

EU PolicyWatch

Database of national-level policy measures

Eurofound's EU PolicyWatch collates information on the responses of government and social partners to the COVID-19 crisis, the war in Ukraine, rising inflation, as well as gathering examples of company practices aimed at mitigating the social and economic impacts.

Overview

Factsheet for measure MT-2020-12/276 – **Updated** – measures in Malta

War in Ukraine

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Quarantine leave - Grants for employers

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Country | Malta , applies nationwide |
| Time period | Temporary, 18 March 2020 – 02 May 2022 |
| Context | COVID-19 |
| Type | Legislations or other statutory regulations |
| Category | Income protection beyond short-time work – Paid sick leave |
| Author | Luke Anthony Fiorini (University of Malta) and Eurofound |
| Measure added | 04 April 2020 (updated 20 June 2022) |

Background information

As part of the national policy to tackle COVID-19, individuals diagnosed with this disease, or individuals who had been in contact with individuals diagnosed with this disease were to quarantine themselves for two weeks. In response, the government provided employers with such employees a lump sum.

It is worth noting that this measure came a few days after the government updated the law by publishing the “Minimum Special Leave Entitlements (Amendment) Regulations, 2020”. These Regulations amend the “Minimum Special Leave Entitlement Regulations” (S.L.452.101): this introduced quarantine leave for all employees, which was to be granted without loss of wages, when the employees is legally obliged to quarantine on order by the Superintendent of Public Health.

Content of measure

Employers who have a member of staff (including themselves) on mandatory quarantine leave in line with the directives of the Superintendent of Public Health are entitled to a one-off lump sum of €350. The grant also applies when members of staff have to quarantine themselves as they may have contacted individuals at risk of infection e.g., those living in the same house or in the same workplace.

The measure only covers grants for full-time employees. Applications are to be made via an online form to the Malta Enterprise who may request further information and documentation to determine eligibility.

Updates

The following updates to this measure have been made after it came into effect.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| 16 August 2021 | Following the publication of Legal Notice 332 of 2021, Period of Quarantine (Contact with other persons) (Amendment) Order, 2021, which provided the Superintendent of Public Health with the discretion to reduce the period of mandatory quarantine following a positive COVID-19 test for those who were vaccinated or provided an essential service, the Malta Enterprise modified the terms of the 'Quarantine Leave' grant. |
|----------------|---|

The updated scheme now provides support for a 7-day quarantine period at the rate of €175, whilst in the case of 14-day quarantine periods, the assistance was retained at €350 per quarantined employee.

| | |
|---------------|--|
| 09 April 2021 | The Malta Employers' Association argued that Employers should not need to fund quarantine leave for workers who refuse to take a COVID-19 vaccine without a justifiable reason. They also argued that such workers should also fund any needed changes in the workplace and necessary medical tests. |
|---------------|--|

Use of measure

By the end of May, €885,500 had been dispensed, covering 2,530 employees. By September it was announced that 3,500 individuals had benefitted from this measure.

During October 2020, Economy Minister Silvio Schembri stated that 2,664 applications for the Quarantine Leave scheme had so far been received, with the total amount approved was €1,821,750 (Malta Chamber, 2020).

Further updates on the use of this measure are unavailable, however during television interviews during January and February 2021, the Superintendent of Public Health highlighted that the number of individuals in mandatory quarantine at any one time exceeded 7,000. It is unclear how many of these were workers.

During an April 2020 press conference by Minister for the Environment, Energy and Sustainable Development Miriam Dalli, it was announced that a total of €11 million had been spent upon this support measure.

Target groups

| Workers | Businesses | Citizens |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Does not apply to workers | Applies to all businesses | Does not apply to citizens |

Actors and funding

| Actors | Funding |
|---|----------------|
| National government Social insurance | National funds |

Social partners

Social partners' role in **designing the measure** and form of involvement:

| | Trade unions | Employers' organisations |
|------|---|---|
| Role | Consulted | Consulted |
| Form | Direct consultation outside a formal body | Direct consultation outside a formal body |

Social partners' role in the **implementation, monitoring and assessment phase**:

- No involvement
- Main level of involvement: Unknown

Involvement

Initially a lack of clarity existed regarding if employees who required to quarantine themselves were to be paid by their employer. Trade unions argued in favour of this, whilst employer associations felt that this was not their role. These representations were made publicly as well as directly with government. Once Government amended the law on special leave, employer associations continued to argue that employers should not foot the bill for this special leave, whilst also opposing the amended special leave legal notice. In view of this, the government announced the grant for employers. Employers however still argued that whilst the grant was beneficial they were opposed to the legal notice as well as the manner in which it was introduced, which was outside of the usual channels of social dialogue. Social partner involvement was thus limited.

Views and reactions

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact upon business, and following consultation with social partners, the government initially announced a package of measures which included the deferral of taxes and financial support to incentivise telework. Following this announcement, employer associations publicly announced that these were insufficient and would not protect their businesses or jobs, stating the government instead needed to subsidise wages. These calls continued when on the 18 March, the government announced further measures including support for those who had lost their job, the disabled, and for employers to subsidise quarantine leave (this measure). Both unions and employer associations publicly stated that this second package was not sufficient to save jobs or organisations. On the 24 March, the government announced a third package of measures which included support for wages and other measures previously announced. This third package of measures was announced by the government whilst flanked by union and employer association members. It was announced that this package was the result of tripartite consultation. Furthermore, following announcement of these further measures, employer associations announced their satisfaction with the package.

In August and September several unions including the General Workers Union (GWU), the UHM Voice of the Workers, and the Police Officers Union (POU) voiced their concern that several employers were not allowing their members who tested positive for COVID-19 to avail of quarantine leave and were instead being made to use their sick leave entitlement. The GWU consequently stated that if this continued they would consider industrial action. The UHM asked for clear procedure to be issued by the Government on the matter.

Indirect criticism of this grant was provided in October 2020 by the President of the Malta Chamber (an Employer's association), who highlighted that the quarantine period was a major burden on employers, particularly in sectors where working from home was not possible. The Chamber suggested that obligatory quarantine leave should be taken as sick leave and paid by the government following the submission of a medical certificate (Malta Today, 2020).

In March 2021, as the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines progressed with earnest, the Malta Employer's Association (MEA) argued that workers who refuse to take a vaccine without any valid reason should be prohibited from taking quarantine leave (Times of Malta, 2021). Employers again argued that they should need to fund quarantine leave for such employees again in April 2021. This proposal was repeated by the Malta Chamber (an employer's association) during their 2022 budget proposals.

Sources

- 18 March 2020: Quarantine leave ([.covid19.maltaenterprise.com](https://www.covid19.maltaenterprise.com)).
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- 23 October 2020: Malta Chamber - Businesses, Workers Benefitted From €230 Million In Wage Subsidies So Far ([.www.maltachamber.org.mt](https://www.maltachamber.org.mt)).
- 03 March 2021: Times of Malta - Employers should know whether workers have been vaccinated - MEA ([.timesofmalta.com](https://www.timesofmalta.com)).
- 16 August 2021: LN 332 of 2021 - Period of Quarantine (Contact with other persons) (Amendment) Order, 2021 ([.legislation.mt](https://www.legislation.mt)).
- 23 August 2021: Malta Enterprise - updated quarantine leave grant ([.covid19.maltaenterprise.com](https://www.covid19.maltaenterprise.com)).
- 13 September 2021: Malta Business Weekly - Malta Chamber of SMEs presents 26 budget proposals for 2022 ([.maltabusinessweekly.com](https://www.maltabusinessweekly.com)).
- 29 April 2022: Malta Business Weekly - Wage supplement scheme extended to May ([.maltabusinessweekly.com](https://www.maltabusinessweekly.com)).

Citation

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