

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.

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| Country | Netherlands |
| Institution | Kamer van Koophandel (KVK) |
| Contact person | Tienke van der Werf |
| E-mail | tienke.vander.werf@kvk.nl |

COVID-19 in your country

The first COVID-19 infection in the Netherlands was detected on 27 February 2020. There was a first wave of infections in the spring of 2020, and a second wave from the autumn onwards. Official estimates indicate that 2 million inhabitants (about 10% of the population) have now been infected and about 16,000 people have died from the virus.

The virus outbreak prompted unprecedented measures. Public life was partly shut down during the first and second wave. Schools, restaurants, shops, cinemas and museums are closed. The 2020 final exams of the secondary schools have been canceled. Events and sports competitions have been canceled. Starting from 21 January 2021 a compulsory curfew applies from 10:00 PM to 4:30 AM.

The economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis are major. Due to the lockdown and working from home, consumption fell sharply. The first quarter of 2020 showed a contraction of the economy of 1.5% (measured in GDP) compared to the previous quarter. This was due to the two-week lockdown in March. In the second quarter, the economy contracted by 8.5%, which was caused by two full months of lockdown. The third quarter showed a limited recovery due to temporary relief of corona measures. In the fourth quarter, growth decreased again to 0.1%.

The government has drawn up an economic aid plan totaling € 77 billion to help companies in need.

Impact of COVID-19 on workload and operations

Due to the already broadly implemented digital government actions, the Netherlands in general and the Netherlands Chamber of Commerce (KVK) made a swift move to provide digital services. Entrepreneurs and business are used to access our services online. KVK was asked by the Ministry of Economic Affairs to be one of the main COVID-19 information portals of the Netherlands, especially aimed at entrepreneurs and businesses.

KVK rapidly developed a COVID-19 website and our business advisory teams were scaled up. So far we had 7 million visits to our COVID-19 website and we have answered almost

100.000 COVID-19 related questions by telephone. The NACE-codes that are registered in the business register are used in the implementation of the support packages for companies.

During the COVID-19 crisis and the lockdowns our front offices were open to the public in order to provide the necessary services (such as starting a new business) to entrepreneurs and businesses. When visiting our offices, the standard public health measures (face mask required, one visitor at a time, electronic payment only) apply. Staff members who do not need to be present at the office or at a location work from home. We have increased the capacity of our servers and networks in order to facilitate working remotely and handling the increased load of providing our services in a digital manner. Because of public health measures, less capacity than desired was available in our front office to handle the high demand for appointments.

Impact of COVID-19 on development projects and strategy

KVK has and had a digital first strategy. In recent years, KVK has invested in the digitization of its services and digital accessibility. Therefore no major shift in or rescheduling of major project was necessary. A project that unfortunately could not go ahead was the organization of the 2020 EBRA annual conference in Amsterdam.

COVID-19 and companies

Normally it is only possible to digitally participate in a shareholders' meeting if this has been laid down in the articles of association. This is often not the case. On 24 April 2020 an emergency law was published. The emergency law offers the possibility to deviate from the articles of association. The board can now determine that members do not have physical access to the shareholders' meeting.

The "New Normal"

At the moment, the Netherlands is in the third lockdown of significant parts of economy and society. There are emerging ideas about the new normal. And there is a widespread expectation that a return to the way it once was is no longer a realistic option. However, it is too early to be able to make tangible statements about the situation once the current restrictions are (partially) lifted. The national government will present a restart and recovery program after the general elections of March 2020.