

Key differences between lockdowns revealed in eurozone retail sales numbers

A decline of 11.2% in retail sales data across the eurozone wipes out more than 5 years of sales growth. Germany has seen a far smaller decline than average, while France is the worst hit of all eurozone countries



An empty Champs
Élysée avenue in Paris

Retail sales are likely to be among the hardest hit of most data to be released these days. In many countries, we have seen lockdowns closing main streets, which has a very significant and immediate effect on sales volumes. The hardest-hit sales category is textiles, clothing and footwear with a month-on-month decline of -38.9%, while food and beverage sales were up by 5%. The latter was mainly driven by stockpiling and substitution from eating and drinking elsewhere. Mail order and internet sales were up just 2.6%, which was a smaller increase than in February. This seems suspiciously low given anecdotal evidence. The drop of 20.8% in fuel sales is more in line with expectations.

By country, the differences between the more and less severe lockdowns are telling. France, Austria and Spain have had the strictest retail restrictions and have all seen sales decline by more than 14% in March. Germany and the Scandinavian countries have seen their sales contract by less than 6%. Countries like the Netherlands and Italy have not yet reported, making the picture

somewhat incomplete.

Looking ahead to April data, some countries had already cautiously reopened some outlets. Austria is therefore likely to leave the group of worst performers in April as smaller retail sites have been open since Easter. Germany also lifted some of its retail restrictions on April 20, and we're seeing a milder impact there. More divergence between countries is likely to become apparent. With most countries now announcing the first cautious easing of measures, May can be expected to come in better, but the road to full recovery is long and full of uncertainty.

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