

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

24 April 2020

List of European decisions

Date	Number of cases and deaths ¹	European response
17 April	878 222 cases 89 825 deaths	<p>The European Parliament held its plenary session and adopted an ambitious resolution on the EU coordinated action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences.</p> <p>The European Parliament also approved the regulation on the fund for aid to the most deprived (FEAD) and measures for financial assistance for hard-hit fishing communities and aquaculture farmers.</p> <p>The EU has managed to bring home over 500.000 citizens affected by coronavirus travel restrictions by funding repatriation flights and carrying out intense consular cooperation. The remaining 98,000 citizens will be repatriated in the upcoming days.</p>
20 April	947 693 cases 99 232 deaths	<p>The European Commission together with several partners launched a European COVID-19 Data Platform to enable the rapid collection and sharing of available research data.</p>
21 April	967 598 cases 101 718 deaths	<p>Ahead of the EU leaders summit, European Council President Charles Michel published a roadmap for “a</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>comprehensive recovery plan that will help us relaunch and transform our economies”.</p> <p>The European Parliament Environment Committee met with Frans Timmermans.</p>
22 April	967 598 cases 101 718 deaths	<p>The European Investment Fund (EIF) and European Commission launched a new €50 million pilot to develop skills and education across Europe.</p> <p>The European Commission adopted a proposal for a €3 billion macro-financial assistance package to ten enlargement and neighbourhood partners to help them to limit the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>The European Commission announced exceptional measures to support the agri-food sector.</p> <p>The Council of the European Union adopted changes to the regulation on the fund for aid to the most deprived (FEAD) as approved by the European Parliament on 17 April.</p>
23 April	1 009 762 cases 108 223 deaths	<p>The European Council discussed Europe’s response to the COVID19 pandemic tasking the European Commission with presenting a proposal for a recovery fund, as well as clarifying its relationship to the MFF.</p>

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

European Council

The European Council took place on 23 April to discuss a proposal for a large recovery fund, potentially financed through the Multiannual Financial Framework. Ahead of the meeting, many progressive leaders raised their voice in favour of a more ambitious plan:

- Pedro Sanchez, Spanish Prime Minister, <https://english.elpais.com/politics/2020-04-20/spain-proposes-a-15-trillion-coronavirus-recovery-fund-financed-through-perpetual-eu-debt.html>

- Iratxe Garcia, S&D Group President,
<https://www.euractiv.com/section/all/news/letter-to-eu-leaders-ahead-of-23-april-eu-co/>
- Mario Centeno, Eurogroup President and Portuguese Finance Minister,
<https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/centeno-the-old-books-by-which-we-governed-are-of-no-use-in-this-period/>
- Margarida Marques, S&D Member of the European Parliament and MFF co-rapporteur,
<https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/opinion/the-next-eu-budget-must-repair-and-transform-the-european-economy/>

After four hours of video conference, the European Council did not issue formal [conclusions](#). Instead, EU leaders directed European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to draw up plans for a new Multiannual Financial Framework with a combination of loans and grants, linked to the Recovery Fund.

For France, Italy, Spain and Portugal, this fund should be based on grants and not loans. The same position was expressed by the S&D Group President, Iratxe Garcia.

President von der Leyen is proposing to increase the ceiling for EU own resources from 1,2% to around 2 percent of Gross National Income (GNI) for the first two or three years of the budget plan. That increase would allow the EU to make loan guarantees for a large financing package for the recovery and increase the stimulus to around €2 trillion, almost double the size of the current MFF.

Following this meeting, the European Commission is expected to come forward with a revised proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 around May 6. Its publication will likely be followed by an extensive negotiation over how the EU budget should be leveraged.

New initiatives of the European Commission

On 22 April, the European Commission proposed the introduction of aid for storage of skimmed milk powder, butter and cheese as well as beef, sheep and goat meat. The products may be withdrawn from the market for a period of two to six months. On the same day, it also proposed to introduce more flexibility in the implementation of sectoral programmes for wine, fruit and vegetables, olive oil and beekeeping. Finally, it agreed to derogate from the competition rules to allow producer organisations and inter-branch organisations in the milk, flowers and potato sectors to adopt measures of self-organisation of the markets for a period of maximum six months. The Commission plans to formally adopt these measures at the end of April, after their validation by the Member States.

- **“Commission backtracks on intervention measures in agri-food markets”**,
Euractiv, 23 April,
<https://www.euractiv.com/section/agriculture-food/news/commission-backtracks-on-intervention-measures-in-agri-food-markets/>

The European Parliament

On 17 April, the European Parliament held its plenary session and adopted an [ambitious resolution](#) on the EU coordinated action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, including a call for mutualising part of the EU Member States' debts by issuing recovery bonds guaranteed by the EU budget.

"This is a crucial moment in our history. We need a Recovery Plan only comparable to the Marshall Plan. In this Parliament, we have been able to overcome ideological divisions and the national interest to defend a robust European response, for the sake of all our citizens. We hope that the Council will do the same," commented Iratxe Garcia, leader of the S&D Group.

→ Press release:

<https://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/newsroom/resolution-call-action-eu-council-including-recovery-bonds-says-iratxe-garcia>

→ Video statement:

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/vod.html?mode=unit&vodLanguage=EN&vodId=1587023938231&date=20200416#>

The resolution also called on the European Commission to propose a massive recovery and reconstruction package for investment to support the European economy after the crisis, beyond what the European Stability Mechanism, the European Investment Bank and the European Central Bank are already doing. The European Parliament asked the Member States for a quick agreement on this new MFF proposal, as an instrument of solidarity and cohesion.

→ Full resolution:

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0054_EN.html

On 17 April, the European Parliament also approved amendments to the regulation on the fund for aid to the most deprived (FEAD) to make it easier for Member States, partner organisations and other parties involved to access the fund. The Council of the European Union confirmed such a proposal by written procedure on 22 April. Around 13 million EU citizens benefit from the fund each year. The new act provides for a temporary possibility of 100% co-financing from the EU budget and for costs to be eligible in cases where the delivery of food or basic material assistance is delayed, or where operations are suspended or not fully implemented. Expenditure for crisis response operations will be deemed eligible as of 1 February 2020. Further to that, the new rules provide for the possibility of delivering food aid and basic material assistance through vouchers, and the cost of purchasing personal protective materials and equipment for partner organisations to be considered an eligible cost.

→ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200416STO77204/corona-crisis-ensuring-aid-and-protection-for-those-in-need>

→ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/04/22/covid-19-council-adopts-measures-to-help-the-most-deprived-eu-citizens/>

On 21 April, the Environment Committee of the European Parliament had an exchange with Frans Timmermans, European Commission Executive Vice-President in charge of the European Green Deal. He confirmed that the European Commission believes that a green recovery is possible, using our investment capacity to create a sustainable economy based on the European Green Deal.

→ <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/timmermans-promises-green-recovery-to-eu-lawmakers/>

“The European Green Deal is not just a way to confront the climate crisis and the biodiversity crisis, but also a way to give Europe a growth strategy that is a winning strategy, not just for Europe itself, but also globally,” said Timmermans. He also praised the initiative by Member of the European Parliament and ENVI Chair, Pascal Canfin, to set up a Green Recovery Alliance, now joined also by our member and ENVE President, Juan Espadas, Mayor of Seville.

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

It is known that [some of the initiatives related to the European Green Deal](#) by the European Commission will now be delayed, but the signals sent by Frans Timmermans are reassuring, considering also the growing number of lobbying organisations, among which [Business Europe](#), that are trying to use the pandemic to postpone the Green Deal.

The importance of not delaying the green transition was also discussed by the PES Environment Network, in which our ENVE coordinator Robi Biber took part the following day, on 22 April:

→ <https://www.pes.eu/en/news-events/news/detail/PES-Environment-Network-This-is-Europes-opportunity-to-seize-a-more-sustainable-future/>

The European Committee of the Regions

On 21 April, the Conference of Presidents (CoP) met via videoconference. PES Group President Christophe Rouillon and CoR First Vice-President Vasco Cordeiro took part in it. The COP joint statement, published after the meeting, made concrete calls for:

- The development of EU mechanisms to allow Local and Regional Governments to have direct access to funding schemes to compensate income tax losses.
- An EU Recovery Fund, connected to the EU budget and based on European debt insurance. Only an ambitious Multiannual Financial Framework, pushing EU budget investments to unprecedented levels, would be up to the challenge of a fair and sustainable recovery.

- The involvement of local and regional authorities in the formulation and implementation of the recovery plans, indispensable in rebuilding our economies and, implementing the ecological transition and social innovation.

→ Full text available here:

<https://cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/COVID-19-We-call-for-an-ambitious-recovery-plan.aspx>

The CoP also agreed to consult all CoR members about a declaration on “*Local and regional authorities as actors of the European response to the COVID-19 crisis*”. This draft declaration was made available in all languages to all Members, through the Members’ Portal on 23 April. Members are invited to submit possible comments by 4 May (09h00). A consolidated draft declaration will then be sent in all languages for approval/endorsement by all full members by 7 May (EOB) by mail, with yes-no-abstention vote form, similarly to what was done in the European Parliament.

At this stage, the draft declaration is supported by all political groups except the ECR. The draft declaration, whose editing was coordinated by the PES, does carry a strong PES footprint in particular by calling for: i) an additional financial support of roughly 200 bln EUR by the EU budget, a temporary lifting of the EU’s budget GNI-based ceiling beyond the current 1.2% EU GNI and a reform of the EU’s own resources system compensating for losses in national GNI-contributions (para. 19 and 20); ii) the setting-up of an EU Recovery Fund connected to the EU budget and based on European common debt insurance, which would have to amount to approximately € 500 bln (para. 27); iii) maintaining the Stability and Growth Pact’s (SGP) general escape clause, as long as the reform of the SGP has not been completed (para. 28); iv) putting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the European Green Deal at the core of the EU recovery plan (para. 17).

Additional suggestions for further improving the draft declaration and updating it, in particular in the light of the new Commission proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 due to be released on 29 April, will be circulated by the PES Group Secretariat in due time.

The European progressive family

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

- **“Cities & regions need support to tackle Covid-19”**, Stefano Bonaccini, president of Italy’s Emilia Romagna region, and president of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), *EUobserver*, 20 April, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/148104>
- **“Cities for a social and solidarity way out of the crisis caused by COVID-19”**, by progressive mayors Ada Colau (Barcelona), Giuseppe Sala (Milan) and, Anne Hidalgo (Paris), *Euractiv*, 20 April 2020,

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/opinion/cities-for-a-social-and-solidarity-way-out-of-the-crisis-caused-by-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 29 contributions from 10 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

Social media trainings for members

The social media team of the European Committee of the Regions is still providing members with one-on-one online coaching sessions on the use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.). If you are interested, please reach out directly to socialmediateam@cor.europa.eu. If you would like to receive additional support, also with a political perspective on the use of social media, please do not hesitate to reach out to the PES Group Press and Communications Adviser, Monica Tiberi, monica.tiberi@cor.europa.eu.

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. 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/20200327STO76004/10-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

OECD

The OECD put together an impressive amount of resources on the response to the coronavirus pandemic, including policy responses, videos and real-time data:

→ <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/en/>

Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), 20 April

FEPS hosted an online debate on the new SURE “Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency” mechanism with experts from across the EU:

→ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7KILYi6piE&feature=youtu.be>

Progressive mayors and other leaders for solidarity, 21 April

Several progressive mayors including Ada Colau, Mayor of Barcelona, Giorgio Gori, Mayor of Bergamo, Katrin Stjernfeldt Jammeh, Mayor of Malmö, Gergely Karácsony, Mayor of Budapest and Antonio Decaro, Mayor of Bari, joined Brando Benifei, Member of the European Parliament and Head of the Italian S&D Delegation, and Frans Timmermans, European Commission Executive Vice-President, for a Facebook Live event on the responses to the COVID-19 crisis (available in Italian with English subtitles):

→ <https://www.facebook.com/benifeibrando/videos/227957625184619>

Bruegel event with Elisa Ferreira, European Commissioner in charge of Cohesion and Reforms, 21 April

Bruegel, an economic think tank in Brussels, interviewed Commissioner Ferreira on the role of cohesion policy in the fight against COVID-19:

→ <https://www.bruegel.org/events/the-role-of-cohesion-policy-in-the-fight-against-covid-19-with-elisa-ferreira/>

Party of European Socialists, 29 April

On 29 April (European Day of Solidarity between Generations) from 18h00 CET, the Party of European Socialists is organising a Facebook Live event with Alicia Homs (Young European Socialists President), Jos Bertrand (European Seniors Organisation President), Sergei Stanishev (Party of European Socialists President), Maria João Rodrigues (Foundation for European Progressive Studies President), Iratxe García (President of the S&D Group in the European Parliament), and many more.

→ <https://www.facebook.com/events/233748177707380/>

Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), 30 April

Join the second FEPS COVID Response Webinar on Thursday 30 April from 9.30, with Nicolas Schmit, European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, to discuss how government spending targeted to social outcomes can play a role in the recovery strategy from the pandemic.

→ https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_kgh0vYW9S56Zbv2tuvR4qA

State of the Union, 6-8 May, Florence

As every year, the State of the Union Conference will take place in Florence, organised by the European University Institute. This year, it will be a special online edition.

→ <https://stateoftheunion.eui.eu/>

Please find here again 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:

- **United Cities and Local Governments**
<https://www.uclg.org/en/issues/live-learning-experience-beyondtheoutbreak>
- **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

- **Bloomberg Foundation**

<https://cities4health.org/>

<https://www.cityleadership.harvard.edu/resources-sessions>

We would like to highlight in particular this guide for local leaders on how to communicate effectively through the press during the COVID-19 pandemic:

<https://cities4health.org/assets/library-assets/working-with-the-press.pdf>

- **European Commission's Intelligent Cities**

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

- **European Commission's Hackathon**

<https://euvsvirus.org/>

Useful readings

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

- **“Cities policy responses”**, OECD, April 2020,
https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=126_126769-yen45847kf&title=Coronavirus-COVID-19-Cities-Policy-Responses
- **“How is EU cooperation on the Covid-19 crisis perceived in member states?”**, Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), 21 April 2020,
<https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/how-is-eu-cooperation-on-the-covid-19-crisis-perceived-in-member-states/>
- **“Added value of a common EU response to the economic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic”**, European Parliament Research Service, April 2020,
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/642829/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)642829_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/642829/EPRS_BRI(2020)642829_EN.pdf)
- **“The EU's 2020 budget: Response to the coronavirus pandemic”**, European Parliament Research Service, April 2020,
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649382/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)649382_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649382/EPRS_BRI(2020)649382_EN.pdf)