

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

17 April 2020

List of European decisions

Date	Number of cases and deaths ¹	European response
3 April	488 190 cases 36 007 deaths	<p>The European Commission waives customs duties and VAT on the import of medical equipment from non-EU countries.</p> <p>The Commission issues practical guidance to Member States to facilitate cross-border treatment of patients and deployment of medical staff.</p> <p>The European Commission extends Temporary Framework to enable Member States to accelerate research, testing and production of coronavirus relevant products.</p> <p>The European Commission adopts a proposal to postpone by one year the date of application of the Medical Devices Regulation to allow manufacturers to focus on the production of critical medical devices.</p>
6 April	582 554 cases 47 741 deaths	<p>The European Commission and European Investment Fund (part of EIB Group) unlock €8 billion in finance for 100,000 small and medium-sized businesses.</p>

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

		<p>Following an agreement reached between President von der Leyen and Premier Li Keqiang last month, a donation of protective equipment from China to the European Union has now arrived in Rome, Italy.</p> <p>The European Commission presents new measures to help farmers.</p>
7 April	608 500 cases 51 059 deaths	<p>A team of European doctors and nurses from Romania and Norway, deployed through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, is dispatched to Milan and Bergamo.</p> <p>The European Commission launches a first “ERAvsCORONA” action plan for short-term coordinated research and innovation actions.</p>
8 April	634 735 cases 55 826 deaths	<p>The European Commission calls on Member States to optimise supply and availability of medicines.</p> <p>The European Commission and the High Representative set out plans for a EU response to support partner countries’ efforts in tackling the coronavirus pandemic across the globe, by providing financial assistance of more than €15.6 billion.</p> <p>The European Commission launches ESCALAR, a new investment approach, developed together with the European Investment Fund, to support venture capital and growth financing to help companies overcome the coronavirus crisis.</p> <p>The European Commission adopts Recommendation for a pan-European coordinated approach for the use of mobile applications to support exit strategies.</p>
9 April	665 778 cases 59 508 deaths	<p>Eurogroup agrees a €540 billion package to support Member States, companies and workers in the coronavirus crisis.</p>
14 April	782 391 cases 74 671 deaths	<p>The Council of the European Union gave its fast approval for €2.7 billion from the EU budget to support the EU healthcare sector.</p>
15 April	827 180 cases 81 480 deaths	<p>The European Commission proposes a new roadmap to guide governments’ exit strategy in a coordinated manner.</p>

		The European Commission presents guidelines on coronavirus testing methodologies .
16 April	852 174 cases 85 926 deaths	<p>The European Parliament held its plenary session with the presence of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel.</p> <p>EU Members States, supported by the Commission, have developed an EU toolbox for the use of mobile applications for contact tracing and warning in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The European Commission published guidelines on data protection.</p> <p>EU trade ministers vowed to protect strategic European companies weakened by the virus-triggered downturn from "predatory" takeovers.</p> <p>European Council President Michel and European Commission President von der Leyen took part in the G7 Leaders' videoconference on COVID-19.</p>
17 April		The European Parliament is holding its plenary session and will adopt a resolution on the EU coordinated action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences.

The EU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the position of the PES Group

New initiatives of the European Commission

Since the last Digest, the European Commission has put forward more proposals to tackle the COVID-19 crisis that concern directly local and regional authorities.

On Friday 3 April, the European Commission issued practical guidance to Member States to [facilitate cross-border treatment of patients and deployment of medical staff](#), an important measure for cross-border regions, but not only. This new initiative helps coordinate requests for cross-border healthcare assistance through the Health Security Committee, chaired by the Commission, and the EU Early Warning and Response System. It also encourages the deployment of qualified teams of medical personnel

across borders. The Commission also encourages local, regional and national health authorities to use existing bilateral and regional agreements and clarify the mutual recognition of professional medical qualifications.

On Monday 6 April, the European Commission and the European Investment Fund unlocked €8 billion to support and provide relief to some 100,000 European businesses hit by the economic consequences of the Coronavirus, thanks to the European Fund for Strategic Investments. Businesses will be able to directly apply for support at their local banks and/or lenders participating in the scheme, listed on the [Access to finance](#) website.

On the same day, the European Commission also launched a new initiative to help Europe's farmers who are on the frontline of the COVID-19 crisis. The Commission proposed to increase the advance payments for the two pillars, from 50 to 70 % for the first and from 75 to 85 % for the second. These advances will be paid from mid-October onwards. It also extends by one month the deadline for requests for CAP aid to 15 June, a measure that Member States have the choice to apply or not. Moreover, the number of physical checks on holdings is reduced.

On 15 April, the European Commission, in cooperation with the President of the European Council, put forward a European roadmap to phase out the containment measures due to the coronavirus outbreak. The roadmap lists concrete recommendations Member States should consider when planning to lift containment measures, while recognising the specificities of each country.

- https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication_-_a_european_roadmap_to_lifting_coronavirus_containment_measures_0.pdf

These measures fall short of what is needed, as stated by S&D Group President Iratxe Garcia:

- <https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/newsroom/commissions-roadmap-lifting-covid-19-mobility-restrictions-falls-short-whats-needed-says>

They also risk being not very useful if Member States decide their own exit strategies in an uncoordinated manner:

- **“EU left behind as capitals plan coronavirus exit strategies”**, POLITICO Europe, 14 April, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-left-behind-as-capitals-plan-coronavirus-exit-strategies/>
- **“EU leaders urge capitals to coordinate coronavirus lockdown exit”**, POLITICO Europe, 15 April, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-leaders-urge-capitals-to-coordinate-coronavirus-lockdown-exit/>

One of the most controversial elements of these measures concerns a new app to track citizens who are tested positive for the coronavirus. More than half of European Union

countries have tapped telecoms companies' data to monitor citizens' movements under confinement measures or pushed ahead with developing their own mobile apps for contact tracing.

- POLITICO Europe,
<https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-cracks-code-for-coronavirus-warning-app/>
<https://www.politico.eu/article/coronavirus-europe-data-regulator-calls-for-pan-european-covid-19-app/>
- Human Rights Watch,
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/02/joint-civil-society-statement-states-use-digital-surveillance-technologies-fight>

On 16 April, EU Member States, supported by the European Commission, have developed an [EU toolbox for the use of mobile applications for contact tracing and warning](#) in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The European Commission published [guidelines on data protection](#).

Last but not least, on April 15, the European Commission announced in a reply to industry that deadlines on the EU-wide ban on some single-use plastic items must be respected.

Eurogroup

The Eurogroup met on Tuesday 7 April to discuss new measures to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic at the request of the European Council. After a 16-hour teleconference, the meeting ended without any decision. Mario Centeno, Portuguese Finance Minister and Eurogroup President, carried out intense negotiations with various capitals ahead of the next meeting on Thursday 9 April. The ministers finally agreed to:

1. A safety net for workers, with the European Commission's initiative for the creation of a temporary European instrument to support national safety nets in this crisis, called "[SURE](#)", [Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency](#). This will put together financial assistance of up to €100 billion in the form of loans from the EU to affected Member States.
2. A safety net for businesses facing difficulties, in particular SMEs, through the European Investment Bank initiative to create a pan-European shield which aims to guarantee €200 billion of lending with a focus on small and medium-sized enterprises. The European Commission's new instrument SURE is available to all EU member states.
3. A safety net for Member States with the "Pandemic Crisis Support", accounting for 2% of Member States' GDP, close to €240 billion, for eurozone countries via the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), available with standardised terms, on the basis of an up-front assessment by the European institutions. Any euro area country requesting this support remains subject to the EU's economic and fiscal coordination and surveillance frameworks. The only requirement to access the credit line will be that the country would commit to using these funds to support domestic financing of direct and indirect healthcare, cure and prevention related costs due to the COVID 19.

In total, the three safety nets add up to around half a trillion euros: a step-change in the economic coordination within the Union. The idea is that no Member State is left without liquidity.

The conclusions of the meeting also commit Eurogroup members to working on a recovery fund in the future, based in part on contributions from the European budget (on which the European Parliament has a say) and national contributions. This fund will have to be commensurate with the extraordinary costs of the crisis and spread those costs over time through appropriate financing.

It will be up to the European Council scheduled on 23 April to take stock of this and suggest new political directions, including further mutualisation of debt through Eurobonds, for instance.

For the PES Group, these measures are a step in the right direction, but certainly not enough to address the crisis our economy is confronted with. More needs to be done to save the European Union from this crisis, estimated by some economic forecasts to represent a loss of about 7% of GDP. If a solution is not found, half of the Eurozone Member States will be on the brink of default, while the European Monetary Union and the Single Market will fragment. Therefore, bolder solutions need to be found based on solidarity.

The European budget will be key in addressing this crisis. Our Group put forward some ideas on why the next MFF will be crucial:

- **“Our call for a strong budget to fuel Europe’s recovery after the coronavirus crisis”**, by PES Group members Christophe Rouillon, President of the PES Group, Isabelle Boudineau, President of the COTER Commission, Juan Espadas, President of the ENVE Commission, and Anne Karjalainen, President of the SEDEC Commission, 8 April, <https://pes.cor.europa.eu/our-call-strong-budget-fuel-europe%E2%80%99s-recovery-after-coronavirus-crisis>

Ahead of the Eurogroup, our PES family sent out strong messages in favour of the Eurobonds:

- **“Coronabonds for a Europe of solidarity, not charity”**, by S&D President Iratxe García and S&D Dutch MEP Paul Tang, Euractiv, 6 April 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/opinion/coronabonds-for-a-europe-of-solidarity-not-charity/>
- **“The Eurogroup must show determination to buffer the Eurozone from a world-wide economic shock”**, by PES President Sergei Stanishev and S&D President Iratxe García, 6 April 2020, <https://www.pes.eu/en/news-events/news/detail/The-Eurogroup-must-show-determination-to-buffer-the-Eurozone-from-a-world-wide-economic-shock-say-Stanishev-and-Garcia/>

And the European Parliament?

The plenary of the European Parliament is taking place on 16-17 April. Members are voting on a resolution on the EU coordinated action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. The resolution should take on board some points put forward by the PES Group Secretariat, including:

- a call for a major rethinking of our economic model, for the very first time putting economic, social and ecological goals on a par with one another, abandoning the business-as-usual approach and fully investing all efforts in the European Green Deal as a vehicle to bring about major economic and societal transformation;
- a call for the creation of recovery bonds issued by a European institution, targeted for specific costs linked to the COVID-19 outbreak and guaranteed by a purchase programme of the European Central Bank.

In addition, many other positions were adopted by our members and other PES family partners. Please find here some of them:

- **“Europe’s future is at stake in this war against coronavirus”**, by Pedro Sanchez, The Guardian, 5 April 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2020/apr/05/europes-future-is-a-t-stake-in-this-war-against-coronavirus>
- **President of Valencian Regional Government and our member, Ximo Puig**, sent a letter to all members of the Committee of the Regions calling for a Marshall Plan (available in Spanish), 6 April, https://www.gva.es/es/inicio/area_de_prensa/not_detalle_area_prensa?id=853476
- **Women are on the COVID-19 frontline – the EU must not leave them behind**, PES, PES Women, S&D Group and the S&D FEMM working group issue a joint letter to EU Commission President, 14 April, <https://www.pes.eu/en/permalink/1881d74b-7e2a-11ea-b5fb-9a82572148c5.pdf>
- **“Only a ‘New Deal’ can rescue the European project”**, by FEPS President Maria João Rodrigues and Mayor of Charleroi and Belgian Socialist Party leader Paul Magnette, Social Europe, 7 April 2020, <https://www.socialeurope.eu/only-a-new-deal-can-rescue-the-european-project>
- **“Europe, NOW we have to talk! The Conference on the Future of Europe after COVID-19?”**, by Christophe Rouillon, *Ouest-France*, 9 April, <https://pes.cor.europa.eu/conference-future-europe-has-draw-lessons-covid-19-crisis>
- **“Des présidents socialistes de départements réclament l’instauration d’un revenu universel”**, by some of the PES Group members, *Le Monde*, 12 April, https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2020/04/12/des-presidents-socialistes-de-departements-reclament-l-instauration-d-un-revenu-universel_6036358_823448.htm
- **“‘Green recovery alliance’ launched in European Parliament”**, by various MEPs, Euractiv, 14 April 2020,

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/green-recovery-alliance-launched-in-european-parliament/>

- « **PRÉPARER LE MONDE D'APRÈS – Pour un nouveau contrat social et écologique** », 125 proposals by the Belgian Socialist Party (available only in French), 15 April, https://www.ps.be/#/page/article/Preparer_le_monde_dapres/21242
- “**Which world do we want after COVID-19?**”, by Bertrand Piccard and Frans Timmermans, Euractiv, 16 April 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/opinion/which-world-do-we-want-after-covid-19/>

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 25 contributions from 8 countries, including from some young local leaders of our progressive network.



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

Initiatives by the European Committee of the Regions

COVID-19 platform and audio messages

Check out the new platform by the Committee of the Regions on what the EU is doing to support local communities in their fight against the Coronavirus pandemic.

- More information: [Helping regions and cities fight coronavirus](#)
- To contribute to the new exchange platform, please write to: covid19@cor.europa.eu

The audiovisual team is also developing a series with audio messages from members to contribute with a Whatsapp audio recorded message saying:

- Hi I'm ...
- I'm a ... (local councilor, mayor, president of regions, etc.) from ... (city/region) in ... (country)
- In one sentence, very short and factual: here is the situation in my country/region/city
- In one sentence: this is how we deal with it at local/regional level. Impact/Implication/my role as a politician
- Share a message of support with all Europeans from other regions/cities: take care/stay safe/advice (very brief 15 sec)
- Core message in the end: we are united in diversity and stronger together.

The format should be:

- Short, to the point (30 sec max-1 min max – we won't be treating long messages)
- In English
- Be careful that the sound is audible and of good quality
- File: .mp3 or any usable phone format

If you would like to contribute, please get in touch with the Audiovisual Officer of the Committee of the Regions, Stephanie Paillet at Stephanie.Paillet@cor.europa.eu.

Europe Day Celebrations

The European Committee of the Regions is preparing to mark Europe Day with a video message on social media. If you would like to be part of this video, please record a video message with your sentence:

“Together we are ...” (up to you to finish it in the way you like).

You are invited to record your video in HORIZONTAL FORMAT (not vertical please) and make sure that the sound is audible.

The deadline for contributions is 20 April. Please send the video to Stephanie Paillet (Stephanie.Paillet@cor.europa.eu), Audiovisual Officer of the Committee of the Regions.

The fight against fake news

The European Union has been at the centre of a campaign of disinformation and fake news related to the COVID-19 in recent weeks. According to a new report by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford, one third of people have seen misleading info on COVID-19 on social media:

- <https://www.politico.eu/article/one-third-of-people-have-seen-misleading-info-on-covid-19-on-social-media-report/>

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”**, by the European Parliament, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200327STO76004/10-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

United Cities and Local Governments

UCLG, Metropolis and UN-Habitat have launched a live learning experience with local and regional governments called “Live Learning Experience #BeyondTheOutbreak”.

- <https://www.uclg.org/en/issues/live-learning-experience-beyondtheoutbreak>



Live Learning Series • Calendar

Past sessions:

- Wednesday, March 25th, 2020 - Public Service Delivery, a Pillar to Address the Pandemic
- Wednesday, April 1st, 2020 - Session on Housing
- Wednesday, April 8th, 2020 - Session on Mobility
- Thursday, April 9th, 2020, Session on the role of Local Governments Association

Upcoming sessions:

- Wednesday, April 15th, 2020 - *Session Technology*
- Thursday, April 16th, 2020- *Session on Migration*
- Wednesday, April 22nd, 2020- *Session on Culture*
- Thursday, April 23rd, 2020- *Session on Finance*
- Wednesday, April 29th, 2020- *Session on Informalities*
- Thursday, April 30th, 2020- *Session on LED*

#BeyondtheOutbreak

UCLG United Cities and Local Governments metropolis UN HABITAT FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

Past videos are available on YouTube:

- https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLjB7fxFUzO8w_IFprAoYw_gktH7M4M0rl

C40 Webinars

C40, the network of the world’s megacities committed to addressing climate change, put together a list of media and resources on topics relevant to mayoral teams and departments that are C40 touch-points: waste, food, buildings, transportation, public engagement, and many more. They are also hosting online events on different topics related to the COVID-19 crisis:

- 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

Bloomberg Foundation

The Bloomberg Foundation launched the [COVID-19 Local Response Initiative](#) to help cities combat the devastating impact of coronavirus on the wellbeing of residents and local economies. As part of it, the Partnership for Healthy Cities COVID-19 Response Center contains practical guidance and tools to support cities in four technical areas: Surveillance and Epidemiology, Communications, Public Health and Social Measures, Legal and

Ethical Considerations. This also includes useful webinars both on the platform itself and through the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative.

- <https://cities4health.org/>
- <https://www.cityleadership.harvard.edu/resources-sessions>
- **“To Beat the Global Pandemic, Empower Local Leaders”**, Michael Bloomberg, 5 April 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-04-05/to-beat-the-global-pandemic-empower-local-leaders>

European Commission’s Intelligent Cities

The European Commission continues its interactive webinars for cities on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The next one is on April 30, keep an eye on the page for more updates.

- <https://www.intelligentcitieschallenge.eu/covid-19-webinars>

European Commission’s Hackathon

The European Commission, in close collaboration with the EU Member States, will host a pan-European hackathon to connect civil society, innovators, partners and investors across Europe in order to develop innovative solutions for coronavirus-related challenges. It also targets public authorities, so we encourage you to take part. It will take place on 24, 25 and 26 April.

- <https://euvsvirus.org/>

Useful readings

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

- **“The territorial impact of COVID-19: managing the crisis across levels of government”**, OECD, 3 April, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=128_128287-5agkkojaaa&title=The-territorial-impact-of-covid-19-managing-the-crisis-across-levels-of-government
- **“Will Sure Shield EU Workers from the Corona Crisis?”**, Center for European Policy Studies, 6 April 2020, <https://www.ceps.eu/will-sure-shield-eu-workers-from-the-corona-crisis/>
- **“A European approach to fund the coronavirus cost is in the interest of all”**, Bruegel, 6 April 2020,

<https://www.bruegel.org/2020/04/a-european-approach-to-fund-the-coronavirus-cost-is-in-the-interest-of-all/>

- **“COVID-19 and the tourism sector”**, European Parliament Research Service, 6 April 2020,
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2020/649368/EPRS_ATA\(2020\)649368_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2020/649368/EPRS_ATA(2020)649368_EN.pdf)
- **“Covid-19: European Responses, a complete picture”**, Robert Schuman Foundation, 7 April,
<https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/actualites/covid19-26032020-en.pdf>
- **“Debt Monetization and EU Recovery Bonds: Fighting the COVID-19 emergency and re-launching the European economy”**, FEPS, April 2020,
<https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/feps%20covid%20response%20paper%20one.pdf>
- **“The reconstruction of the European economy after the Corona pandemic”**, by Gerhard Stahl, FEPS, 12 April 2020,
<https://progressivepost.eu/spotlights/the-reconstruction-of-the-europeans-economy-after-the-corona-pandemic>
- **‘Corona bonds’ and Europe’s north-south divide**, by Adam Tooze, Social Europe, 13 April 2020,
<https://www.socialeurope.eu/corona-bonds-and-europes-north-south-divide>