

PES Group Digest on the EU Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

15 May 2020

List of European decisions

Date	Number of cases and deaths ¹	European response
8 May	1 218 311 cases 143 911 deaths	<p>The Eurogroup agreed on the features of the Pandemic Crisis Support instrument of the European Stability Mechanism and discussed the economic situation of the euro area, based on the European Commission's spring forecast.</p> <p>The European Commission delivered a first batch of 1.5 million masks funded by the Commission to 17 Member States and the UK to protect healthcare workers against coronavirus.</p> <p>The European Commission set up an EU Humanitarian Air Bridge to transport humanitarian workers and emergency supplies for the coronavirus response to some of the most critical areas around the world.</p>
9 May	1 230 361 cases 145 788 deaths	Europe Day saw the organisation of many different events across Europe. The European Committee of the Regions hosted its first online event .
11 May	1 251 079 cases 147 681 deaths	Additional batches of masks are being delivered by the European Commission to North Macedonia and

¹ European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. The figures concern the countries of the European Economic Area (EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and the UK. <https://gap.ecdc.europa.eu/public/extensions/COVID-19/COVID-19.html>

		<p>Montenegro via rescEU to help countries affected by the coronavirus outbreak.</p> <p>The European Commission launched the Fit for Future Platform – a high-level expert group, which will help the Commission simplify existing EU laws and reduce administrative burden for citizens and businesses. The Committee of the Regions will have three representatives in the “FFF” Platform.</p>
12 May	1 259 709 cases 148 799 deaths	<p>EU ministers for health discussed the availability of medicines across the EU in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The European Commission announced the granting of €117 million for treatments and diagnostics through the Innovative Medicines Initiative.</p> <p>The European Commission published detailed guidance on how coronavirus-related humanitarian aid can be sent to countries and areas around the world that are subject to EU sanctions, such as Syria.</p>
13 May	1 268 603 cases 150 327 deaths	<p>The European Commission presented a package of guidelines and recommendations on how to safely resume travel and reboot Europe’s tourism in 2020 and beyond.</p> <p>EU agriculture and fisheries ministers met to take stock of COVID-19-related measures taken so far to limit the negative impact of the pandemic on the sectors.</p> <p>The European Parliament held its plenary session and discussed the COVID-19 crisis recovery plan, the Multiannual Financial Framework and the situation of the rule of law in Hungary.</p>
14 May	1 277 188 cases 151 749 deaths	<p>The European Parliament held its plenary session and discussed the use of contact tracing apps and the issue of vaccines and therapeutics against COVID19.</p>
15 May		<p>The European Parliament is holding its plenary session and will vote on the MFF resolution.</p>

		<p>The Eurogroup will meet to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and how to relaunch the EU economies.</p> <p>EU ministers responsible for industry and internal market will meet to discuss plans for the EU's economic recovery.</p>
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The EU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the position of the PES Group

European Commission

Tourism and travel restrictions

The European Commission published non-binding guidelines to help Member States gradually lift travel restrictions and allow tourism businesses to reopen. The package includes:

- An [overall strategy](#) towards recovery in 2020 and beyond;
- A [common approach](#) to restoring free movement and lifting restrictions at EU internal borders in a gradual and coordinated way;
- A [framework](#) to support the gradual re-establishment of transport whilst ensuring the safety of passengers and personnel;
- A [recommendation](#) which aims to make travel vouchers an attractive alternative to cash reimbursement for consumers, meaning that travel companies are still obliged to refund passengers for cancelled trips if reimbursement is requested.
- [Criteria](#) for restoring tourism activities safely and gradually and for developing health protocols for hospitality establishments such as hotels.

The Commission's proposal aims at offering a European common framework to lift travel restrictions in Europe for the summer. A principle of non-discrimination is pushed ahead in order to ensure that all Europeans living in regions with similar epidemiological conditions have the same right to travel. The proposal, on the transport side, reaffirms the right of passengers to get reimbursed if their travel has been canceled but making the option of using vouchers more attractive to them. This voucher option was the preferred option of the industry in order to limit the level of reimbursements in this time of crisis. The European Commission proposal also confirms more flexibility under state aid rules to support the travel/transport industry (for instance guarantee schemes for vouchers). Finally, the Commission announces that it will work with Member States to promote a

patronage voucher system under which customers can support their favourite hotel or restaurants.

The PES Group welcomes the fact that the Commission is proposing an overall strategy for tourism, which has been a request of the Committee of the Regions. The communication announces a European tourism convention on the tourism of tomorrow (with a strong focus on sustainable tourism, in line with the Green Deal and the current opinion on sustainable tourism by Manuel Alejandro Cardente Flores from Renew Europe).

- **Questions and answers by the European Commission**, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_870
- **“European Commission’s travel and tourism package - a step in the right direction”, say S&Ds**, Press release, 13 May, <https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/newsroom/european-commissions-travel-and-tourism-package-step-right-direction-say-sds>
- **“Commission proposes gradual lifting of borders, in bid to save Europe’s summer”**, *Euractiv*, 13 May, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/commission-proposes-gradual-lifting-of-borders-in-bid-to-save-europes-summer/>

European Parliament

Transport and tourism

On Monday, the European Parliament Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN) held an exchange of views with European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans on the future of the transport sector in the framework of the Green Deal. Timmermans declared that airline companies should be asked for an effort in terms of environmental sustainability when offered state aid.

Environment

On Tuesday, the European Parliament Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) held an exchange of views with Virginijus Sinkevičius, Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, on the presentation of the Circular Economy Action Plan and on the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. PES Group member and Chair of the European Committee of the Regions’ ENVE Committee Juan Espadas, Mayor of Seville (Spain), had the opportunity to intervene to stress that addressing the climate crisis and implementing the EU Green Deal must become the pillars of Europe’s recovery plan.

Regional development

On Tuesday, the European Parliament Committee on Regional Development (REGI) discussed a draft report on establishing the Just Transition Fund (JTF) (Rapporteur: Manolis Kefalogiannis, EPP/Greece). The Committee of the Regions’ Rapporteur on the JTF Vojko odobersnel (PES/Croatia) presented his draft opinion already in COTER in

February 2020. It is foreseen for adoption at the virtual Committee Plenary in July. In line with the Committee's opinion, a draft proposal by the Croatian Presidency was recently circulated in the press highlights suggesting that the fund would cover "activities that are directly linked to its specific" objective of "transitioning towards a climate-neutral economy by 2050, and that there could be some form of conditionality to oblige countries receiving money from the fund to respect 2030 and 2050 EU climate goals.

Plenary session 13-14-15 May

The main topics discussed during the European Parliament's plenary session were the COVID-19 crisis recovery plan, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the situation of the rule of law in Hungary. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen unveiled some elements of the upcoming COVID-19 recovery plan, which will be presented on 20 May.

- **"Von der Leyen unveils details of EU's upcoming COVID-19 recovery plan"**,
Euractiv, 14 May,
<https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/von-der-leyen-unveils-details-of-eus-upcoming-covid-19-recovery-plan/>

Moreover, the European Parliament asked the European Commission to put forward a contingency plan by 15 June 2020 at the latest, in case the new Multiannual Financial Framework cannot be agreed in time to come into force on 1 January 2021.

- <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20200512IPR78918/long-term-eu-budget-parliament-wants-safety-net-for-beneficiaries>

The European Parliament resolution on the "New MFF, own resources and Recovery plan", backed by the five biggest political groups and to be adopted on 15 May, calls for:

- financing the recovery instrument with "long-dated recovery bonds", with the MFF as a guarantee;
- channeling money mostly through "grants and direct payments for investment and equity";
- investments to be prioritized into the Green Deal, the digital agenda and achieving European sovereignty in strategic sectors;
- new EU own resources through a common corporate tax, a tax on digital services or revenues via the EU's emissions trading scheme (ETS).

- Full text of the resolution:
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2020-0158_EN.html

The Council of the European Union

Eurogroup

On 8 May, Eurozone finance ministers agreed on the features and standardised terms of the Pandemic Crisis Support, available to all euro area Member States for amounts of 2% of the respective Member's GDP as of end-2019, as a benchmark, to support domestic financing of direct and indirect healthcare, cure and prevention-related costs due to the COVID-19 crisis. Ministers will convene again on 15 May to continue the discussion on the economic response to the pandemic.

The European progressive family

The S&D Group published a policy paper on the need for an integrated European Health Union as a way to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and future health crises. The main proposals put forward by the S&D Group are:

- Stress tests for the national health systems,
- Improving the functioning of joint procurement to purchase medical devices and vaccines,
- A European Health Mechanism to manage the crisis,
- Stronger European health agencies.

→ https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/sites/default/files/2020-05/european_health_union_sd_position_30512_0.pdf

In addition, many of our members and PES family partners came up with further proposals to address the COVID 19-crisis. Please find here some of them:

→ **“Winning the Car Wars”**, Podcast interview with Pascal Smet, Secretary of State of the Brussels region for urbanism and PES Group member, *EU Scream*, 7 May, <https://euobserver.com/eu-scream/148277>

→ **“Portugal, Spain, Italy call for common EU minimum income”**, *Euractiv*, 11 May, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/portugal-spain-italy-call-for-common-eu-minimum-income/>

PES Group solidarity project

Last but not least, you are kindly reminded to join the PES Group project on solidarity initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic:

<https://pes.cor.europa.eu/covid-19-progressive-cities-and-regions-share-solidarity-projects>

So far, we have received a total of 38 contributions from 11 countries from PES Group members and also other local and regional progressive leaders.



If you wish to contribute, you can consult the online form available at this [link](#).

The fight against fake news

The General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union has released a new infographic on the EU's emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which also includes fighting disinformation:

→ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/covid-19-eu-emergency-response/>

The following websites, constantly updated, can be helpful to you:

- **EUvsDISINFO**, <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/>
- **Scams related to COVID-19**,
+ https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/consumers/enforcement-consumer-protection/scams-related-covid-19_en
- **COVID-19 foreign influence campaigns: Europe and the global battle of narratives**, European Parliament Research Service,
<https://epthinktank.eu/2020/04/07/covid-19-foreign-influence-campaigns-europe-and-the-global-battle-of-narratives/>
- **European Solidarity in Action**, European Commission,
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/FS_20_563
- **European Commission Corona Virus Response**,
https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response_en
- **European Parliament Corona Virus Response**,
<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/priorities/eu-response-to-coronavirus>

- “10 things the EU is doing to fight the coronavirus”, European Parliament, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200327STO76004/1-0-things-the-eu-is-doing-to-fight-the-coronavirus>
- European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/novel-coronavirus-china>
- World Health Organisation, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Initiatives for cities and regions

New UN-Habitat initiative

Our partner UN-Habitat launched the initiative *Local2030 Spotlight Series*. Within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), local and regional authorities around the world are invited to prepare and share 2-minute video contributions highlighting their perspectives on the main challenges and innovative solutions developed at the local level to fight the COVID-19 outbreak. Each week, there is a different theme.

If you wish to contribute, please get in touch with our Press and Communications Adviser, monica.tiberi@cor.europa.eu.

Interesting events coming up

PES Women and Rainbow Rose - 19 May

Tune in to the Facebook Page of Rainbow Rose on 19 May at 19:00-20:00 CEST for “LGBTI & Women's Rights Violations in Poland: Voices from the Community”. PES Group member Beata Moskal-Słaniewska, mayor of Świdnica, will be taking part in the debate.

→ <https://www.facebook.com/rainbowrose.eu>

European Committee of the Regions - 19 May

The Committee's Bureau will hold an online meeting.

The Committee will host its second Digital Masterclass on “Coping with COVID-19: Best practices for social media in times of crisis” with experts from government, civil society, and local authorities.

→ Register here: www.cor.europa.eu/webinar-registration.go

Global Parliament of Mayors, 27-28 May

A two day-webinar hosted by the Global Parliament of Mayors will explore the impact on urban safety and security.

→ <https://globalparliamentofmayors.org/save-the-date-27-28-may-webinar-un-habitat-gpm/>

Useful links to monitor

Please find here a list of sources that we have already shared. All these organisations are regularly publishing updates and online events, so we recommend you to check their websites:

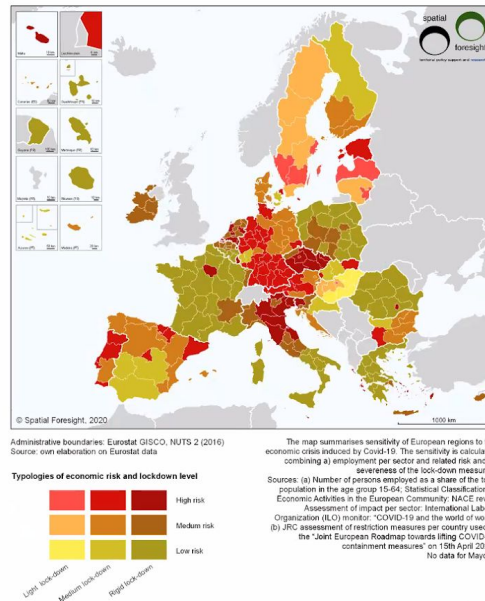
- **Bloomberg Foundation**
<https://cities4health.org/>
<https://www.cityleadership.harvard.edu/resources-sessions>
- **C40**
https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/cities-and-coronavirus-covid-19?language=en_US&tabset-5cf81=42fb1
https://www.c40knowledgehub.org/s/article/Cities-and-Coronavirus-COVID-19?language=en_US
- **European Commission's Intelligent Cities**
<https://www.intelligentcitieschallenge.eu/covid-19-webinars>
- **OECD**
<https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/en/>
- **United Cities and Local Governments**
<https://www.uclg.org/en/issues/live-learning-experience-beyondtheoutbreak>

Useful readings

Please find below a series of useful articles, published by various think tanks and organisations:

- **“Understanding the Territorially Diverse Implications of Covid-19 Policy Responses”**, Spatial Foresight, May 2020,
https://www.spatialforesight.eu/files/spatial_theme/spatial/publications/Brief_2020-13_200513.pdf

Map 1: Economic sensitivity – risk sectors



- **“Risking their health to pay the bills: 100 million Europeans cannot afford two months without income”**, Bruegel, 7 May 2020, <https://www.bruegel.org/2020/05/two-months-before-the-cliff-millions-of-europeans-cannot-afford-food-and-lodging-after-two-months-without-income/>
- **“Social Bonds In Response To The Covid-19 Crisis - When financial markets save lives”**, Center for European Policy Studies, 11 May 2020, <https://www.ceps.eu/social-bonds-in-response-to-the-covid-19-crisis/>
- **“Coronavirus And The Cost Of Non-Europe: An Analysis Of The Economic Benefits Of Common European Action”**, European Parliament Research Service, 12 May, <https://epthinktank.eu/2020/05/12/coronavirus-and-the-cost-of-non-europe-an-analysis-of-the-economic-benefits-of-common-european-action/>
- **“The message in the ruling”**, Bruegel, 12 May, <https://www.bruegel.org/2020/05/the-message-in-the-ruling/>
- **“Pride versus prejudice: LGBTI people in the EU today”**, European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 14 May, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/event/2020/pride-versus-prejudice-lgbti-people-eu-today>
- **“Why Europe Still Matters”**, Carnegie Europe, 14 May, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/81793>