

European countries offer more economic relief from pandemic

May 14 2020, by Nicole Winfield and Vanessa Gera



A worker walks holding a lawn mower as a biker rides past a cafe outdoor tables in Tremezzo, Lake Como, Italy, Thursday, May 14, 2020. Regional governors have been pressing the government to be permitted to present their own reopening plans, taking into account the level of infection and also the growing economic crisis. (AP Photo/Luca Bruno)

European governments promised more relief to their citizens on Thursday as a top U.S. immunologist prepared to tell Congress that America faces its "darkest winter in modern history" unless leaders act decisively to prevent a rebound of the coronavirus.

France's government announced an 18-billion-euro (\$19.4 billion) plan to support restaurants, hotels and other tourist facilities which have been closed since mid-March amid the coronavirus crisis.

Prime minister Edouard Philippe promised the French on Thursday that they will be able to go on vacation in France in July and August, including in French overseas territories, as the country has started lifting its lockdown this week.

Germany's parliament approved plans to increase the amount paid to people who spend months in a government-backed short-time work program during the coronavirus crisis.

Companies are making extensive use of the program, which was credited with keeping down unemployment in the financial crisis over a decade ago. It allows them to keep employees on the payroll while they await better times.

Those announcements came after Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte promised a massive package of tax cuts and other financial aid to help businesses and families.

"Your cry of alarm didn't escape us," Conte said late Wednesday.



Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe wearing a face mask leaves after a press conference at his official residence in Tokyo Thursday, May 14, 2020. Abe announced the lifting of a coronavirus state of emergency ahead of schedule in most of the country except for eight high-risk areas. (Akio Kon/Pool Photo via AP)

His government also promised to legalize the status of foreigners, many of them illegal migrants who are crop-pickers, baby-sitters and caretakers.

Italy is one of the countries worst hit by the coronavirus. But U.S. has the largest coronavirus outbreak in the world by far: 1.39 million infections and over 84,000 deaths, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. Worldwide, the virus has infected more than 4.3 million

people and killed some 297,000. Experts say the actual numbers are likely far higher.

A top U.S. immunologist who says he lost his government job because he warned the Trump administration to prepare for the coronavirus pandemic said he was ready to tell Congress that America faces its "darkest winter in modern history" unless leaders act decisively to prevent a rebound of the coronavirus.



A McDonald's employee, wearing a face mask and gloves to help protect from coronavirus, processes delivery orders as two Deliveroo drivers wait outside a branch in the Tooting area of south London, Thursday, May 14, 2020. McDonald's on Wednesday reopened the first 15 of its restaurants in the south east of England for delivery only, after eight weeks of closing all their branches in the UK due to the coronavirus outbreak. (AP Photo/Matt Dunham)

Dr. Rick Bright's testimony Thursday follows a warning earlier in the week from Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious disease expert, that rushing to lift store-closing and stay-at-home restrictions could "turn back the clock," and lead to more suffering and death and complicating efforts to get the economy rolling again.

But the pressure is on to staunch job losses after the U.S. unemployment rate soared to 14.7% in April, the highest since the Great Depression. Another nearly 3 million laid-off workers applied for U.S. unemployment benefits last week as the viral outbreak led more companies to slash jobs even though most U.S. states have begun to let some businesses reopen under certain restrictions.

Roughly 36 million people have now filed for jobless aid in the U.S. in the two months since the coronavirus first forced millions of businesses to close their doors and shrink their work forces, the U.S. Labor Department said Thursday.



Schoolchildren wait in line to use the toilet in the schoolyard of the Sainte Aurelie primary school of Strasbourg, eastern France, Thursday, May 14, 2020. The government has allowed parents to keep children at home amid fears prompted by the COVID-19, as France is one of the hardest-hit countries in the world. Authorities say 86% of preschools and primary schools are reopening this week. (AP Photo/Jean-Francois Badias)

The fallout from the pandemic includes heightened political tensions between nations.

In China, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian, criticized the United States, saying authorities there have failed to effectively fight the global coronavirus [pandemic](#) and "abused American people's trust."

Zhao appeared to be firing back against accusations from the Trump administration that China mishandled or deliberately delayed releasing information about the outbreak, first detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan late last year.

Zhao said the U.S. should "focus more on fighting the epidemic and safeguarding the lives and health of the American people, and stop playing such buck-passing game."

Australia said it will push for an inquiry into the origins of the coronavirus even if it hurts trade relations with China. Prime Minister Scott Morrison had been accused of playing "deputy sheriff" to the United States after calling for the inquiry.



A woman watches a short film on a giant screen in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Wednesday, May 13, 2020. Cinema from the windows is the name of a Rio City Hall initiative to bring the movie theater to people in quarantine at home due to the coronavirus pandemic. (AP Photo/Silvia Izquierdo)

Morrison brushed off the criticism, telling reporters: "We have always been independent, we have always pursued our national interests, and we always will."

The world's public health measures continue to provoke conflict between officials and the public.

In Ethiopia, police said they arrested over 1,000 people for refusing to wear face masks in public, while in Greece a spat broke out over a government plan to install cameras in high school classrooms. The idea is to provide live-streaming to allow for reduced classroom attendance when schools reopen next week. But a privacy watchdog and a left-wing opposition party called cameras a serious privacy risk.

In many parts of the world, communities and individuals were finding inventive ways to cope with what many view as a "new normal."

Apartment dwellers in Rio de Janeiro were getting some much-needed entertainment from children's movies projected onto screens set up outside their buildings, similar to a drive-in theater.



In this April 27, 2020, photo, Song Huiyan shows her fashion dresses for her online clients during the live-streaming at her clothing shop in Beijing. Retailers in China are embracing livestreaming as a sales channel amid a Chinese "shoppertainment" boom accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Via livestreaming, retailers can interact with customers in real time, while customers make purchases directly in the stream.(AP Photo/Andy Wong)

Cesar Miranda Ribeiro, president of city-owned RioFilme company, said the effort, called "Cinema in the Windows," is aimed at "trying to take care of the mental health of the people."

Chinese people looking for some stay-at-home retail therapy have tuned into livestream shopping.

Others seeking spiritual support and human connections are worshipping remotely via online religious services, including from the Vatican to village churches.

"People in general, I think, are looking for more meaning and spirituality in the midst of all this," said Omar Suleiman, an Islamic leader in Irving, Texas, whose Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research has been uploading YouTube videos. "So I think there's just a general increase in religiosity and consumption of religious content."

For most leaders, though, the focus was a far more worldly one: how to get back to business and revive economies reeling from record numbers of job losses and chilling uncertainty.



People wearing face masks to protect against the spread of the new coronavirus keep social distancing as they wait to enter a KFC restaurant in Yokohama near Tokyo, Thursday, May 14, 2020. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara)



Soma Sugiyama, of Japan, attempts a trick as some of the skate park is still filled with sand to deter skaters at Venice Beach during the coronavirus outbreak, Wednesday, May 13, 2020, in Los Angeles. Los Angeles County reopened its beaches Wednesday in the latest cautious easing of coronavirus restrictions that have closed most California public spaces and businesses for nearly two months. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)



In this May 5, 2020, photo, China's online celebrity Zhang Mofan introduces a backpack to her online clients and fans through the live-streaming at her house in Beijing. Retailers in China are embracing livestreaming as a sales channel amid a Chinese "shoppertainment" boom accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Via livestreaming, retailers can interact with customers in real time, while customers make purchases directly in the stream. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)



A member of the staff hands over a Covid-19 self test kit to a man at a drive-thru test site at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif., Wednesday, May 13, 2020. Los Angeles County reopened its beaches Wednesday in the latest cautious easing of coronavirus restrictions that have closed most California public spaces and businesses for nearly two months. The move comes as California tentatively eases some stay-at-home restrictions. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)



A runner exercises past a sign posted for a COVID-19 Testing drive-in site at the Rose Bowl, after the community recreation loop reopened to the public in Pasadena, Calif., Wednesday, May 13, 2020. Los Angeles County reopened its beaches Wednesday in the latest cautious easing of coronavirus restrictions that have closed most California public spaces and businesses for nearly two months. The move comes as California tentatively eases some stay-at-home restrictions. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)



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In this Aug. 3, 2016, file photo, a large bison blocks traffic as tourists take photos of the animals in the Lamar Valley of Yellowstone National Park. Access to the southern half of Yellowstone National Park will resume Monday, May 18, by way of Wyoming but park officials continue to talk with Montana about reopening the rest of the park after a seven-week closure due to the coronavirus, Superintendent Cam Sholly said Wednesday, May 13, 2020. (AP Photo/Matthew Brown, File)



Registered nurse Stephanie Mundo, left, watches as RN Dexter Tatum disinfects a patient's chair after conducting a COVID-19 testing site at the Abyssinian Baptist Church, Wednesday, May 13, 2020, in the Harlem neighborhood of New York. Churches in low income communities across New York are offering COVID-19 testing to residents in conjunction with Northwell Health and New York State. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)



In this March 3, 2020 file photo, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell pauses during a news conference in Washington. Powell provided a bleak outlook for the U.S. economy in remarks Wednesday, May 13, and urged Congress and the White House to act further to offset the damage from the viral outbreak. (AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin, File)



A police officer wearing a Balinese traditional mask, called celuluk, performs as the new coronavirus during a campaign to wear masks as a precaution against the virus outbreak at a market in Bali, Indonesia, Thursday, May 14, 2020. (AP Photo/Firdia Lisnawati)



A man has his beard trimmed at a barber in Christchurch, New Zealand, Thursday, May 14, 2020. New Zealand lifted most of its remaining lockdown restrictions from midnight Wednesday as the country prepares for a new normal. Malls, retail stores and restaurants are all reopening Thursday in the South Pacific nation of 5 million, and many people are returning to their workplaces. (AP Photo/Mark Baker)



In this May 2, 2020, file photo, a bicycle sits in the sand during the coronavirus pandemic in Belmar, N.J. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke, File)



Passengers wait to board their flight at Christchurch Airport in Christchurch, New Zealand, Thursday, May 14, 2020. New Zealand lifted most of its remaining lockdown restrictions from midnight Wednesday as the country prepares for a new normal. Malls, retail stores and restaurants are all reopening Thursday in the South Pacific nation of 5 million, and many people are returning to their workplaces. (AP Photo/Mark Baker)



Children respecting social distance play puzzle in a classroom of the Saint-Tronc Castelroc primary school in Marseille, southern France, Thursday, May 14, 2020. The school can only operate three classroom since the others could not be disinfected. The government has allowed parents to keep children at home amid fears prompted by the COVID-19. (AP Photo/Daniel Cole)

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Thursday announced the lifting of an ongoing state of emergency in most parts of the country ahead of schedule.

Abe lifted the measure for 39 of the country's 47 prefectures, effective immediately, while keeping the measure in place for eight others, including Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and Hokkaido, where risks still remain high.

"Today is the new beginning for our daily lives, a new normal," Abe said, but also warning of the risk of a resurgence of the disease.

In New Zealand, malls, retail stores and restaurants reopened Thursday and many people returned to their workplaces as the nation of 5 million people ended most of its [coronavirus](#) lockdown restrictions. But most gatherings will be limited to 10 people and social distancing guidelines will remain in place.

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