

Case Studies and Policy Changes

UK, EU Move to Ease Impact of Accounting Rules for Borrowers Affected by COVID-19

By Greg Feldberg

Original post [here](#).

On March 20, the Bank of England and European Central Bank (ECB) provided guidance to banks on how to follow accounting rules in evaluating loans to borrowers affected by the COVID-19 crisis.

The new IFRS 9 accounting standard, implemented in most of the world outside the U.S., requires banks to set aside loan loss allowances against all future expected losses for loans to borrowers who are categorized in high-risk groups. For borrowers in the low-risk group, the standard only requires banks to set aside allowances for 12 months of expected losses.

Most borrowers are now in the low-risk group. But IFRS 9 could require banks to downgrade borrowers into a high-risk group if they miss payments because of the crisis. Such downgrades would affect banks' capital negatively, making it harder for them to keep lending or provide forbearance to affected borrowers.

In different ways, UK and EU regulators gave guidance to banks to be flexible in such cases. Specifically, they said that banks should take into account government relief measures in evaluating borrowers and calculating expected losses on their loans. The guidance says that those relief measures, such as payment holidays or loan guarantees, should not automatically lead banks to move borrowers from 12 months of expected losses to lifetime expected losses.

The [Bank of England](#) said that, when firms calculate future losses, it expects they will “reflect the temporary nature of the shock, and fully take into account the significant economic support measures already announced by global fiscal and monetary authorities.”

The [ECB](#) said it would “exercise flexibility” regarding the classification of borrowers as unlikely to pay when banks call on new COVID-related public guarantees and on borrowers covered by legally imposed payment moratoria.

In the U.S., the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) implemented the Current Expected Credit Losses (CECL) standard for large banks at the beginning of this year. Like IFRS 9, CECL provides a forward-looking framework for banks' calculation of expected losses. Bankers and some U.S. regulators [this week](#) called on FASB to loosen or delay the standard. FASB has [said](#) that is the regulators' call.

Denmark Plans to Pay Fixed Costs for SMEs Hit by Coronavirus Lockdown

By Alexander Nye

Original post [here](#).

On March 18, the Danish Minister of Finance [introduced](#) a plan to pay a significant portion of the cost of small and medium businesses whose revenues fall by more than 25% during the coronavirus pandemic. The plan, which the Parliament passed on March 19, would cost the government roughly 40 billion Danish crowns (\$5.8 billion or about 1.6% of GDP) for the first three months (see details [here](#) in Danish).

The Minister also announced programs for self-employed people and for owner-operated businesses with 10 or fewer full-time employees. These programs will complement Denmark’s strong existing unemployment insurance program.

Denmark is the latest country to introduce a program to help small businesses struggling with an unprecedented global revenue shock. These programs range from asking banks to voluntarily delay payment dates to broader [tax](#) or debt holidays. In some cases, [governments](#) may ease the cost for banks through regulatory forbearance. In other cases, governments provide direct subsidies to prevent SMEs from missing payments (see [India's vast farm loan waiver programs](#)).

In normal times, such programs may be [criticized](#) for creating moral hazard and raising long-term borrowing costs. During the coronavirus pandemic, though, such programs may not raise moral hazard concerns if they will sunset when the virus has passed. Also, the Danish government, by linking eligibility to dramatically falling revenues, can be relatively assured that the funds will go to companies that need them (See Table 1).

Table 1

Decline in Expected Revenue (%)	Government Compensation of Fixed Costs under Program
100% (business ordered to close by the government)	100%
80%-100%	80%-100%
50%-80%	60%-80%
25%-50%	40%-60%

In its SME compensation program, the Danish government noted six principles:

- Businesses in any sector should be eligible for compensation;
- Compensation will be targeted at companies with a large decrease in revenues earned domestically;
- The compensation will cover at least 25% and as much as 100% of fixed costs;

- The compensation will cover up to three months of fixed costs and will be dispensed as soon as possible;
- If revenue decreases less than expected, SMEs must repay the government; and
- Companies that are compelled to close due to a ban on staying open will receive compensation for 100% of fixed costs.

The Danish program will seek to keep the administrative costs down by requiring outside accountants to audit the reported fixed costs and the decline in revenues. To receive aid, companies have to send audited statements of their fixed costs for the past three months and hire accountants to confirm that business revenue has or is expected to fall. The government will cover 80% of these auditing costs if a company joins the program. The government will also rely on auditors to identify fraud. Supervisors will conduct random checks, and checks at the end of three months, of auditors' VAT reports. The government will use these VAT reports to adjust its aid to reflect the actual revenue losses these firms eventually suffer.