

Ireland set for second lockdown as Europe reels from virus surge

October 21 2020, by Joe Stenson With Afp Bureaus



Few in Ireland were looking forward to the new restrictions

Millions of people in Ireland were getting set for a second national lockdown on Wednesday, the first European country to take the drastic step as the continent battles a persistent surge in coronavirus cases.

Other European countries are resisting national shutdowns after the measures earlier in the year provoked widespread bitterness and deep recessions.

While France and Britain are expanding areas under local restrictions, the Czechs have reintroduced curbs on movement and closed shops.

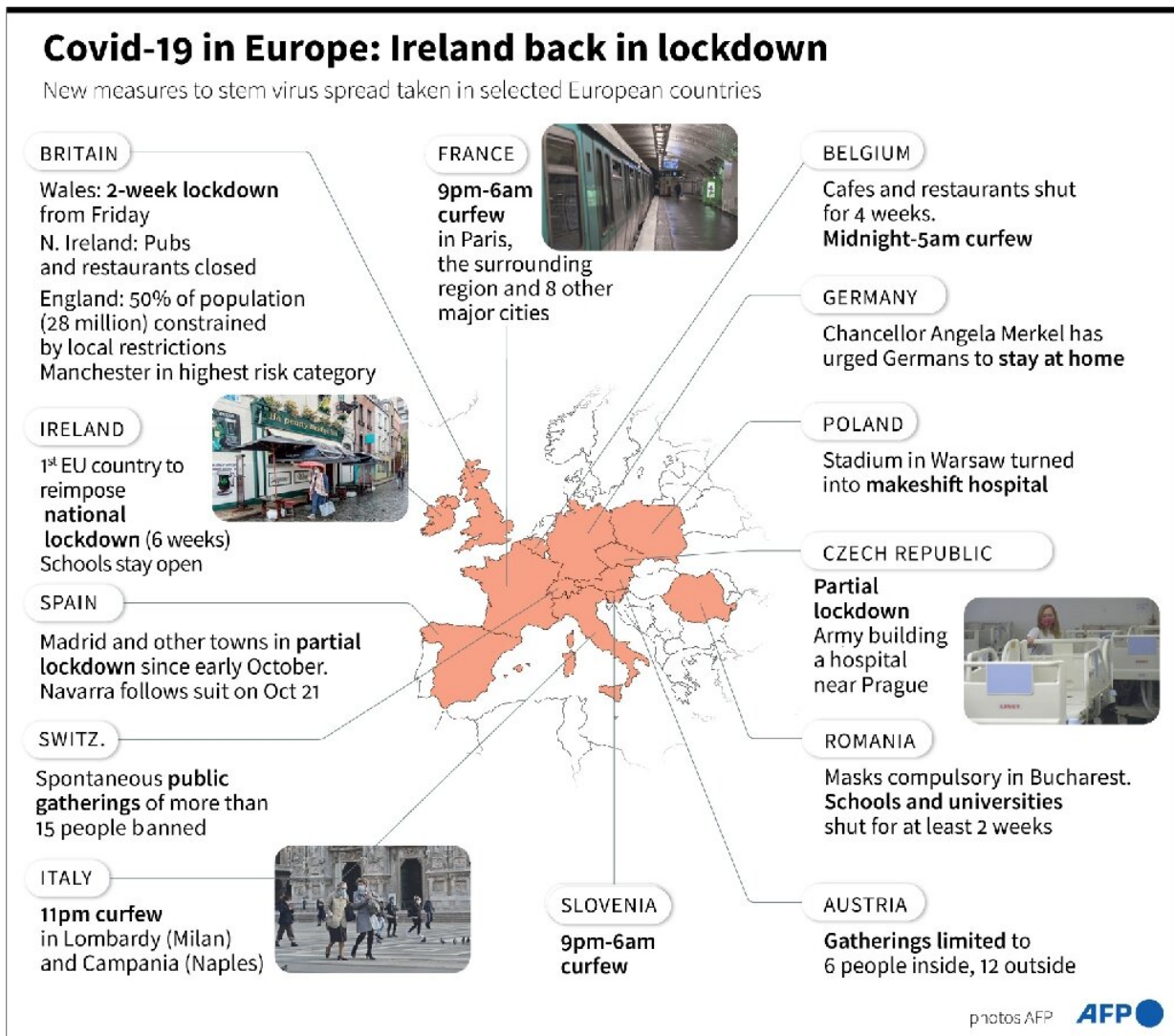
But the Irish are facing the most dramatic measure, with non-essential business to shut nationwide and people told to stay at home.

"There's a lot of people out there with this second shutdown (who) will really, really find it hard to come through," Dublin antique jeweler John Farrington told AFP.

Across the world, businesses are still struggling to come back from the damage caused by the restrictions.

Hong Kong airline Cathay Pacific was the latest firm to announce massive staff cuts, even as Thailand tentatively welcomed back its first tour group since March and the US state of California laid out rules for reopening its vast theme parks.

The global death toll now exceeds 1.1 million from the virus, which first emerged in China late last year.



A map of Europe showing new measures to stem the spread of Covid-19

Measures 'have failed'

Europe accounts for roughly a quarter of those deaths, and governments are ramping up restrictions.

The Czech Republic—presiding over the EU's worst record for new cases and deaths per 100,000 people in the past two weeks—has ordered

shops and services closed and intensified social distancing measures.

"The growth is huge and the measures we have taken so far have failed to flatten the growth curve," Prime Minister Andrej Babis told reporters.

France has already imposed a night-time curfew on roughly 20 million of its people, but the number of patients in intensive care has surged past 2,000 for the first time since May.

Officials said several regions would have alert levels raised to maximum and some would have a curfew imposed.

Britain was also busy widening its network of lockdowns—another 1.4 million people in northern England facing business closures and other restrictions.

The government's opponents believe a national lockdown is the only way of curbing the virus, and the two sides have been engaged in a bitter battle in recent days.



Thailand welcomed its first tour group since March

'Mandatory arbitrary guidelines'

A patchwork of restrictions is also frustrating some in the United States, with California's latest plan to allow theme parks to reopen drawing an angry response.

Californian authorities will allow parks including Disneyland and Universal Studios to reopen in counties with lower levels of transmission but only if strict protocols are followed.

Ken Potrock, president of Disneyland Resort, said the state was making

"mandating arbitrary guidelines that it knows are unworkable and that hold us to a standard vastly different from other reopened businesses and state-operated facilities".

Thailand's decision to begin reopening its [tourism industry](#) was also attracting controversy, coming as the country is convulsed by anti-government protests.

A planeload of 39 Chinese tourists flew into Bangkok from Shanghai late on Tuesday, as officials try to revitalise an economy brought to its knees, with eight million expected to lose their jobs by the end of the year.

"Thailand will become an economic basket case if it doesn't bring back tourism," said tourism consultant Bill Barnett.



India is set to roll out cheaper, quicker tests to try to reach remote parts of the country

Illustrating the struggles of businesses across the world, staff at the Charles Dickens Museum in London are also unsure of their future.

"I'm absolutely confident that when the pandemic is over and international tourism returns to London we will absolutely bounce back," manager Cindy Sughrue told AFP.

"But no one knows exactly when that point is going to be reached, and that's my concern now."

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