issues a notification for relief.
- **Property tax rebate:** The SG government has also introduced a property tax rebate of up to 100% for non-residential businesses, which is intended to help businesses deal with the impact of COVID-19.

- The SG government has also enacted legislation to make property owners to pass on the tax rebate to their tenants.
 - The passing on of the rebates by the property owner to their tenants/licensees may be by way of cash payment (lump sum or instalment) or by way of an off-set against the rent/licence fee payable by the tenant/licensee or a combination of both.
 - Property owners must not subject the passing of the rebate to any conditions – any such conditions will be void.
 - Property owners must also retain records to prove that the rebates were passed on for a period of 3 year.
 - If property owners fail to pass the rebates to their tenants/licensees or fail to comply with the record keeping obligations, the property owner will be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding SSGD5,000.

6

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- The Honourable Chief Justice has directed that the Supreme Court, State Courts and Family Justice Courts will hear only **essential and urgent matters** from 7 April 2020 to 4 May 2020 (“**Relevant Period**”).
- The three courts issued Registrar’s Circulars identifying matters which may be considered as essential and urgent. Such matters will be heard by electronic means of communication as far as possible, without requiring physical attendance before the court. If physical attendance is required, safe distancing measures must be adhered to. The essential and urgent matters differ depending on which court is hearing the matter. For the High Court, some examples of essential and urgent civil matters are, inter alia:
 - An application for urgent injunction or search order.
 - An application to set aside an injunction or search order.
 - An application for the arrest or release of a vessel.
 - An application for the discharge of dangerous or perishable cargo.
- All matters that were scheduled for hearing during the Relevant Period which are not essential and urgent will be adjourned.
- As for arbitration, the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (“**SIAC**”) has closed its offices since 7 April 2020, but will remain fully operational as its staff are telecommuting. All communications with SIAC are to be via e-mail.

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- **Automatic Deferment of Corporate Income Tax (CIT) Payments:** To ease the cash flow for businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, companies have been granted an automatic deferment of income tax payments for 3 months. No application is required.
- **Support for the Self-Employed:** To support self-employed persons, personal income tax payments due in May, June and July 2020 will be deferred automatically for 3 months this is also the case for one-time income tax payments. No application is required.
- **Support for Employees:** Employees may apply to defer income tax payments due in May June and July 2020 for a period of 3 months. For employees making lump sum payments, such payments may also be deferred by 3 months upon application.

Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- **Extension of deadline for holding Annual General Meetings and filing Annual Reports:** On 7 April 2020, the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority (“ACRA”) announced a 60-day extension of time for all listed and non-listed companies to hold their annual general meetings (“AGMs”) and file their annual returns (“ARs”). The Singapore Exchange Regulation (“SGX RegCo”) also announced that it would automatically extend the deadline by 60 days for all issuers with financial year-end on or before 31 March 2020 to hold their AGMs.
- **Alternative arrangements for AGMs which proceed:** On 7 April 2020, the COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) Act was enacted by Parliament. One of the provisions state that a relevant meeting or class of meetings held on or after 27 March 2020 that complies with alternative arrangements prescribed under the new law will be deemed to satisfy any requirements for the convening, holding or conduct or deferral of such meetings under the relevant written law or legal instrument.
- **On 13 April 2020, the COVID-19 (Temporary Measures) (Alternative Arrangements for Meetings for Companies, Variable Capital Companies, Business Trusts, Unit Trusts and Debenture Holders) Order was gazetted.** The Order sets out alternative arrangements to personal attendance in respect of certain classes of meetings, which include, inter alia, general meetings of companies. Personal attendance can be via electronic means instead.
- **The Singapore Stock Exchange is also providing a grant of SGD5,000 per issuer that can only be used for the purpose of implementing COVID-19 measures for AGMs.** This ‘AGM Facilitation Grant’ will cover all AGM-related expenses incurred between 16 March 2020 and 15 March 2021, such as augmenting physical AGMs with video conferencing, additional logistics such as on-site temperature taking or pre-AGM shareholder communication, amongst others.

1

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

- Government will grant up to €100 billion in guarantees for funding provided by credit institutions. In this respect:
 - Net indebtedness limit for the Spanish Official Credit Institute (ICO) raised by 10€ billion, to increase ICO facilities providing funding to companies and the self-employed.
 - The guarantee will cover 80% of new financing operations and renewals for self-employed and SMEs (defined as companies with less than 250 employees, and with an annual turnover that does not exceed EUR 50 million or with an annual balance sheet that does not exceed EUR 43 million). For all other companies, the guarantee will cover 70% in the event of new loan operations and 60% for renewals.
- There is no limit to the amount of guarantee per beneficiary, subject to EUs state aid rules.
- The Spanish Export Credit Agency (CESCE) has been authorised to provide insurance cover amounting up to €2 billion for the working capital credit facilities needed by SMEs (excluding micro-companies that are those with less than 10 employees and with an annual turnover or annual balance sheet that does not exceed €2 million) and bigger non-listed companies.
- There is no requirement that the use of the funds be linked to the performance of export contracts and should respond to new financing needs and not to pre-crisis situations. The percentage of credit risk cover shall not exceed 80%.
- The sums in the Fund for “Red Cervera” Technical Provisions and R&D&I projects are allowed to be used to cover any risks that the Centre for Technological and Industrial Development (CDTI) may incur by providing loans to finance R&D&I projects of small and medium enterprises, and of mid-cap companies.
- For more information, please visit: [Royal Decree-Law 8/2020 of March 17, 2020 launches urgent and extraordinary measures to confront the economic and social impact of COVID-19, Preserving and increasing liquidity in the time of COVID-19, and COVID-19: Recommendations for accessing the financing facilities offered under Royal Decree-Law 8/2020](#)

2

Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- **Furlough procedures (“ERTEs”) as a temporary solution.** The conditions for processing ERTEs have eased and can be processed much quicker. ERTEs can be processed in case of force majeure and economic, technical, organisational and production-related grounds arising from COVID-19.
- **Exemption from contributions in the case of ERTEs due to force majeure.** There is a full exemption from the employer’s share of social security contributions for companies with fewer than 50 workers and a 75% exemption for companies with 50 or more workers.
- **Obligation to maintain employment.** The extraordinary employment-related measures are subject to the company’s obligation to maintain employment for a period of 6 months following the date of resumption of the company’s activity.
- **Rights to adapt and reduce working hours.** This measure is addressed to workers who evidence duties of care with respect to their spouse or equivalent and relatives up to the 2nd degree of consanguinity because of COVID-19.
- For more information, please visit: [Royal Decree-Law 8/2020 of March 17, 2020 launches urgent and extraordinary measures to confront the economic and social impact of COVID-19, Companies facing the COVID-19 crisis, Key new legislation introduced in Royal Decree-Law 11/2020, and Workers in non-essential services will be compelled to take recoverable paid leave](#)

3

Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- **Suspension of all procedural terms and authorised judicial proceedings:**
 - All procedural terms for all kinds of courts have been suspended, which includes terms before commercial courts, which are the courts that specialise, among others, in insolvency matters and form part of the civil jurisdiction. These terms will resume when the state of emergency ends. However, this suspension does not prevent the courts from ordering the performance of any judicial steps that are necessary to prevent irreparable damage to the legitimate rights and interests of the parties to the proceeding.
 - New insolvency proceedings are also subject to the restriction of new submissions indicated above.
- **Suspension of some material terms or partial moratorium:** A moratorium has been established on the duty to file a petition for the opening of insolvency proceedings while the state of emergency is in effect. During the moratorium, the debtor will also be protected from any petitions for the opening of mandatory insolvency proceedings filed by its creditors.
- For more information please visit: [Companies facing the COVID-19 crisis](#), and [COVID-19: Key new legislation introduced in Royal Decree-Law 11/2020](#)

4

Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- There has not been any outstanding measure taken by the Spanish Government regarding the specific reinforcement of contracts, therefore, normal rules would apply.
- When it comes to contract suspensions and reductions in working hours that are directly caused by losses in activity as a result of COVID-19, a legal provision has been included in Royal Decree-law 8/2020, of March 17 (RDL 8/2020) stating that those specific cases shall be considered as force majeure, when duly verified.
- It should be taken into account that the force majeure term relates with the impossibility of the parties to perform their respective obligations due to the existence of an event that could not have been foreseen or that, if foreseen, were inevitable. In this respect, the scope and applicability of the force majeure would be subject to the specifics of each case, which shall be, in last instance, examined and determined one by one by the judicial courts.
- Likewise, if the performance of a contract is significantly affected due to unforeseen circumstances, it should be considered that there is a legal doctrine on hardship created by case law, that allows obligations and contracts to be reviewed when the economic balance of the contract has been upset and the contract has become impossible or very difficult to perform for one of the parties due to those unforeseen circumstances. However, it should be noted that the Spanish courts have hitherto applied hardship principles very cautiously and the specific characteristics of each case must be thoroughly looked at to determine whether it is applicable.
- For more information please visit: [Companies facing the COVID-19 crisis](#), and [Force majeure and the grounds for suspension of contracts due to COVID-19 cannot be regarded as justifying dismissal](#)

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

- **RDL 8/2020** incorporates a moratorium in favour of mortgage debtors who are in a particularly vulnerable situation (i.e. the mortgagor becomes unemployed or, in the case of a businessperson, suffers a substantial loss of income or a substantial drop in sales, that is, at least 40%).
- If the landlord is an entity or a public housing company (entidad 'pública de vivienda') or a large individual holder (i.e. an individual owning more than 10 properties or owning a built facility bigger than 1,500 sq.m), the tenant may request temporary and extraordinary deferment of the rent of his/her principal residence within one month from the enter into force of Royal Decree-law 11/2020, March 31, provided that said deferment or the total or partial remission of the rent has not already been achieved voluntarily by agreement between both parties. In the event that the agreement had not taken place, the landlord may choose between the following alternatives:
 - a 50% reduction over the rent while the state of emergency is in force, or
 - a moratorium on the payment of the rent that will be applicable during the term of the state of emergency (and which may be extended monthly if that term is insufficient in relation to the situation of vulnerability caused by the COVID-19), and which may not, in any case, exceed four months.
- Likewise, measures related to the suspension of the eviction procedures as well as the removals of judicial releases for vulnerable households without alternative housing have been introduced.
- Finally, besides the above regulations introduced by the Spanish government to mitigate the economic impact regarding the COVID-19, the undertakings that need to bear rental payments while their business are closed (retailers, in particular) are requesting to their landlords, on a general basis, rent free periods regarding their lease agreements given the extraordinary nature of the health emergency resulting from COVID-19, based on the force majeure and rebus sic stantibus applicable case law.
- For more information please visit: [Royal Decree-Law 8/2020 of March 17, 2020 launches urgent and extraordinary measures to confront the economic and social impact of COVID-19](#), and [COVID-19: Key new legislation introduced in Royal Decree-Law 11/2020](#)

6

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- Suspension of procedural and administrative terms, statutes of limitations and time bars: additional provision two of Royal Decree 463/2020, of March 14 ("RD 463/2020") states that for all court orders under procedural laws, the time limits have been suspended and the terms have been interrupted. These time periods will resume when RD 463/2020 or any of its extensions cease to be in force. This interruption will not apply in the cases specifically mentioned in the RD 463/2020.
- For more information please visit: [COVID-19: Royal Decree declaring situation of emergency published](#), [Companies facing the COVID-19 crisis](#), and [COVID-19: Key new legislation introduced in Royal Decree-Law 11/2020](#)

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- **Suspension of certain tax terms**
 - Terms and deadlines for all the procedures in progress against the AEAT have been suspended during the state of emergency. The authorities are allowed, however, to carry on with ordinary conduct of tax procedures, to order and carry out any steps they consider absolutely necessary and to serve notifications, demands, requests for information or grant terms for audit of files and comments. In this case, the terms for fulfilment of these steps by the taxpayer have been extended until April 30 or May 20, 2020, depending on the case concerned.
 - Deadlines for filing tax returns and paying regular taxes (such as withholding taxes, prepayments, VAT, etc.) have not been extended, unless the deferral explained above is applicable.
 - More information can be found [here](#).
- Exemption in relation to transfer and stamp tax for mortgage transactions.
- **VAT and custom duties exemption:** For imports of any goods necessary for medical treatment of individuals affected by COVID-19 and for avoiding the spread of viruses.
- **Suspension of assessment of VAT and of excise taxes on electricity and on hydrocarbons on the bills for electricity, natural gas and oil products:** Exemption from any obligation to assess and pay VAT and, where relevant, the excise tax on electricity and the excise tax on hydrocarbons relating to bills with suspended payment, until the customer has paid them in full, or 6 months has run from the end of the state of emergency.
- For more information, please visit: [COVID-19: Key new legislation introduced in Royal Decree-Law 11/2020](#), [Companies facing the COVID-19 crisis](#), and [Spain interactive map for COVID-19](#)

Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- **Meetings of managing bodies:** The measures adopted as a consequence of the COVID-19 seeks to make easier the meetings of managing bodies to be held by using distance communication mechanisms (i.e. video calls), or directly in writing and without a meeting.
- **Annual shareholders' meeting:** It has been postponed the terms for calling and holding the ordinary annual shareholders' meeting (i.e. approval of annual accounts). Regarding the attendance to the shareholders meeting, in the case of non-listed companies, the provisions on remote attendance are not so clear. In the case of listed companies, the management body may call the general meeting for attendance by electronic means and remote voting under the terms of art. 182, 189 and 521 of the Spanish Companies Act, as well as the holding of the meeting anywhere in Spain, even though these matters are not provided for in the bylaws.
- For more information please visit: [Royal Decree-Law 8/2020 of March 17, 2020 launches urgent and extraordinary measures to confront the economic and social impact of COVID-19](#), and [COVID-19: Key new legislation introduced in Royal Decree-Law 11/2020](#)

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

- On April 8 2020, the Dutch government announced that it intends to reinsure supplier credits for the remainder of 2020. This measure is mostly aimed at helping SME retailers and catering establishments that make use of supplier credits and need to provide an insurance of payment to the supplier via a credit insurer. It is estimated that the measure will cost around EUR 12 billion, and that the Dutch government will incur approximately EUR 1 billion in losses. The measure has yet to be worked out in greater detail and approval of, amongst others, the European Commission is required.

- Dutch exporters and their banks can take out an export credit insurance with Atradius Dutch State Business for political and commercial risks that cannot be insured on the market. Such risks concern, for example, the long duration of the credit. The government has announced that it will extend export credits which will enable companies to cover more risks. Applications for different products may be submitted to Atradius Dutch State Business through the [website](#).

- An SME Credit Guarantee Scheme is available for small and medium sized enterprises established in the Netherlands and have substantial activities in the Netherlands (except for undertakings active in agriculture, fisheries, public health care, insurance and finance, and real estate).

Under the regular scheme, the government guarantees loans to SMEs up to 50% of the loan provided by the financier. The size of the maximum guarantee has been increased from 50% to 75% for loans with a maximum amount of EUR 266,667. For loans of more than EUR 266,667, the guarantee is capped at 50%. In addition, the maximum loan for which the guarantee applies has been increased from EUR 1 million to EUR 1.5 million.

The scheme can be used by companies for bridging loans or to increase their current account credit for up to two years. With effect from 7 April 2020, the premium for the government guarantee has been decreased from 3.9% to 2%. Moreover, the budget for the scheme has been increased to EUR 10 billion.

The eligible companies make an application to the accredited financier which is usually a bank. The accredited financiers can submit an application to the Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland. You can find the eligibility criteria and the list of accredited financiers [here](#).

- A scheme is available for SMEs and large companies that are established in the Netherlands and have substantial activities in the Netherlands (except for undertakings active in agriculture, fisheries, public health care, insurance and finance, and real estate).

The government helps companies by providing a guarantee on bank loans and bank guarantees. Under the GO Scheme, the maximum amount of the guarantee to be provided by the Dutch government to (i) large companies is 80% of the related bank loan or bank guarantee; and (ii) SMEs is 90% of the related bank loan or bank guarantee, provided that the large company or SME (as the case may be) has been affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Under the regular scheme, this applies to loans and guarantees from EUR 1.5 million up to a maximum of EUR 50 million per undertaking. The Dutch government has increased the maximum amount of any loan or guarantee under the GO Scheme to EUR 150 million per undertaking. The budget of the GO Scheme has been increased from EUR 400 million to EUR 10 billion.

The eligible companies make an application to an accredited financier which is usually a bank. The accredited financiers can submit an application to the Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland. You can find the eligibility criteria and the list of accredited financiers [here](#).

- A measure is available for SMEs that were established in the Netherlands before 15 March 2020 and are active in sectors which are directly affected by the government measures such as cafes, bars, restaurants, beauty salons, travel industry etc. With effect from 7 April 2020, this so-called Emergency Desk measure has been expanded to include other so called “contact professions”, such as tattoo shops, taxi companies, dentists and suppliers of eating and drinking establishments.

The expanded list can be found [here](#).

These undertakings can receive a one-off compensation of EUR 4,000. Applications may be submitted until 26 June 2020. Companies that are on the ‘expanded list’ can submit their applications from 15 April 2020. Application and further eligibility criteria may be found [here](#).

- Bridge financing is available to start-ups and scale-ups that have been affected by the COVID-19 Outbreak. Since these companies usually do not have banking relationships, the credit will be provided by Regional Development Agencies (Regionale Ontwikkelingsmaatschappijen, ROM). The government has made EUR 100 million available to support the start-ups and scale ups through this scheme. It is expected that applications can be made from the fourth week of April 2020.
- A measure is available for agricultural SMEs that are established in the Netherlands and have substantial activities in the Netherlands. The Dutch government has decided to temporarily amend the scheme to provide more financial leeway for agricultural SMEs that run into difficulties and need working capital and/or liquidity.

The temporary extension is aimed at regular agricultural loans and means that the State guarantees 70% of the total amount of the loan granted by the financier. This temporary extension can be used by agricultural SMEs to obtain a bridging loan or an increase in current account credit from a lender for a maximum term of two years.

On 10 April 2020, the measure has also been extended to include fisheries and aquaculture companies. Companies within these sectors can make use of the scheme retroactively per 18 March 2020.

Furthermore, the premium for the government guarantee has been decreased from 3% to 1.5% and from 1% to 0.5% for starters. The eligible companies make an application to the accredited financier which is usually a bank. The accredited financiers can submit an application to Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland. You can find the eligibility criteria and the list of accredited financiers [here](#).

- The government announced to introduce a scheme with a EUR 650 million budget for the compensation of damages suffered by specific agricultural sectors as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The ornamental horticulture sector and specific sections of food horticulture will be compensated for up to 70% of decrease in turnover in March, April and May 2020. The benchmark is the average turnover in the same period in three preceding years.

Chip potato growers will receive compensation in relation to the quantity of potatoes they still have in storage. The compensation applies to potatoes that can no longer be processed into chips for this season. The total compensation will amount to 40 percent of the average market value of the potatoes over the period from September 2019 up until February 2020. A total of EUR 50 million has been made available to this end.

Further details on the measure and how companies can apply for compensation will be published shortly.

2 Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

A subsidy is available for employers that pay Dutch wages and expect to see at least a 20% decline in turnover over a three-month consecutive period between 1 March 2020 and 31 July 2020, the starting date of which falls on the first day of March, April or May 2020.

The benchmark is the average turnover over the course of three months in 2019 for companies which existed in 2019. The subsidy is up to a maximum amount of 90% of the wage bill (the wages of all employees) for the period from 1 March 2020 up until 31 May 2020. Only in the event of a 100% decline in turnover, will 90% of the total wage bill be paid out. If the decline in turnover is lower, the subsidy will be set at a proportionately lower level.

Based on the application, the Dutch Employee Insurance Agency (the UWV) will pay an advance payment of 80% of the estimated amount of the subsidy based on the expected decline in turnover and the employers' actual wage costs in January 2020. A final settlement will take place on the basis of the actual turnover which normally requires an audit opinion.

In cases of a composition of legal entities, the decline in turnover is assessed at group level. This means that if a group as a whole has a decline in turnover of less than 20%, the individual members of that group are not eligible for a NOW subsidy.

A maximum of twice the maximum daily wage per month per individual employee is taken into account as salary. Compensation for each individual employee's wage is capped at EUR 9,538 per month. In using the scheme, companies are obligated, amongst other things, to use the subsidy exclusively for the payment of wage costs and not to apply for dismissal for commercial reasons during the period of the NOW subsidy. Probationary period dismissals and non-renewal of fixed-term contracts are not regarded as such. Any extension of the subsidy period will be announced before 1 June 2020. Applications may be submitted via [UWV](#).

- A measure is available for the self-employed registered in the business register before 17 March 2020. The support may take the form of a benefit payment up to a certain maximum amount (social minimum) and/or a loan for working capital to solve liquidity problems.
- No viability test will be applied so that the requests may be processed quickly, i.e. 4 weeks instead of the regular 13-week period. The level of income support depends on income and the household composition but is a maximum of approx. EUR 1,500 per month (net). This income support does not need to be paid back. The accelerated procedure also applies to loan applications for working capital up to a maximum of EUR 10,157. In addition, a lower interest rate than the regular rate will be applied on the loans.

3 Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

The Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security published a bill on 8 April 2020 on temporary provisions in the area of the Ministry of Justice and Security in connection with the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak (the "**Emergency Act**") and an accompanying Explanatory Memorandum.

The Emergency Act provides for, among other things:

- a temporary limitation on the 'presumptions of proof' for directors' liability in case of bankruptcy if filing the annual accounts is delayed as a result of COVID-19, and
- the extension of the period for preparing annual accounts by the management board instead of by the general meeting.

The Netherlands

The bill has now been adopted by the House of Representatives and must be adopted by both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Once the Emergency Act is adopted and in effect, it is expected to have a retroactive effect from 16 March 2020, and will apply until 1 September 2020, unless an extension is necessary due to the continuing consequences of COVID-19. The regulation on presumptions of proof in the event of late filing of annual accounts expires on 1 September 2023, as a directors' liability in bankruptcy can be invoked for up to three years.

More information can be found [here](#).

4

Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- There has been no expressive Government intervention into the workings of contracts in the Netherlands and the normal rules apply.
- Delays in production, supply and transportation may result in delay or failure to perform a contract. Therefore, particular attention has been given to existing force majeure clauses within contracts. Contracts usually include a list of force majeure events, including events such as natural disasters, wars, government acts, etc. Whether a 'pandemic' such as the coronavirus and the resulting government measures, is deemed to fall within the scope of the 'force majeure' clause will have to be examined on a case-by-case basis.
- Absent contractual clauses to this effect, Dutch law allows a contracting party to invoke 'force majeure' by relying on various grounds under the statutory provisions of the Dutch Civil Code in case of absence of fault, by virtue of law, a juridical act, or based on common opinion.

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

Tenants

- The Dutch Government has come to an agreement with housing corporations and associations that tenants will not be evicted during the COVID-19 crisis. For tenants who are unable to pay the monthly rent despite these measures, landlords will endeavour to provide custom solutions. Evictions may only take place in case of criminal activity or extreme nuisance.
- Furthermore, the Dutch Government has initiated an emergency act allowing temporary lease contracts to be extended during the course of the crisis. Currently, Dutch law prescribes that any extension of a temporary lease will automatically be converted into a permanent lease, causing landlords to terminate the contract at the end of the lease. The emergency act will allow landlords to extend the lease with a maximum of three months and until 1 September 2020 at the latest. The aim is for this legislation to enter into force as soon as possible.

Businesses

- The Dutch Ministry of Economic affairs has drawn up guidelines with real estate companies on how to cater shop owners in financial distress. The most important guideline is for real estate companies to (partially) suspend the rent in April, May and June, upon request.
- Real estate companies are urged to act in accordance with the guidelines, however they are not legally binding.

6

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- The courts are closed for public but remain functional.
- The deadlines for submitting documents to the courts remain unchanged as much as possible, unless the court reports otherwise.
- In-person hearings are suspended until at least 28 April. In urgent matters, the courts may hear cases via videoconference or teleconference and, in very exceptional cases, in-person hearings may be held.

7

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- Companies can obtain deferral of payment of income tax, corporate income tax, wage tax and/or value added tax, excises (mineral oils, alcohol, and tobacco), insurance tax, gambling tax, and landlord levy). The Dutch tax authorities will postpone collecting payment and grant a deferral of three months immediately after receipt of the request. The deferral applies to current debts as well as the debts that arise during the three months after deferral application. Furthermore, a deferral for a period longer than three months is possible but is subject to further conditions. The deferral application may be submitted [here](#).
- The tax authorities will not impose default penalties for non-payment or late payment of taxes. Default penalties (automatically) imposed will be reversed. Even though this is not specifically confirmed, it is generally understood that both measures apply since 12 March 2020. The collection interest that normally starts after the expiry of the payment term will be temporarily reduced from 4% to 0.01% from 23 March 2020. This applies to all tax debts. In addition, the interest rate for unpaid tax will also be reduced to 0.01% as of 1 June 2020. An exception to this is the temporary reduction of the rate for unpaid personal income tax, which will take effect from 1 July 2020.
- If a preliminary corporate tax assessment has been imposed and the taxable profit is likely to be lower than the taxable profit estimated for the preliminary assessment, a reduction of the preliminary assessment may be requested. This creates a right to a refund (if the preliminary assessment has already been paid in full) or provides for a reduction of the monthly tax due (if the preliminary assessment is paid on a monthly basis).
- The Dutch government has announced that the Dutch tax authorities will grant all requests to reduce preliminary assessments. The application may be submitted [here](#).

8

Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- The Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security published a bill on 8 April 2020 on temporary provisions in the area of the Ministry of Justice and Security in connection with the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak (the “**Emergency Act**”) and an accompanying Explanatory Memorandum. The Emergency Act provides for, among other things:
 - the facilitation of electronic decision-making by temporary derogation from the legal and statutory provisions concerning holding physical meetings of legal entities;
 - extension of the period for preparing annual accounts by the management board instead of by the general meeting;
 - a temporary limitation on the ‘presumptions of proof’ for directors’ liability in case of bankruptcy if filing the annual accounts is delayed as a result of COVID-19.
- The bill has now been adopted by the House of Representatives and must be adopted by both the House of Representatives and the Senate.
- More information can be found [here](#).

1

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

- Lending is available under two new schemes that have been introduced in the UK:
 - The COVID-19 Corporate Financing Facility (**CCFF**) – this scheme provides funding to larger businesses and corporates to support their liquidity and working capital issues by helping them to, for example, pay wages and suppliers due to the disruption caused by Covid-19 to their cashflows.
 - The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (**CBILS**) – this scheme is designed to support lending to SMEs (businesses with a turnover of no more than £45 million), that are experiencing lost or deferred revenues, leading to disruptions in their cashflow. It will initially run for six months.
- These schemes ensure that businesses that were viable prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 will have access to funding. Those businesses who were facing financial difficulty prior to the outbreak, will find it more difficult to get access to this funding.
- [COVID-19 Government help for UK businesses](#)
- The Government has recently announced an additional scheme to help start-ups, as the CBILS does not apply to loss making businesses. Under this scheme the Government will match any investment given to start-ups by making loans which will be convertible into equity if not repaid. The start-ups must have previously raised £250,000 from private investors in the previous five years.
- A further £750 million will be available as loans and grants for small businesses focussing on research and development.

2

Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- The UK Government has introduced The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme under which employers can access a grant to cover the wages for employees on “furlough” (ie still on their employer’s payroll but not providing any work). Under the Scheme the grant will cover 80% of an employee’s wage, up to a maximum of £2,500 per month. To find out more: [Coronavirus - Job Retention Scheme is now open and there is yet more guidance](#)
- A similar scheme has been put in place for the self-employed: [Coronavirus - Self-Employed Income Support Scheme – what is the government proposing?](#)
- The UK Government has also introduced changes to Statutory Sick Pay, which can now be paid not only to those who are displaying symptoms of Coronavirus, but also to those who live with someone who has symptoms or to those in clinically extremely vulnerable groups who have been notified that they should stay at home at all times until the end of June (known as “shielding”). To find out more: [Coronavirus - An update on Statutory Sick Pay](#)
- The UK Government has announced that changes to IR35 (also known as off-payroll working) in the private sector, which would potentially have affected the taxation of payments to consultants and contractors, have been delayed by a year. The intention had been to extend IR35 to medium and large companies in the private sector from 6 April, however, the Treasury has confirmed that the changes will be postponed until 6 April 2021 in response to the ongoing spread of Coronavirus. To find out more: [IR35 tax rules delayed by 12 months](#)

3

Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- The UK Government has announced proposed changes to the UK insolvency laws in order to address the unique circumstances arising from the Coronavirus pandemic. The principal proposed changes were publicised on 28 March and include:
 - a temporary suspension of the law making directors liable for wrongful trading. This will apply retrospectively from 1 March 2020 for an initial 3 month period. This is for all companies (not limited to those directly affected by coronavirus related issues). Other related insolvency laws/legislation to remain effective, and
 - the introduction of a new form of moratorium from creditors in addition to the current administration provisions, this is likely to resemble some features of the US Chapter 11.
- This change may help boards where the company is in financial difficulties and there is significant uncertainty regarding the businesses' financial future. In particular, it might aid such companies considering whether to bridge their cashflow by borrowing additional sums and accessing the furloughing scheme.
- [Insolvency update - changes to wrongful trading](#)
- On 23 April 2020, the UK Government announced a new tranche of measures to protect commercial tenants during the current crisis. The new measures, which will be included in the Corporate Insolvency and Governance Bill will prevent the use of statutory demands made between 1 March and 30 June 2020 and winding up petitions presented to court between 27 April 2020 and 30 June 2020 where the tenant "cannot pay its bills due to coronavirus".
- In addition to these changes, landlords will not be able to use the Commercial Rent Arrears Recovery (CRAR) procedure as a means for recovering rent unless 90 days of unpaid rent is outstanding.

4

Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- There has been no meaningful Government intervention into the workings of UK contracts between commercial entities and the normal rules apply.
- In the UK there has been an increased focus on contractual small print, such as the precise wording of force majeure clauses within contracts. The sort of unforeseen disruption to lives and businesses that we are now seeing is exactly what one imagines a force majeure clause is designed to respond to. In many cases the pandemic or the restrictions the Government has now advised to limit its spread will fall into a contractual definition of force majeure, however the clause itself will need to be scrutinised carefully in order to determine whether or not it is engaged.
- If a force majeure clause is engaged, typically it will suspend the performance of the affected party's obligations under the contract, for the duration of the force majeure event.
- If performance of a contract may be significantly affected it is crucial to review the terms of your contracts so you understand your rights and obligations and to allow you to scenario-plan accordingly.
- [Contracts in the time of COVID-19: Force majeure and frustration](#)
- Particularly with long-standing contracting partners, many businesses are trying to agree a mutually acceptable way forward, including varying contractual obligations and sharing the exposure more fairly (in which case any variations should comply with the formalities required by the original contract).
- Public sector bodies are being strongly encouraged by the Government to provide financial support to their at-risk suppliers to increase the financial resilience of their supply chains.

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

- Under emergency legislation:
 - Landlords of business tenancies are prohibited from re-entering premises (forfeiture) for non-payment of any sums due under the lease, from 26 March to 30 June inclusive. This period can be extended by further legislation. Landlords will retain their right to exercise re-entry for these sums at a later date, unless they expressly waive it in writing. Existing court orders for possession of premises may be postponed.
 - Notice periods for terminating most residential tenancies are extended to three months, for the period 26 March to 30 September. The notice period can be extended to a maximum of 6 months by further legislation.
- All current housing possession claims are suspended from 27 March for 90 days. This suspension affects all tenancies and licences of dwellings. Again, this period can be extended.
- Many business tenants are no longer able to open their doors to the public. However, aside from the legislation above and absent any other intervention, leases will continue and the obligations on tenants will carry on as before.
- The most practical route for the majority of tenants will be some form of temporary adjustment to the rent payable under the lease, from a switch from quarterly to monthly rent payments, to a rental holiday or deferment or even a full rent-free period.
- Landlords in the UK are being encouraged to approach negotiations with a degree of flexibility and it may become increasingly difficult for landlords to resist some nod to the gravity of the situation faced by the whole business community.
- A number of practical tips for both landlords and tenants is here: [COVID-19 Impact on Landlords and Tenants](#)

6

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

- In the UK, with the help of some technological innovation such as the use of video conferencing tools, the courts are operating largely 'business as usual'.
- On 19 March 2020, the Business and Property Courts of England and Wales issued a protocol regarding remote hearings, providing that remote hearings should take place wherever possible. Where a remote hearing is not possible, then the Court has only two solutions: (1) proceed with the matter in court; or (2) adjourn because a remote hearing is not possible and the length of the hearing combined with the number of parties or overseas parties, representatives and/or witnesses make it undesirable to go ahead at the current time. The protocol emphasises the need for the court and parties to be proactive in relation to forthcoming hearings. Allied to this, the Government is also introducing a bill to dramatically increase the availability of video and telephone conferencing as an alternative to physical hearings.
- Similar methods are being employed to deal with arbitration hearings.
- [COVID-19 and Hearings in International Arbitration](#)

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- The cash grants being offered under the UK Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme mentioned is closely linked to HMRC's existed pay-as-you-earn (PAYE) tax withholding system.
- Payments of VAT for the period from 20 March 2020 until 30 June 2020 may be deferred until April 2021, regardless of the type or size of business, although the VAT returns must still be made. However, VAT refunds and reclaims will be paid by HMRC as normal to aid businesses' cashflow. HMRC will also consider extending payment deadlines for customs duty and import VAT on a case-by-case basis for importers facing severe financial difficulties as a direct result of COVID-19.
- Income tax self-assessment payments for the self-employed, including individual partners in partnerships, that are otherwise due on 31 July 2020 will also be deferred until 31 January 2021.
- All businesses in the hospitality and retail sectors irrespective of their rateable value are exempted from paying business rates this tax year.
- A £25,000 grant will also be available to businesses with smaller retail, hospitality and leisure premises that have a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000.
- There is also a support package for self-employed individuals who make profits of up to £50,000 a year and who will be entitled to a taxable grant worth 80% of their average monthly profits over the last three years, up to £2,500 a month for 3 months.
- [Coronavirus and the UK tax system](#)

Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- The UK Government announced on 28 March 2020 that legislation will be introduced to ensure that those companies required by law to hold annual general meetings (AGMs) (i.e. public companies and private companies that are traded companies) will be able to do so safely and in a manner consistent with the Stay at Home Measures.
- While the requirements of a valid general meeting are in part determined by a company's articles of association, and will need to be checked on a case-by-case basis, the majority of companies should still be able to hold a general meeting (if they do not wish or are unable to postpone the meeting, or to take decisions by other methods) such as through the use of proxy votes, enabling shareholders to participate, without needing to attend in person.
- [Shareholder meetings and decision making during COVID-19 lockdown](#)

1

Loans and financial support

Has the government put in place any new bank funding schemes?

- The U.S. Federal government has embarked on several initiatives to support businesses. The two primary programs were included in the CARES Act, which was signed into law on March 27, 2020.
- The **Paycheck Protection Program** (PPP) incentivises employers to continue to employing workers and paying employee benefits. PPP is administered by the Small Business Administration (SBA) and offers employers unsecured loans at a nominal interest rate, with a streamlined closing process. The program is available to companies with less than 500 U.S.-based full-time equivalent employees. Foreign ownership is not a bar to participation. PPP loans are available for up to the lesser of (a) US\$10 million and (b) 2.5 times average monthly payroll. PPP loans can be forgiven in whole or in part, to the extent that recipients use them for qualified purposes, namely, wages, salary, benefits, rent, mortgage interest and utilities. As of mid-April 2020, the initial US\$349 billion allocated for PPP loans had been claimed in full, however Congress is expected to offer additional funding in the near future.
- For more details, please refer to our client alert [here](#).
- The **Main Street Lending Program** (MSLP), facilitates low interest lending to small and medium-size businesses, including those with over 500 employees. Up to \$600 billion of MSLP loans will be available.
- For more details, please refer to our client alert [here](#).

2

Employment

What financial support is the government providing to businesses and to individuals on employment issues?

- The U.S. Federal government created the **Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation** program, which provides an additional \$600 weekly in special unemployment compensation for individuals receiving as little as \$1 in standard unemployment benefits. The law also extends the maximum duration of benefits by 13 weeks, which means that in most states, employees who have lost their jobs, or been placed on furlough, will be able to collect for up to 39 weeks. The new rules also include compensation for individuals who are not traditionally eligible for unemployment benefits, including independent contractors.
- The Families First Coronavirus Response Act created mandatory employer-paid leave related to COVID-19.
- For more details, please refer to our client alert [here](#).

3

Insolvency

Has the government made any changes to insolvency legislation?

- The CARES Act modifies the Small Business Reorganization Act (SBRA) and greatly expands the restructuring options available to businesses with less than US\$7.5 million in debt through March 27, 2021. It is effective immediately. Previously, only businesses with up to \$2.7 million in debt could use the SBRA's expedited procedures. Small business debtors have traditionally been wary of a reorganization process under Chapter 11 of the Bankruptcy Act (which provides for reorganizations), despite its well-acknowledged benefits, due primarily to the potential cost and disruption it often causes. For those businesses that qualify, the SBRA is intended to alleviate those concerns and to make small business bankruptcies proceed under a faster timeline and at reduced cost.
- For more details, please refer to our client alert [here](#).

4

Contractual Issues

What measures have been taken to reinforce contracts?

- The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the global supply chain. In addition to duties, liabilities, and defences created by contract, businesses also need to be conscious of a number of common law duties and obligations that may arise as a result of what is happening around the globe. These can include extra-contractual defences and concepts such as force majeure, impossibility of performance, and frustration of purpose. Although federal courts are open, many state courts are running with reduced capacity, so the U.S. has not seen widespread contract litigation as of late April. However, parties are generally positioning themselves to prepare for it. From the obligor side, this includes correspondence emphasizing how the current crisis makes strict contractual compliance impossible. From the obligee side, this includes careful steps to preserve rights while avoiding the implication of taking harsh positions that could lead to adverse litigation outcomes in future.
- For more details, please refer to our client alert [here](#).

5

Property

Have any changes been made to the laws around property, rent and enforcement?

- The impacts of COVID-19 have led many landlords and tenants to consider their options under existing leases to determine the best path forward and what actions to take if someone on the property has contracted the virus. As a result, many states and local jurisdictions have taken action to prohibit certain evictions based on non-payment of rent and to delay foreclosures by mortgage lenders. The U.S. has not yet seen a wave of real estate related litigation, likely because court access is curtailed and landlords may consider a non-paying tenant preferable to no tenant.
- For more details, please refer to our client alert [here](#).

6

Litigation

Are the courts operating?

Generally, yes. Federal courts are operating, and state courts are available for emergency relief. In general, courts are deferring items that are not urgent, and also adjusting procedures to observe social distancing guidelines.

7

Tax

Has any new legislation been introduced in light of COVID-19?

- The CARES Act offers some taxpayers an opportunity to take immediate action to reduce their federal income tax liability as they prepare their 2019 income tax returns. However, much of the CARES tax impact will be delayed until income tax returns are filed for tax periods during the crisis, which, for most U.S. taxpayers, began in 2020. Thus, in many cases, federal income tax refunds (particularly refunds resulting from the carryback of net operating losses (NOLs)) will not become available until income tax returns for 2020 are filed in 2021. Nevertheless, some action may be taken in the short-term to accelerate the ability of taxpayers to obtain income tax refunds this year, and some action may be taken during the balance of 2020 to ensure that income tax refunds will be obtained when 2020 income tax returns are filed in 2021.
- For more details, please refer to our client alert [here](#).



Company law matters

Have any measures been put in place to accommodate social distancing (such as remote general meetings)?

- Yes, in many cases taking advantage of legal concepts already on the books. Generally, U.S. corporate law is specific to the state of incorporation, except for listed companies, where federal securities law considerations are important. State law generally permits adjournment of annual meetings for emergencies, and for the conduct of meetings by remote means. State law generally allows for action by written consent without a meeting in many cases. For private companies, those whose charters contain conflicting provisions are generally reviewing changing them. For public companies, the long-held idea that holding annual meetings online could suppress shareholder democracy has been turned around, with many enthusiastically embracing the idea.

Please note, this bulletin does not constitute legal advice. The law is accurate to 20 April 2020 and the position is moving rapidly. We recommend that the latest government guidance is checked as this is changing daily. This publication is a general summary of the law. It should not replace legal advice tailored to your specific circumstances.