



The European Business Registry Association (EBRA), together with our peer organizations International Association of Commercial Administrators (IACA), Corporate Registers Forum (CRF) and ASORLAC, sought member feedback on the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on business registries. The response period was open from 8 March to 16 April 2021. We hereby present the received responses from our member jurisdictions.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Country | Estonia |
| Institution | Centre of Registers and Information Systems |
| Contact person | Kersti Rätsep |
| E-mail | kersti.ratsep@rik.ee |

COVID-19 in your country

COVID-19 has affected life and economy vastly in Estonia. The country has gone through several lockdowns. Companies have been forced to temporarily close their businesses (meaning subsidizing costs for the government to support their employees, etc.). Schools have been working remotely for long periods. Medical sector has had a very heavy workload, and medical costs for the government budget are high.

Impact of COVID-19 on workload and operations

The annual distribution of the workload changed due to the postponement of the deadline for the annual reports. Client support had many questions regarding the business register and the COVID-19 situation, postponement of annual reports. However, given the difficult situation, the increase in workload was not significant.

The registrars have been working remotely for many years in Estonia (without an on-site customer service office). Therefore COVID-19 did not affect their working conditions or everyday operations.

The technical team and client support team (Centre of Registers and Information Systems) have been working mainly remotely from the 13th of March 2020.

Remote work, virtual collaboration tools, digital filings etc. were already in use before COVID-19; therefore the overall impact of COVID-19 has been not been significant for workload and operations of Estonian Business Register.

Impact of COVID-19 on development projects and strategy

We did not have to delay any planned development projects. But we did accelerate the implementation of legislation that enabled to hold digital meetings for all legal entities. It was especially important as physical meetings were not allowed at some periods of lockdown.

Although companies can do most of the operations digitally through the e-Business Register Portal, a small number of the operations (approximately 5% of total proceedings) must be



carried out via notaries (i.e. sale of shares). Fortunately, a new tool for remote authentication for notaries was completed just before the COVID-19 crisis and the Estonian government decided to change legislation to allow these transactions with the remote authentication tool. Remote authentication enables the conduct of notarial acts via a video bridge created between the notary and the customer. Such authentication is equivalent to authentication at a notary's office. In the first months of 2021 more than 20% of notarial transactions related to the business register were carried out remotely without the need to visit a notary's office.

COVID-19 and companies

- *Implementation of changes in legislation to allow all legal entities to hold digital meetings*
- *Implementation of changes in legislation to allow remote authentication tool for notarial transactions*
- *Extended term of office of the board members of NGO's and Apartment associations until October 2020*
- *Extended term of filing annual accounts of 2020 until October 2020*

The "New Normal"

We are currently working on a new version of our e-Business Register portal. Creating this portal, we are mainly focusing on usability and user experience and we hope that this would encourage even higher use of digital channels for the companies.

Our goal is to provide companies with all the services they need at once. We enable companies to register their employees and apply for a VAT number in the Company Registration Portal during the establishment process and forward this information to the Tax and Customs Board. We also want to make it possible to apply for different operating licenses in the similar way.

We are considering possibilities to create a service for holding digital general/shareholder meetings. The goal is to help micro and small enterprises to make sure their digital meetings and related documents are conducted properly. In order to create this service, it is necessary to create a register of shareholders that would hold legally validated information.