What's the latest on coronavirus in Italy

Background

On 31 January 2020, the Italian government declared a national emergency due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-2019) originating in Wuhan, China. On Friday, 21 February, 3 people were infected with the coronavirus in Italy. Since then, the situation in Italy has dramatically worsened and over 200 people have tested positive for the sickness. It is integral that companies, especially those in Europe be prepared for the imminent changes to the workforce in this uncertain time.

The spread of the coronavirus

At this time, the severity of the worldwide spread of the coronavirus is unknown. However, reports have suggested that this illness could mark the beginning of a pandemic. Keeping this in mind, companies should be prepared for rapidly changing regulations mandated by national governments.

In Italy in particular, the situation regarding the coronavirus has been changing frequently, and these changes have serious implications that should be closely monitored by employers. Experts at the University of Hong Kong suspect that the virus will peak at the end of April or even May. In this case, employers should be prepared for periods in the next few months where employees may not be able to come to work at all. Employers should be ready for the following:

- Frequent telecommuting. Under Article 3 of the Decree of the President's Council of Ministers on 23 February 2020, employers are required to allow employees to telecommute when there is a risk to local or national

health or safety.

- An amendment to this Decree on 25 February 2020 stated that it was up to the employers discretion whether they would participate in telecommuting. It would no longer be done automatically and instead require employers to tell employees if they were eligible.
- Periods of quarantine. Individuals living in high-risk areas or those who have traveled to places with the coronavirus may be required to be quarantined for 14-20 days before returning to work. During this time, the employer will have to make arrangements for the employee in quarantine.
- Rapid changes in national policies. Employers should be up to date on information from the Italian Ministry of Health and the Italian Ministry of Labor for updates.

Burden of Responsibility

The Italian Ministry of Health has released special instructions for companies that currently do business in Italy. Under the Italian Legislative Decree no. 81/2008, an employer has a responsibility to protect the health and safety of employees. This means that an employer should follow what is in the employee's best interest during times of crisis.

In recent cases regarding the coronavirus across Italy, employers have promptly taken action and have required employees to stay home from work. However, this is not the only protection for employees that exists in Italian law. Law Decree no. 6 of 23 February 2020 states that employees may be allowed to work from home (or "smart work") to prevent the coronavirus infection.

Smart Working

There are several factors for both employers and employees to consider before smart working. First of all, employers should identify the type of workers that are able to work from home

as well as those who cannot. This can help develop an action plan that can be shared with employees in the case of an emergency.

However, it must be noted that an employee cannot legally stay home from work simply on the basis of suspicion of the virus—instead, they must have a reasonable belief that staying home is the best option. For those who unable to "smart work" in their jobs, the Italian government will be releasing information on how to maintain a proper and safe distance between individuals in the next few days. All workers deserve to be safe in the face of a health crisis. P. a Fabiana Dadone has already talked to employees in unions who are unable to use "smart working" about how to stay safe on-the-job.

Economic Impacts

It is suspected that businesses will suffer in economic markets due to the coronavirus. Additionally, supply and demand for certain goods and services will change. One of the biggest changes that can be predicted is in the corporate tax deadlines. The Minister of the Economy, Roberto Gualtieri has stated that businesses in a "red zone," which is a quarantine zone, will suspend tax payments and the withholding of taxes. Businesses should be prepared for these uncertain conditions and a constantly changing cash flow.

Currently, in cities such as Milan, the future of the hospitality industry is uncertain as many individuals have canceled their trip plans to Northern Italy. Employers should be prepared for these types of situations.

Employees who Travel

It is integral that employers determine which employees engage in both domestic and international travel for work. Employers should be on high alert for potential border closings, coronavirus checkpoints, and travel delays. It is possible

that employees who have traveled to areas with serious coronavirus be quarantined for several days as a protective measure. For example, in the Italian region of Basilicata, there is a requirement that individuals traveling from Piedmont, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Lombardy, and Liguria be quarantined for 14 days before entering the region. Employers should make action plans for ex-pats and employees traveling in areas that have been infected with the coronavirus.

These action plans should include a list of contacts for employees in case of emergency, alternative routes to travel to and from in case of closures, as well as strong management that can lead in the case that an employee falls ill.

Companies, big and small, need to be prepared for the risks of the coronavirus. Companies that send employees abroad, in particular, must take precautions in the next coming months. Hopefully, new regulations and recommendations from various bodies can improve the situation in Italy and across the world.

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