

Welcome to the seventh edition of the NAT Bulletin!



While the novel coronavirus continues to rage around the globe, it is probably safe to say that the first, and hopefully only pandemic wave in Europe is over. The damage on all fronts is still being assessed, and there are still a lot of lessons to be learned.

The European Commission launched its proposal for a €750bn Next Generation EU recovery instrument reinforcing the newly proposed long-term €1100bn EU multi-annual financial frameworks for the period 2021-2027. The Next Generation fund contains a pillar dedicated among others to health, civil protection and resilience – topics on which the NAT Commission will continue to work with dedication and deliver its proposal to the European Commission, Parliament and Council.

It is too early to say, but we hope that future NAT meetings and activities can take place normally again. We are looking forward to this. For now, we will not continue informing you through the NAT bulletin, but we will keep you updated through the normal channels and via the NAT secretariat. Please do not hesitate to contact the NAT Commission secretariat at nat@cor.europa.eu. And most importantly, stay safe!

Karsten Uno Petersen (DK/PES), NAT Commission Vice Chair

€15 billion reinforcement for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

The recovery plan for Europe announced on Wednesday 27 May 2022 included €15 billion reinforcement for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. The new funds should support rural areas in making the structural changes necessary in line with the European Green Deal and achieving the ambitious targets in line with the new Biodiversity and Farm to Fork strategies. The CoR regrets the Commission proposal to decrease the EAFRD budget compared to the previous programming period, which runs counter to the EU's objective of territorial cohesion. The 15 bln EUR in additional support foreseen for rural development does not compensate the 28% budget cut proposed by the commission in May 2018 for the EAFRD.

More details available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/recovery-plan-europe>

EU4Health programme

The European Commission has put forward a proposal to create a new recovery instrument Next Generation EU. As part of the new recovery plan is also a new standalone Health Programme, EU4Health, with a budget extending to €9.4 billion, which will be implemented via grants directly to beneficiaries and centrally managed procurements by the European Commission.

The programme foresees investing in EU healthcare systems, focusing on health security and capacity to react to crises – prevention, crisis preparedness, the procurement of vital medicines and equipment, as well as long-term disease prevention and surveillance, health access, diagnosis and treatment, cross-border collaboration in the health domain. It will aim to complement and reinforce efforts at national level and provide regional support to healthcare systems under cohesion policy.

Link to press release: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_940

More resources to rescEU

As part of the new recovery plan, the European Commission also announced a €2 billion reinforcement of rescEU, the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism. The aim is to build up a permanent capacity to handle all types of emergencies, create an EU level reserve of essential supplies and equipment to be mobilised in response to major emergencies and to make rescEU more flexible and increase the Union's capacity to act together at EU level. In other words, it would include, for example, medical equipment as well as medical evacuation planes and field hospitals, also firefighting planes and helicopters and other assets that can be mobilised quickly in case of health emergencies, forest fire outbreaks, chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear incidents or other major emergencies.

The Commission also proposes to strengthen the role of the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) as a coordinating hub for the network of national crisis centres.

In order to be able to have a fast, flexible and coordinated EU response to crises, the Commission also aims to strengthen its emergency tools and make them more flexible so that resources can be deployed quickly and at scale when needed. This includes the European Solidarity Fund and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund as well as the Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve and Horizon Europe.

More details at: https://ec.europa.eu/echo/news/eu-budget-recovery-2-billion-reinforce-resceu-direct-crisis-response-tools_en

Pharmaceutical strategy for Europe

In line with the announced Pharmaceutical strategy for Europe, the European Commission launched a roadmap and announced a public consultation that would lead to the adoption of the Strategy towards the end of 2020. Please find more information and participation links below.

Pharmaceutical strategy for Europe: https://ec.europa.eu/health/human-use/strategy_en

Link to roadmap and public consultation: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12421-Pharmaceutical-Strategy-Timely-patient-access-to-affordable-medicines>

Coronavirus: biological agents directive updated to better protect the health and safety of workers

The Commission adopted an update of the Biological Agents Directive to include SARS-CoV-2 among the list of biological agents it covers. This update takes into account new risks in the workplace and offers additional protection to all workers, particularly those working in direct contact with the virus in hospitals, industrial processes and laboratories.

The Commission has worked quickly to update the directive, and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (OSHA) has already published EU guidance for a safe return to the workplace to help employers prepare workplaces for the return of workers after the COVID-19 crisis.

Links:

Commission Directive: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32020L0739>

Factsheet: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=22729&langId=en>

Farm to Fork Strategy

On 20 May, European Commission issued the Farm to Fork Strategy. The Strategy is aiming at enabling the transition to a more sustainable food system while safeguarding food security, ensuring access to healthy diets and reducing the environmental and climate footprint of the EU food system while strengthening its resilience.

At this end, the Strategy sets ambitious targets for a reduction by 50% of the use and risk of pesticides, a reduction by at least 20% of the use of fertilizers, a reduction by 50% in sales of antimicrobials used for farmed animals and aquaculture, reaching 25% of agricultural land under organic farming.

It also proposes measures to ensure that the healthy option is the easiest for EU citizens, including improved labelling to better meet consumers' expectations.

There is support foreseen by the CAP and the CFP through new streams of funding and eco-schemes to take up sustainable practices.

More about the strategy at: https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork_en

Examples from the regions via CoR COVID-19 Exchange Platform

A large number of contributions from European regions is reaching via our Covid-19 exchange platform, informing us about additional measures of local and regional governments, supplementing the efforts of the Member States:

Cluj Napoca starts a project to mobilize funding and resources for hospitals

"A Single Cluj" is a project that mobilizes funding and resources for hospitals with the help of local and regional authorities as well as civil society initiatives to synchronise and centralize information during COVID-19 crisis.

Westpomeranian Region prepares health care system and economy for the outbreak

The Presidents of 16 Polish Regions, 24 Mayors of the biggest Polish cities and the President of the region held a videoconference with Prime-Minister Mateusz Morawiecki on how to tackle COVID-19.

In Westpomeranian Region, authorities are focusing on purchasing additional equipment and beds for hospitals. In addition, they are working on an anti-crisis package to reduce the negative impacts of Covid19 on our economy and save jobs.

Protective equipment sewn by school and social service staff – to leave nobody unprotected

In the Košice Self-governing Region, protective equipment is sewn by school and social service staff. Every week, the region distributes 4,000 canvas facemasks. The teachers of secondary schools specialised in fashion and clothing are contributing to such efforts. Further, the region provides more than 1,200 rooms in its school dorms (currently unused due to school interruption).

Cultural regional institutions are offering visitors a virtual visit of their premises via the web or social media. With regard to care, protective equipment is distributed to outpatient clinics in all districts to those physicians currently in charge, including to some 479 dental clinics, 372 general practitioners, 188 paediatric clinics and 50 lung centres. The regional Volunteering Centre is working nonstop to protect the elderly, as local population counts 123,000 elderly citizens (+65 years old).

Investment in health equipment and IT

The Municipality of Gdańsk purchased 2200 tests for front liners fighting the pandemic. In addition, 140 sterile masks, 8000 suits, 600L of soap, 1800L of disinfectant and 260 pairs of gloves have been ordered to protect health professionals and those offering critical services. The Municipality is also gathering IT equipment for teachers and students to facilitate remote learning.

Strong focus on collaboration in Athens

The City of Athens, is collaborating with health professionals to provide tests for the elderly, as well as disinfecting public areas to fight the pandemic. The Mayor has been holding meetings with over 45 Mayors, including the Mayor of Seoul, to exchange good practices.

Tampere delivers free school meals to pupils studying from home

Tampere has been active in informing the public about the coronavirus situation, through both traditional channels and social media. The city has sent an information letter to all residents over the age of 70, and young people have been informed through a social media campaign. The key guidelines on the city's website are available not just in Finnish but also in English, Russian, Swedish, Estonian, Chinese, Somali, Arabic, Kurdish, Farsi and sign language.

Free school meals are a fundamental right in Finland. Although most schools are closed for the time being and teaching is organised remotely, Tampere has decided to start distributing meals to pre-school, primary and lower secondary school pupils based on a questionnaire sent to parents or guardians. Families reported a need for food support for around 8 000 children. Meals can be collected from ten schools that remain open, and food can be delivered.

Web Portal on epidemiological situation of coronavirus in Castilla y León Region

The Regional Government of Castilla y León (ES) has developed a web portal that provides daily updated information on the situation of the coronavirus (COVID-19) in Castilla y León. It offers information about the situation of the pandemic, based on official and reliable data, explained in a clear and understandable way. Reusable formats of the data sets are available for more advanced users, offering the possibility to download the raw (unprocessed) data.

Link to the portal: <https:// analisis.datosabiertos.jcyl.es/pages/coronavirus/>

More stories on the Covid-19 exchange platform: <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/Pages/covid19-stories.aspx>