

LAWYERS IN TIMES OF CORONAVIRUS

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Teleworking has become a common practice in law firms in Spain and Portugal, which have set up special committees to analyse and monitor the situation created by COVID-19 along with its legal, economic and social consequences. Without the possibility of holding events, law firms use

telematic means to communicate with employees, clients and society in general, and put on a good show in these times of pandemic. Here are some examples.



The international emergency situation caused by COVID-19 and the state of alarm and emergency declared by several European governments, including those of Spain and Portugal, has made law firms, following the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) and their respective governments, establish special working and monitoring committees, as well as extraordinary action protocols to preserve both the health of their employees and that of their clients, collaborators and society in general and, at the same time, continue to provide the best legal advice adapted to the events and regulations that

the competent authorities publish every day in the form of decrees, decree-laws, resolutions and ministerial orders in various fields of law. All of them agree on one thing: their Labour areas are receiving massive consultations. The cancellation of events has also been widespread, not only in the legal sector.

To communicate with the outside world, firms use all the telematic means at their disposal; newsletters, social networks (especially LinkedIn), corporate websites, webinars/videoconferences, podcasts, videos, reports (PDFs), infographics, etc.

On March 5, **EY** (Ernst & Young) reported through its website and social networks that they had identified a positive case of coronavirus in the Madrid office and activated phase 2 of its prevention protocol, sending its 3,100 employees of Torre Azca home to telework. In the same statement, the firm explained that phase 1 had consisted of restricting travel to those affected, as well as implementing 14 days of home teleworking for all those who had travelled to affected areas during the previous 15 days. It was the first firm to raise the alarm, and its response was rapid, accurate and consistent. In addition, they took care, from the very beginning, of the social aspect and maintained, at a distance, the fundamental values of their corporate culture, through the #EYfamily hashtag. From that moment on, the firm started to issue communication alerts, keeping its clients updated about the legal news in the different areas.

After this first communication, other firms took the same measures, with newsletters/information alerts being one of the most used means by firms to communicate news, legislative or not, that may be of interest to employees, companies, the legal sector and citizens in general. This is the case of **KPMG**, a firm that analyzed the situation from various perspectives in its newsletter. KPMG, which according to its 2018 annual report has more than 4,000 professionals in its 16 offices in Spain, announced its new teleworking policy in our country, also through the networks, in the form of an anchored tweet on its Twitter timeline dated March 13.

Another firm that has used this medium is **Andersen Tax & Legal**. In addition to launching a special newsletter on the subject, on March 16, the firm issued a statement in which it announced the main measures taken "in view of the international alert situation caused by COVID-19 and within the framework of the state of alarm decreed by the Spanish Government," and established an extraordinary action protocol "in order to preserve the health of our professionals, clients,

collaborators and society in general, to contribute to the effort that we must all make in containing it and to maintain our capacity to provide legal advice with the same commitment and quality as always."

Furthermore, Andersen Tax & Legal has also set up a special COVID-19 section on its website where they compile all the analysed information and news on this subject. The firm has 300 employees in its Spain offices and 40 in Portugal. Social networks, especially LinkedIn, became an updated repository of the information made "ad hoc" by the firms about the different legal, economic or social aspects, in which the coronavirus has caused an impact. Thus, for example, on March 12, on Allen & Overy's corporate LinkedIn page, one could read the implementation of the firm's contingency plan that sent its professionals home to telework. **Allen & Overy** has more than 95 lawyers among its employees in its Spain office. In this same network, the firm also wanted to continue promoting corporate culture and encouraging its professionals to telework with the hashtag #aospain.

From **Sagardoy Abogados, David Isaac Tobía**, managing partner of the Barcelona office and director of the working group (task force) created in the firm to monitor the impact of coronavirus, explains that, among other measures, from the very beginning they decided to increase the use of prevention measures such as hand sanitizer. "We began by informing our professionals of the need to scrupulously follow hygiene and action recommendations to minimize the risk of contagion." They tell us that they quickly adapted to the situation, but on the basis of existing risk prevention protocols. Like many others, Sagardoy, which has a team of more than 70 lawyers among its employees, also issued an information note on coronavirus and set up a specific committee to unify criteria for advising clients, with the contribution of lawyers and experts in occupational risk prevention. Regarding the doubts and queries that this situation is generating among the firm's clients, Tobía explains that "we are adapting our advice to the specific case of each client. Although there are common features in all consultations, each case is different and responds to the particular reality of each company and activity. In this regard, the committee allows us to give agile, practical and verified answers."

Among many other actions, on March 13, **Roca Junyent** offered a breakfast webinar on the legal implications of coronavirus. An online meeting in which, for two hours, several firm's partners explained to nearly 200 clients the main labour, fiscal and contractual implications of this unusual situation under the firm's perspective. On Friday March 20, another meeting was held, under the title "Legal measures to respond to the impact of #Coronavirus," which was attended by more than 300 people according to the firm's LinkedIn post. The firm has more than 150 lawyers.

These days, corporate websites, that continuously update their content with new aspects to consider in relation to COVID-19, have become a fundamental resource for law firms. For example, **Garrigues**, which has a special multidisciplinary section on its website, published an alert on March 5: "Coronavirus: The Ministry of Labour publishes a guide to action in the field of employment, by partner Rosa Zarza," and on March 14 announced that all its offices would remain open, offering minimum essential services. However, the firm confirms that its offices staff work remotely, specifically its Madrid office staff, that has been doing so since March 11, "without any incident." Something for which its team, the statement continues, "has the required training, resources and secure technological means to provide the quality of service that customers expect from the office." Garrigues has also set up a special committee with the aim of permanently monitoring the effectiveness of these measures and their adaptation to the evolution of the concurrent circumstances in the various geographical areas in which the firm carries out its activity. Garrigues has 2,121 employees globally, of which 1,735 are in Spain and 118 in Portugal.

Cuatrecasas also decided to set up a special committee from the beginning, and we can see the communication on its website, dated March 16, stating: "last Thursday, March 12, Cuatrecasas

activated its prevention plan in relation to the COVID-19. Since Friday, March 13, all our professionals (lawyers, assistants and the organization team) in all our offices have been working remotely. Our infrastructure, computer and communications equipment allow our entire team to work remotely and securely from their homes, following all of our firm's usual procedures. In these circumstances, we continue to strive to provide excellent support and service to our clients worldwide." Cuatrecasas has 1,352 employees in its 14 Spain offices and 213 in Portugal (Lisbon and Porto offices).

During the second week of March, nearly all law firms had either imposed teleworking or suggested teleworking to their employees. **DLA Piper** announced among other platforms, on its LinkedIn corporate page, the holding of a webinar on March 19 on "Coronavirus COVID-19 and its effects on supply chain contracts" and, on March 20, on this same network, the creation of its "Coronavirus Resource Center"; a specific section within its web page that offers, as its name indicates, different resources such as a guide to publications, access to the subscription to the special newsletter on the COVID-19 that the firm publishes, and access to the coronavirus regulatory monitoring team. On their Twitter account @DLA_Piper_Spain they also share the analysis that the firm performs in each of the legal areas affected. DLA Piper has 122 employees in Spain, 84 of whom are lawyers.

From **Pérez-Llorca**, they also confirm to Iberian Lawyer that, from Wednesday, March 11, "all the professionals are teleworking." A measure that was taken first in Madrid and, shortly after, in Barcelona, London and New York. To this end, the firm explains that "all lawyers and support staff have portable devices and VPN connection to be able to telework with full access to documents, folders, computer applications, Intranet, library and various services that the office makes available, always with maximum security measures." In addition, they say that 100 % of the employees have been provided with corporate mobile phones so that they can make and receive calls without connectivity being affected: "the IT department is continuously monitoring the systems and the system has not exceeded 60 % of its capacity." Something that is allowing them to work with agility and without incidents. The partners and lawyers hold daily virtual meetings to deal with several matters and to organize the daily work operation. "We are also using these tools to make all employees feel that they are accompanied by the firm and that they are not alone in this situation." Regarding the demand for advice, Pérez-Llorca emphasizes that "the consultations are multidisciplinary, on how to apply these measures and their consequences in the present and future." The firm, that according to data from September 2019 collected by El País, has 250 lawyers, 46 of which are partners, with a total workforce of 350 people, also uses social networks, LinkedIn in this case, for its communications. On March 17, it published a #notajurídica(#legalnote) on its corporate page in which they compiled and analyzed various agencies and institutions official statements in relation to COVID-19.

From **Ceca Magán Abogados**, its managing partner, **Esteban Ceca** (pictured left), explains that "since the detection of the virus in China in February, our firm has taken the spread of this virus and its possible consequences very seriously, as has unfortunately been demonstrated. It was at that time that specific committees were set up to establish different internal protocols for our professionals and externals to serve our clients. Internal communications were made to all employees informing of the situation and encouraging them to prevent it. It was at this time that we reviewed emergency protocols to implement teleworking throughout the company, as we have done."

Ceca Magán Abogados has more than 100 professionals in its three offices in Spain. The firm also uses the social networks to keep its employees' spirit strong with hashtags such as #equipoceca(#cecateam) and nice corporate content like the one that shows that #yomequedoencasa (#Istayathome) has good things too.

Similarly, **Uría Menéndez**, published on its website on March 16, that the vast majority of its staff - including 100% of the lawyers - were teleworking. "However, - continued the press release- all the

offices remain open and fully operational, and the essential services necessary for our activity are maintained. The lawyers and the rest of the professionals at Uría Menéndez are available at their usual telephone numbers and e-mail addresses." With regard to events, the same note states that "all events which were to take place at any of our offices in the coming weeks have been cancelled, except those which under current regulations can legally be held" and recommends that all members "avoid attending meetings and that these meetings be replaced, whenever possible, by telephone calls or video conferences." On the other hand, among other measures, Uría Menéndez has prepared a systematized regulatory compendium by subject and sector of the provisions approved to date in relation to the health crisis generated by COVID-19. According to the firm, this compendium will be periodically updated to facilitate the monitoring of the regulations issued on the matter -particularly, the measures in Labour, Tax or Financial matters approved in the Council of Ministers- and their impact on economic and business activity. The information, seen on LinkedIn, carries the hashtag #conocimientoUM (#knowledge UM).

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