



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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COVID-19 in your country

The Law on the Management of the Spread of COVID-19 Infection (initially the Law on the Activities of Public Institutions in the Event of an Emergency in Relation to COVID -19), which aims to ensure the continuous and effective operation of public institutions in relation to the spread of COVID-19 during an emergency, establishes that in connection with the spread of COVID-19 during the state-declared emergency, the state institutions shall observe the following principles in their activities: the work shall be organized in such a way as to ensure, as far as possible, the fulfillment of the functions and tasks specified in regulatory enactments and shall co-ordinate its activities and co-operate with each other, refraining from legal formalism, which should also be taken into account.

During a crisis, the ability of public administration to set priorities precisely, to take decisions quickly, and to act in solidarity in the interests of all parties becomes particularly important. The State Chancellery, in cooperation with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, developed guidelines to provide explanations and recommendations for the organization of work, remuneration and customer service in public administration institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Ministry of Economics provides appropriate support mechanisms for entrepreneurs: downtime support; wage subsidy support; a working capital grant is awarded to companies affected by the COVID -19 crisis to compensate for the fall in working capital flows. Several amendments to the laws were adopted, including the Commercial Law of 20 March 2020, which provide for the possibility for members of capital companies, including shareholders, to participate and vote at meetings of shareholders remotely. These amendments have been adopted to allow meetings to be held in the context of restrictions on gatherings in the event of a crisis caused by COVID-19.

The amendments provide for how a participant may exercise his or her right to participate and vote at a meeting of participants remotely: by casting a vote in writing (including by electronic means) before the meeting of the participants; participating in the meeting of participants and voting at it by electronic means; participating in e-meetings organized by companies. In accordance with Article 7.1 of the COVID-19 Infection Management Law and taking into account the epidemiological situation in the spread of COVID-19 infection in the Register of Enterprises, orders on actions and responsibilities to limit the spread of COVID-19 infection in the Register of Enterprises were adopted accordingly.



Impact of COVID-19 on workload and operations

The work plan of the Enterprise Register of the Republic of Latvia already in 2019 developed the “Business Environment Improvement Action Plan” which envisaged from 1 July 2020, to ensure the registration of merchants in the Register of Enterprises only happens electronically. In general, here are the general statistics for Q1 in 2020 and 2021:

	Q1 2020	Q1 2021
New merchants and companies registered	2,808	2,470
Amendments in the Commercial Register	10,515	10,298
Proportion of registration applications received electronically	56%	65%
Proportion of information requests received electronically	39%	90%
Electronically received applications for services in the Register of Enterprises	48%	76%

In order to reduce the risk of employees becoming infected with COVID-19, on-site customer service was discontinued, which allowed to give up part of the leased area, reducing the cost of renting the premises. Systematic disinfection of the premises is performed (additional costs – 6,354.52 EUR).

All employees are provided with personal protective equipment (mask, gloves and disinfectants), and hand and surface disinfectants are available at all workplaces.

Employees are provided with equipment to be able to perform their duties remotely (additional laptops were rented in the period 26 March 2021 – 31 August 2020. Informative materials have been sent out for action to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Percentage of services in 2020 – 1.81% (services in 2020 – 982,803, COVID-19 services in 2020 – 17,818).

In order to further improve the opportunities and solutions offered by remote work, the Register of Enterprises regularly conducts employee surveys. In one of the most recent employee surveys related to telework in the Register of Enterprises, almost 50% of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the conditions of telework in the Register of Enterprises.

At the same time, almost 60% of the respondents have indicated that they would prefer to choose part-time telework (the possibility to work both in the office and remotely). In turn, when answering the question about the quality of telework, more than 60% rated it as good or even very good (without feeling the difference from working in an office).

Also, by summarizing the respondents' recommendations in the context of telework, the Register of Enterprises regularly works on various improvements and new solutions in this area.

For those employees for whom the specifics of work are appropriate to the conditions of telework and it is possible to observe the relevant safety aspects, the Register of Enterprises had provided opportunities for telework even before the spread of COVID-19 infection in the world.



At the same time, COVID-19 infectious diseases are affected by the Register of Enterprises, evaluating both the specifics of employees' work and the possibilities of providing telework (including solving safety issues, searching for technical solutions, providing the necessary equipment, etc.), with 67% of all employees of the Register of Enterprises agreements on partial or 100% telework have been concluded.

Impact of COVID-19 on development projects and strategy

Continuing to implement telework and maintaining it as one of the types of work in the Register of Enterprises undoubtedly affects the issue of communication and culture, which requires reviewing and updating the values of the Register of Enterprises, among others. This is also one of the planned tasks in developing and updating the Business Register strategy for the coming years.

The situation revealed that digital registration services are available to Latvians, and their popularity correlates with the popularity of e-signatures in society.

The Registry provides customers with remote, 24/7 support tools: e-services, step-by-step service descriptions on the website, and UNA- virtual assistant consultations. In cases where an employee consultation was required, e-mailing or calling customer service specialists during business hours was offered.

Statistics show an increase in the use of digital registration services: In 2020, registration applications in electronic form were received in 78% of cases (for comparison in 2019 - in 64% of cases).

As a result of COVID-19, the ability to provide remote customer support was completely reviewed. Almost all functions of the Register are performed remotely by employees.

A new project was launched to implement telework. Initially (in March 2020) portable computer equipment was rented, later (in October), during the procurement, the rented computer equipment was replaced and additional laptops were purchased. Until now, the employees of the Register mainly worked from desktop computers and only 10% of the employees had the opportunity to work remotely. Within the project, remote access to the Register systems was provided to 70% of employees. Security factors were assessed and improved.

Surveys were conducted regularly to receive feedback on the psychological and emotional state of employees, the ability to cope with work tasks remotely, the adequacy of technical support and digital skills. The responsible structural units (Development Department, Personnel Department) provided constant support to the employees of the institution, who requested re-evaluation of processes and tasks and re-planning of resources.

The implementation of the most important Register development projects launched earlier has not been directly critically affected by COVID-19. The organization of work involved in projects has changed (transition to teleworking), but all ongoing projects are continuing.



COVID-19 and companies

The business register provides services to customers only remotely; face-to-face services are not available. It is possible to submit documents to the Register of Enterprises using the unified e-service of the Register of Enterprises by sending them by post, or in certain cases by sending them to the official e-mail of the Register of Enterprises.

As far as possible, the notaries of the State of the Register shall communicate with the clients (by telephone or by e-mail) regarding the deficiencies in the documents, with a request to eliminate the identified deficiencies. If necessary, the term for examination of documents in the form of a resolution is extended.

The Register of Companies convenes extraordinary meetings of the Company remotely, at the same time inviting the members of the Company to exercise the right to vote before the extraordinary meeting or to exercise the right to participate and / or vote in the extraordinary meeting using the Microsoft Teams application.

The voting of the participants before the meeting of the Company's participants shall be submitted to the Register electronically or in paper form, or through the portal www.latvija.lv service "Application to the institution", with prior appropriate authorization on the portal.

The "New Normal"

In 2020 the strategic goal was fulfilled – to develop the information provision function of the Register, increasing the possibility of customer self-service and reducing the involvement of the institution's employees in the provision of these services.

From 7 January 2020, the information available on the Register data portal <https://info.ur.gov.lv> is provided free of charge, thus ensuring that current / historical data and documents are available to every person online.

In 2020, the portal viewed data on 1.4 million legal entities and 70,000 natural persons.

The implementation of this goal facilitated the cooperation between the Register and the clients in a difficult situation for the world and the country.

Similarly, the availability of the Register data transfer service and open data in state sharing solutions was improved / expanded (by participating in the ERDF project "Single Data Space").

In the next strategic period, the Registry will continue the ongoing digital transformation in the areas of domestic and international e-services, remote customer support / consulting and remote work.

Main planned initiatives: Modernization of the register information system (revision, optimization, standardization and automation of registration processes; improvement of e-services, improvement of accessibility (incl. for cross-border users), replacement of obsolete information systems (IS) technologies, ensuring compliance with modern requirements, systems operational stability and availability); improvement of remote (mobile) work environment for the employees of the Register.