

In March 2020, the Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments published Spotlight No. 28 on preventative and sanitary measures in parliaments. On 3 November, the Austrian *Nationalrat* and the European Parliament submitted request 4548 to the ECPRD network in order to obtain updated information regarding preventative and sanitary measures in parliaments. In total, 40 chambers replied to the request.

This Spotlight reflects the state of measures up to 14 December 2020. Due to the rapidly changing context of the crisis, the current situation may vary from the one outlined in this document. For updates, please contact the editor.

## General trends and evolution since March

Last March, the main trends were the cancellation of events, suspension of visits and travel, as well as the request for staff (and occasionally MPs or MEPs) to work from home. All three remain prevalent across parliaments today. The most significant change to be observed is the **generalisation of the use of face masks**, which concerned fewer than eight parliaments back in March and which is now in place in one form or another in *all* parliaments.

Another notable feature is that parliaments have mostly maintained and adhered to their parliamentary calendar, with only a few and small exceptions.

## Compulsory wearing of face mask on parliamentary premises

Parliaments in which <b>wearing a face mask is compulsory</b>	Parliaments in which wearing a <b>face mask</b> and undergoing a <b>temperature check</b> is compulsory	Parliaments in which wearing a mask is <b>recommended</b>	Parliaments in which wearing a face mask is compulsory <b>except</b> for MPs
Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France (both chambers), Germany (both chambers), Greece, Italy ( <i>Camera dei Deputati</i> ), Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Netherlands ( <i>Tweede Kamer</i> ), North Macedonia, Romania, Spain (both Chambers), Slovak Republic, Switzerland, UK House of Commons, US House of Representatives	Croatia, Cyprus, European Parliament (masks also compulsory for MPs when speaking), Hungary, Italy (Senate), Malta, Montenegro, Poland (both Chambers), Portugal, Slovenia (both chambers)	Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Dutch Senate, Sweden ('optional'), United States Senate ('optional')	Austrian National Council, Danish <i>Folketinget</i> (face masks are only compulsory for guests when not seated), Israeli Knesset (only recommended for MPs), Norway (mandatory for staff and recommended for MPs)

## **Measures for social distancing in the plenary**

Most chambers have taken measures for social distancing in the plenary, though the measures put in place vary. A large number of parliaments hold their plenary with a reduced number of members present. This is currently the case in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, the Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, Norway, the Polish *Sejm*, Portugal, Spain (both chambers), Sweden, the UK House of Commons and the US House of Representatives.

In the Belgian *Chambre des Représentants*, a livestream is offered. In the Danish *Folketinget*, by agreement, there are only 95 MPs of 179 taking part in voting, with proportional representation of parties ensured. In the Finnish *Eduskunta*, 74 of 200 members can be present at a time. In the French National Assembly, by consensus, only half the number of MPs of each group attend the plenary, which means 288 members instead of 577. In the German *Bundestag*, MPs are present on a voluntary basis, and the quorum has been lowered to one quarter. In the *Bundesrat*, all votes of a Land can be cast by one member. In the Irish *Dáil* chamber, 19 of 160 members can be present for debates, and up to 45 for votes. In the Norwegian *Stortinget*, 87 of 169 members can be present so the voting threshold is lowered to 87 instead of the usual 102. In the Portuguese Assembly of the Republic, 46 members are present as opposed to the regular 230. In the US House of Representatives, in-House members access the floor in alphabetically ordered groups for voting.

There are also parliaments which have chosen not to change their sitting arrangements. This concerns Estonia, Lithuania, Malta (Plexiglas was added), Moldova, the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, Norway (Plexiglas was added), Romania and the Slovak Republic.

## **Changes in the parliamentary calendar**

No parliament reported reducing the number of session or postponing them, and almost all parliaments indicated that they had not changed their parliamentary calendar as a result of the pandemic. The French *Assemblée Nationale* and the Dutch *Eerste Kamer* indicated that adjustments had been made to prioritise the vote and scrutiny of bills relating to the health emergency. The British House of Commons and the US House of Representatives indicated that its parliamentary calendar had occasionally been modified. The Irish House of the Oireachtas has put alternated sitting days in place to suit both Chambers. The Bulgarian Parliament reported that only necessary committee meetings could take place. The Hungarian National Assembly indicated that no oral questions and interpellations could take place, and that certain procedural motions had been limited.

## **Introduction of remote parliamentary sessions and voting**

Remote plenary sessions remain the exception rather than the rule, with only the Belgian *Chambre des Représentants*, the European Parliament, Latvian *Saeima*, Lithuanian *Seimas*, Polish *Sejm* and Senate, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, Slovenian National Council and *Državni Zbor* indicating that their plenary sessions take place online (with a hybrid participation format for the EP).

Countries were split on remote voting. The Albanian Parliament, German *Bundestag* and *Bundesrat*, Moldovan Parliament, Norwegian *Stortinget*, Portuguese Assembly of the Republic, UK House of Commons and US House of Representatives have made remote voting possible for committees (select committees in the UK). The Croatian *Sabor* and the Bulgarian Parliament have made remote voting available for MPs in isolation. In Slovenia, remote voting is always possible in the National Council, and possible in the second chamber, except for secret ballots. In the European Parliament, the Belgian *Chambre des Représentants*, Hellenic Parliament, Latvian *Saeima*, Lithuanian *Seimas*, both Polish Chambers, the Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor* and both Spanish Chambers, remote voting is in place.

## **Access to the gallery for visitors and media**

Most parliaments have taken measures to restrict the access to parliamentary buildings, notably for non-essential visitors, which come on top of the sanitary precautions one must follow in order to gain entry. However, only a minority of parliaments have completely closed their gallery to both visitors and the media.

Gallery access for the public and for the media	Gallery access only for the media	Closed to both
Denmark (limited to 40 for general public, 60 for schools, open to all journalists), Estonia (limited access for public and media), Germany (restricted access for both in the <i>Bundestag</i> and <i>Bundesrat</i> ), Hungary (restricted access for public and limited to the state news media for press), Italian <i>Camera dei Deputati</i> , Malta (open for both), Dutch <i>Tweede Kamer</i> (limited access for public and media), Norway ( <i>idem</i> ), Poland (limited access for both in both Chambers), Portugal (limited access for both), Romania ( <i>idem</i> ), Sweden (normal for press, normal but less for public), Switzerland (to be decided for public and limited access for press)	Austria, Belgium, Finland, French Senate, Greece, Italian Senate (also used by members to ensure distancing), Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Dutch <i>Eerste Kamer</i> , Spain, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, UK	Albania, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic (both Chambers), European Union, French <i>Assemblée Nationale</i> , Israel, Italy

### Visits, tours and events

As a general rule, tours and events are cancelled in all parliaments. In the Cypriot House of Representatives, tours are cancelled but events are still possible. In the Estonian *Riigikogu*, tours and events are only possible for guests of MPs. In the Italian Senate, tours and events are limited and conventions suspended if not held remotely. The North Macedonian *Sobranie* has made virtual tours possible. In both Polish chambers, tours and events are cancelled but exceptions apply. The Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor* indicated that there was restricted access.

### Remote working for parliamentary staff

Remote working for administrative staff wherever possible has remained the norm. Some parliaments have put rotation systems in place (Czech Chamber of Deputies, Italian Senate, Montenegrin Parliament, North Macedonian *Sobranie*, Portuguese Assembly), and many indicate the possibility for essential staff to be present when needed. The only exception is the Slovak *Narodna Rada*, where only staff over 65 years of age, pregnant women and staff with serious or chronic illnesses work from home, with all others in the office adhering to sanitary measures.

Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments - Institutional Cooperation Unit

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