



Denmark

Spread of new variant increases likelihood of extension, tightening of restrictions

 SECURITY CIVIL UNREST OPERATIONAL

COVID-19

The head of Denmark's team modelling the COVID-19 pandemic said in an interview on 4 February that, if cases of a new variant of COVID-19 continue to spread at the same pace, the overall number of cases in the country will continue to rise despite restrictions.

The government is likely to respond to this development by extending restrictions and even tightening them in the coming months.

The development reflects the unpredictable and changing potential course of the pandemic, and with this the impacts on operational risks, which are likely to remain heightened throughout 2021.

However, if the government succeeds in vaccinating the entire population by June, this will likely allow the government to consider easing some restrictions before the end of the year.

Further protests by those opposed to restrictions or vaccinations remain likely.

The UK variant

Camilla Holten, who leads the team modelling the pandemic at the Statens Serum Institute, the Danish health service's centre for the study of infectious diseases, made the comments in an interview with *Science* magazine. Researchers believe that the variant (B.1.1.7, often referred to as the "UK variant") is the cause of recent surges in cases in countries such as Ireland and Portugal. In both countries, the surges stretched healthcare capacity beyond the pressures seen in early 2020. While the Danish government has taken efforts to contain the spread of B.1.1.7, a large-scale research project in the country suggests that the variant continues to spread.

There is potential for the spread of the variant to reverse a downward trend in case numbers since mid-December 2020. The government has already extended current restrictions until the end of February over concerns at the spread of the variant. Current restrictions include a ban on gatherings of more than five people, restaurants only being allowed to offer a takeaway service, and a requirement for schooling to be remote where possible.

Restrictions not enough

If, as Danish research suggests, the new variant is spreading despite restrictions, an extension of restrictions is likely beyond the end of February. There is also considerable potential for the government to tighten existing restrictions in the coming weeks. The government since the first cases in the country in February 2020 has avoided imposing curfews or stay-at-home orders. The toughest restrictions on mobility so far have been on movement between municipalities. However, the government may yet consider tougher restrictions on mobility.

Unpredictability

The emergence of more contagious variants demonstrates the somewhat unpredictable nature of the pandemic. As a consequence, there is considerable potential for businesses in Denmark to face continued heightened operational challenges over the course of 2021 related to government efforts to curb the spread of the virus.

Vaccination

The government has begun a vaccination programme, aiming to vaccinate the entire population by June. Should the programme prove successful, this will likely allow the government to ease restrictions. However, even in this scenario, the government could decide to maintain restrictions on entry from countries where the virus continues to circulate at a higher rate or where new variants have been detected.

Protests

Further restrictions and the rollout of the vaccination programme are likely to lead to further protests by those opposed to such measures. More than 600 people protested in the capital Copenhagen on 6 February against the existing measures and against a planned vaccination passport. This followed [clashes](#) on 23 January in the capital that broke out during a protest against COVID-19 restrictions. The

protests demonstrate the growing potential for societal frustrations over measures in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 to drive civil unrest.

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