

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: Second COVID-19 Wave Forces Belgium and Its Hospitality Sector Into Another Lockdown

Country: Belgium

Post: Brussels USEU

Report Category: Agricultural Situation, Agriculture in the News

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Report Highlights:

On October 19, the Belgian hospitality sector closed again amidst a second COVID-19 wave that surpassed the first wave in the Spring of 2020. The absence of a new federal government until the end of September prevented early effective measures from stopping the second wave. It is expected that the Belgian economy, especially the hospitality sector, will face the dire consequences, despite the extension of existing, and new, emergency measures to underpin businesses and the poor going into winter.

On October 19, Belgian bars and restaurants closed again as the new Belgian federal government, led by Alexander De Croo, sharpened its measures against the second COVID-19 wave after limitations on table numbers and opening hours from October 6 had little effect on corona infection numbers. The Belgian federal government took these measures in an effort to harmonize earlier measures independently taken by the Brussels', Flemish and Walloon regional governments, leading to confusion and regional cross-border tourism. As COVID-19 numbers continued to rise, the government, on November 6, limited social contacts further to one contact per person and ordered hotel bars and restaurants, which had remained open to hotel guests, to also shut down, leaving only room service available. The measures will last for six weeks through the middle of December, with an evaluation planned at the end of November. To cushion this new economic blow, the [government decided to extend the emergency measures](#)¹ installed during the first COVID-19 wave through the first trimester of 2021 to avoid massive bankruptcies and lay-offs. As the first COVID-19 wave has already taken a serious financial toll on the poor, the new package includes additional measures and resources for shelters for the homeless and other social organizations helping the poor as we head into the winter season.

By the second half of October, Belgium reached the highest level of [corona infections](#)² of all EU member states. This was the result of the inability of the Wilmès provisional government, which had been planned to end on September 17, to take effective measures to avoid the COVID-19 wave as it was unable to coordinate and even met resistance from regional governments, while the new federal government, with Alexander De Croo as Prime Minister, was only sworn in on September 30. Hence, the new federal government had less than a week to come to grips with a COVID-19 wave spiraling out of control. By early November, this second COVID-19 wave has surpassed all incidence numbers from the first wave, except the number of daily casualties, but that may still come. It is widely anticipated that the current lockdown 2.0 will be extended as Belgian virologists warn that a third COVID-19 wave will be unavoidable in the Spring of 2021 if restrictions are softened too early again before corona incidence levels are brought down to a low level. As a result, the damage to the Belgian economy and particularly the hospitality sector is expected to also exceed those of the first COVID-19 wave, as the industry will likely miss out on the end-of-year holiday boom, while it has already used much of its reserves. Larger restaurants have their staff in unemployment schemes as they closed, while many small restaurants try to generate some cash through selling take-away dishes. Because this second COVID-19 wave has been developing for a few months and arrives in autumn when most harvesting work is over, farmers and the food industry are not facing the disruptions from the first wave, but nevertheless, this new lockdown is expected to impact consumption patterns again.

¹ <https://www.premier.be/fr/vaste-plan-de-soutien-socio-economique>

² <https://www.coronaviruscovid19.be/coronavirus-cijfers>

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Attachments:

No Attachments.