



European Committee
of the Regions

SEDEC Bulletin N°3

COVID-19 impact and response measures

15 May 2020



The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically affected our world and our way of living, with the loss of thousands of lives and unprecedented consequences for every aspect of our daily existence. The Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC) at the European Committee of the Regions is preparing regular bulletins on the policy fields within its remit, reflecting recent research, articles and discussions on the socio-economic impact of the pandemic in Europe and on the different actions and response measures being planned and implemented at EU, national, regional and local level.

Anne Karjalainen (FI/PES), Chair of the SEDEC commission

Social policy and employment

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) issued [a guidance on coming back to work](#) on 24 April, 2020. The main areas covered relate to risk assessment, taking care of workers who have been ill, information for sectors and occupations, planning and learning for the future and the involvement of workers in all of the above.

The European Commission's [database for social dialogue](#) accepts documents that demonstrate the solidarity between social partners in this critical period. Social partners are working together, sometimes across sectors, to explain in a series of texts the concrete problems they are facing as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, and to indicate how to address these issues. These suggestions are addressed to companies as well as to political authorities and are useful in the period of lockdown as well as for the recovery process.

The European Commission considers that this epidemic will cause the biggest recession in EU history; the economies of the EU will shrink by 7.4% due to the pandemic. Furthermore, unemployment is expected **to rise to 9% in 2020 (from 6.7% in 2019), before receding to 7.9% in 2021.** [\[source\]](#)

State aid: Commission approves: **1) €5.2 billion Czech guarantee scheme** for loans to large exporting companies; **2) Belgian €250 million subordinated loan scheme** to support start-ups, scale-ups and SMEs; **3) €10 million Greek scheme** to support companies in the floriculture sector affected by the coronavirus outbreak; **4) €296 million Danish loan schemes** to support start-ups; **5) €40 million Finnish direct grant schemes** to support companies in the agriculture and fishery sectors; **6) €7.3 million Czech scheme** to support research and development activities; **7) €314 million Hungarian guarantee scheme** to support SMEs active in the agri-food value chain; **8) €200 million French guarantee scheme** for small and midsize exporting companies. Furthermore, on 8 May the Commission adopted a second amendment to extend the scope of the [State Aid Temporary Framework](#).

New Cedefop analysis (7/5/20) explores which EU Member States are likely to expect the highest [risks](#)



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[in jobs related to the tourism industry](#). The sector, despite being one of the strongest pillars of the EU Economy, now faces an uncertain future as the coronavirus countermeasures will continue to disrupt both individual and business travel for a potentially long period of time. In addition, the impact of the pandemic may bring profound changes to people's habits and business operations, which tourism businesses may struggle with for years to come.

Cedefop experts created a new coronavirus [social distancing risk index](#) (29/4/20), Cov19R, to assess which individuals face a higher risk of coronavirus exposure by doing their jobs, and therefore need greater social distancing. The index was created by identifying skills descriptors distinguishing jobs according to whether they rely on physical proximity or contact with others; the degree to which a job can be performed (remotely) via digital technologies was considered a risk-mitigating factor.



Research and innovation policy

EIT Health has announced [funding of over 6 million euro](#) in the fight against COVID-19, which will be dedicated to 14 specially selected health innovation projects across Europe. The projects will focus on immediate and impactful solutions that can be found to arm health services with better tools for navigating the pandemic.

A team of EIT Digital Master School students from Hungary came top in the [Health & Life](#) category of the **EUvsVirus Hackathon**. Their 3D printed remote monitoring device enables nurses to monitor numerous COVID-19 patients' vitals remotely and simultaneously. (The device also won an award from [EIT Health](#) at the "Hack the Crisis Hungary hackathon".)

"Solidarity" is an [international clinical trial](#) launched by the World Health Organization in order to find an effective treatment for COVID-19. The trial will compare four treatment options against standard of care. By enrolling patients in multiple countries, the Solidarity trial aims to rapidly discover whether any of the drugs slow disease progression or improve survival.

The [United Nations Development Programme](#) is calling on scientists, innovators, developers and designers to create open source solutions for those regions that need most help. The priority actions are: "Flatten the curve in communities with preventive solutions", "Reduce the disease's impact on economies of these vulnerable areas" and "Design replicable, low-cost tools to aid in coronavirus detection".

Coronavirus Global Response: €7.4 billion raised for universal access to vaccines

On 4 May, the [Coronavirus Global Response](#) virtual pledging conference kick-started efforts to close the immediate budget gap and accelerate the development and deployment of universally available



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and affordable vaccination, treatment and diagnostics. [The opening event already raised €7.4 billion](#) from donors worldwide, [including €1 billion under the Horizon 2020](#) budget. This almost reaches the [initial target](#) of €7.5 billion and is a solid starting point for the worldwide pledging marathon, which will continue in the coming weeks.

[Coronavirus: Commission launches data sharing platform for researchers](#)

Commissioner Mariya Gabriel has recently launched the [European COVID-19 Data Platform](#), which gives researchers an open, trusted, and scalable environment to store and share information to help us better understand, diagnose and eventually overcome this pandemic. The Joint Research Centre has also created [a unique database of containment measures and casualties](#). As they have since the start of the crisis, JRC experts continue to monitor and model the expected development of the pandemic, feeding into [the European roadmap to lifting containment measures](#).

[EUvsVirus Hackathon + Matchathon](#)

This pan-European innovation event was jointly opened by EC **Commissioner Mariya Gabriel** and **CoR President Apostolos Tzitzikostas**. 21 000 participants from 141 countries, supported by hundreds of partners and volunteers, submitted 2150 solutions. A total of [117 innovative solutions](#) were selected as winners. They will be invited to the upcoming EUvsVirus Matchathon (22-25 May), which will include a Demo Day (21 May).

[Additional €150 million for the European Innovation Council to fund breakthrough ideas tackling coronavirus solutions to coronavirus challenges](#)

On 30 April, the European Commission approved €150 million of additional budget for the [European Innovation Council \(EIC\) Accelerator](#) to support game-changing innovations to tackle the coronavirus crisis. Companies selected for EIC support will be announced in late May. A record number of close to 4000 start-ups and SMEs applied to the EIC Accelerator pilot in March – over 1000 of which have innovations relevant to the coronavirus outbreak.

Education and Youth, Culture and Sport

1. On 4 May, the Committee on Culture and Education (**CULT**) in the European Parliament held a [structural dialogue](#) with **European Commissioners Mariya Gabriel** and **Thierry Breton** on the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak. The discussion focused mainly on cultural and creative sectors (CCSs), but the MEPs also called for further support for online education (a computer at home for every child), for grassroots sports and activities. On online education, Ms Gabriel responded by providing reassurances that the **Digital Education Action Plan** would address the questions raised and that its adoption was still expected by early July at the latest. On **Erasmus**, Ms Gabriel pointed out that around 60% of long-term mobility and 70% of short-term mobility had been cancelled and guaranteed that the Commission would "continue its weekly virtual meetings with the national agencies." A **Special Distance Learning Network** of education ministries was already set up.



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The EU Code Week [Icebreaker massive open online course](#) takes place from 11 May to 15 June. The course encourages families and teachers to bring innovation into the home and (virtual) classroom. It provides ideas and practical tips on how to engage children and students using new, fun and educational activities. Participants will also get access to materials and resources in 29 languages that will help them plan and organise their own coding activities.

On 5 May, the European Commission awarded the [Jan Amos Comenius Prize](#) for high-quality teaching about the European Union. The prize goes to 22 secondary schools from across Europe that teach about the European Union in a creative way. It highlights the importance of teaching and learning about the EU in an inspirational way.

[Learning City Webinar Series 2020, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning \(UIL\)](#)

In May, UIL is continuing its [webinars](#) for cities to share and learn about measures taken at different stages of the emergence of COVID-19:

- 20 May 2020: New ways of governance, partnership and education
- 27 May 2020: Economic and social and education recovery
- 3 June 2020: Human & civil rights protection
- 10 June 2020: General response to COVID-19

2. During the [structural dialogue](#) on 4 May with Commissioners Gabriel and Breton, **CULT Chair** Sabine Verheyen stated that "Europe must not allow things that define Europe – namely, the rich, lively and productive cultural and creative scene to disappear", therefore the EU needs to quickly and directly support those affected. She also drew the attention of both Commissioners to the need to fully integrate culture into the future **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**.

During the debate, MEPs stressed that the damage to the cultural and creative sector – especially for small businesses and individual actors – meant "more than just jobs being lost", calling for:

- **An EU recovery plan for the cultural and creative sector;**
- **Direct support for media;**
- **EU culture and values to be preserved at "all costs".**

On 5 May, a new platform [CreativesUnite](#) was launched to offer a common space for all those looking for information about cultural and creative sector initiatives responding to the coronavirus crisis. It gives access in one single space to the multitude of existing resources and numerous relevant networks and organisations. It also offers a space to co-create and upload contributions towards finding solutions together.

On 9 May, a High Level Webinar on "**Cultural Heritage as a Catalyst for the Future of Europe**" was co-hosted by the [Europeana Foundation](#) and [Europa Nostra](#) (EN), acting on behalf of the [European Heritage Alliance](#).



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The Chair of the **SEDEC commission Anne Karjalainen** participated in a debate with the European Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, the Croatian Minister of Culture Nina Obuljen-Koržinek (HR EU PRES), EESC President Luca Jahier and EP CULT Chair Sabine Verheyen.

The **Europe Day Manifesto** launched on this occasion aims to "convey a strong message of solidarity, hope and unity to Europe's

leaders and citizens at a time when Europe and the entire planet are struggling to overcome an unprecedented crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus." The Europe Day Manifesto is open for signatures by individuals and organisations on the websites of [Europa Nostra](#) and [Europeana Foundation](#).

Also on 9 May, Heritage Malta co-hosted an international webinar dedicated to [Digital Cultural Heritage](#) with the Cyprus University of Technology and European Cooperation in Science and Technology to commemorate Europe Day. The discussion highlighted the achievements of cultural heritage digitisation, the current challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic and new initiatives taken especially for the tourism and education sectors.

On 12 May, the Regional Initiative for Culture and Creativity network (**RICC**) held its second COVID-19 webinar, organised by the Emilia-Romagna, Friuli Venezia Giulia and Basque Country offices in Brussels, in close collaboration with the European Committee of the Regions and in cooperation with the European Commission (DG EAC) and the UNESCO EU Office. CoR member **Alin Nica** participated in the debate on the regional dimension of the COVID-19 crisis and the measures for the Culture and Creativity Industries (CCI). The local and regional agendas must be linked to the EU and international dimensions to reinforce the regional ecosystems and to fulfil the potential for cooperation and to reinforce the CCI sector.

3. The #LetsBEACTIVE campaign has been renamed [#LetsBEACTIVE at home](#), to encourage people to keep training and engaging in healthy lifestyles at home. EuropeActive organised a webinar on 6 May, 2020 on the topic "[Reopening Fitness Doors: a World Tour](#)". The webinar provided insights and the latest developments about COVID-19 in regard to fitness around the world.

Information society, artificial intelligence and audiovisual/telecommunications technologies

[Supercomputers at the disposal of Czech COVID-19 researchers in the Moravian-Silesian region](#)

Artificial intelligence (AI), in combination with high performance, edge and quantum computing, all increase and accelerate humans' ability to understand the virus itself and the mechanism of the disease and then develop a vaccine. Atos, a European multinational information technology service and consulting company, has made two of its supercomputers at VSB-Technical University of Ostrava, in the Moravian-Silesian region of the Czech Republic, available to support COVID-19 research.



[Technology to aid the exit from lockdown while helping control the spread of epidemic: the Netherlands](#)

Localisation applications face the technological challenge of how to ensure respect for privacy and have faced criticism in Germany, France and the Netherlands on this account, while Austria has chosen a decentralised system of detection and data sharing technical solutions to circumvent the privacy issue. As the discussion in the Netherlands, for example, has shown, tracking applications can be effective for containment only if combined with more massive medical testing for the virus and on the condition that a majority of the population has volunteered to use the tracking application.

Further use of artificial intelligence applications in this situation includes interactive voice response systems and chat-bots for patient self-triage and image-based medical diagnosis (e.g. chest x-rays) as well as monitoring of public areas and transportation in order to detect situations where people are not complying with public order rules, and forecasting the epidemic's spread over time and space. However, forecasting is particularly difficult, because this pandemic is new and no previous historical tracking data are available.

❖ Responses at regional and local level

Social policy and employment

Valencia (Spain)

In order to put in practice a **social plan** against the crisis, Valencia has increased the budget for social aid and has also created an emergency budget, implemented a series of measures for self-employed people targeted towards maintaining their jobs, postponed municipal taxes and launched specific measures for the tourism sector. It has also launched a phone and home assistance service for elderly people, stopped charging rent to those affected by the crisis and hosted homeless people, offered free transport to all health workers, protected survivors of domestic violence, and given 1000 tablets to families in need for educational reasons.

Nice (France)

To support the restart of the local economy, the city of Nice has introduced [Confiance Sanitaire](#), a health confidence label. Shops and other businesses can use the label to show that they comply with the health safety rules surrounding the coronavirus pandemic. The label is based on a charter of commitment and will reassure customers that it is safe to shop there.

Guimarães (Portugal)

The Municipality of Guimarães has instituted a series of [measures](#) from housing for homeless people to providing tablets for students to enable distance learning and offering support for tourism-focused micro-enterprises. Furthermore, it is [testing all daycare employees](#) for COVID-19 in preparation for the reopening of daycare centres on 18 May.



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Research and innovation

[Semmelweis University, Budapest, Hungary](#)

Clinical tests are to begin at Semmelweis University in Budapest about the capability of an existing drug, so far used to treat pneumonia and tissue scarring, to prevent complications of COVID-19. The molecule, patented by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, could bring a breakthrough in the fight against the disease. Also under the supervision of Semmelweis University, a Hungarian SME created a [portable ventilator](#) designed specifically for the effective treatment of respiratory failure caused by the novel coronavirus. By filtering exhaust air, the invention provides protection for healthcare workers while treating patients.

[COVID-19 Early Warning System in Castilla y León, Spain](#)

The Castilla y León Health Network (Sacyl) has designed an early warning system within the Open Line Care Management application (GACELA Care) for the detection of patients with symptoms compatible with COVID-19, in collaboration with the Oesia group. The selected variables (temperature, oxygen saturation, cough, dyspnea and CRP) recorded by the nurse, are considered predictors of the severity of the disease according to the available evidence (especially fever and oxygen saturation).

[Estonian Viveo Health makes its secure telemedicine system free to doctors](#)

Estonian telemedicine specialist Viveo Health is making its platform technology Virtual Office for Doctors available free of charge to medical professionals around the world. The company says healthcare professionals have been forced to use social media and other channels that are not secure, to communicate with patients during the pandemic.

[Using AI to Detect How Many People Are Wearing Masks](#)

Paris and other French cities are testing AI-enabled software to detect whether people are wearing masks on public transportation. The software analyses security camera footage, generating statistics about the percentage of individuals wearing masks in 15-minute intervals. The software can help authorities anticipate areas that could see a growth in COVID-19 cases.

[Cologne – Innovation database](#)

The city of Cologne has created a [database](#) of best practices from local companies that have found innovative and creative solutions to deal with the present circumstances. This includes, for example, digital window-shopping or selling vouchers for favourite individual stores or pubs around the corner.

Education and Youth, Culture and Sport

Education and Youth

Oulu, Finland

Quality recommendations for distance learning have been introduced in Oulu as part of the [OpenDigi – Teachers in Learning Skills and Digital Pedagogy Developer Communities project](#) (OKM). The recommendations have been specifically tailored to take into account the specific needs of all parties



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– students, guardians, and teachers. Emphasis has been placed on allowing the best use of e-learning and digital tools, while still allowing students to learn beyond the screen.

Attica Region, Greece

At the [initiative of the Attica Region](#), distance education for primary and high school students is being provided free of charge. Students from all over Greece, not only from Attica, will have access to the educational services online as long as their schools remain closed.

Basque Country, Spain

The Department of Education of the Basque Government is promoting the educational space "[Bitartean, etxetik ikaste](#)", in cooperation with EITB (Basque TV). A new programme for teachers, Semantic Web Amarauna, will also be launched to create and share digital educational content.

Nice, France

The Regional Council of [Nice Côte d'Azur](#) has opened municipal nurseries and leisure centres for children whose parents are mobilised to maintain services during the health crisis. The Council has also organised online music classes led by teachers from the Nice Regional Conservatory.

Mġarr, Malta

Aware that parents and pupils are missing the social side of the classroom, teachers at [San Andrea School](#) in Mġarr have taken the initiative to set up a radio station amid the coronavirus shutdown. Like all schools in Malta, San Andrea has been closed since 13 March, with lessons being carried out at home or online, away from friends. But now, students will be able to tune in to the radio to hear their classmates perform radio drama, play music and share positive messages.

Cultural and Creative Sectors

Sofia, Bulgaria

The municipality of Sofia has launched the "[Solidarity in Culture](#)" initiative, aimed at supporting independent artists, cultural spaces, and event organisers. The initiative aims to financially support those working in the cultural and creative sectors and encourage them to organise projects and create online.

Kuopio, Finland

Kuopio has launched a "[well-being market](#)" to help citizens nurture their mental and physical well-being. The city is proposing cultural, sports and other activities, which are constantly being updated as new material is available.

Nice, France

The city of Nice has created an [online platform](#) broadcasting a variety of concerts, ballets, interviews, etc. New content is uploaded every week, and many regional cultural figures have been invited to



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participate. The city has also been distributing books from the municipal libraries to isolated and fragile people.

Sport

Florence, Italy

The [city of Florence](#) is preparing sports trainings in parks led by certified instructors from sports associations, as the city is phasing out the lockdown measures. Registration will be required in order to be able to control the size of the groups and ensure social distance.

Pays de la Loire, France

Sports and culture are at the heart of the Pays de la Loire's regional politics. Therefore the regional government has created an [exceptional fund](#) to help organisers of sports and cultural events who have been harshly hit by the current situation.

Information society, artificial intelligence and audiovisual/telecommunications technologies

Information society

[Vienna: Epidemic Management System \(EMS\) to control the spread of infectious diseases](#)

The Health Service of the City of Vienna, Austria, has developed and implemented **EpiSYS**, an Epidemic Management System (EMS) to support the control of the spread of infectious diseases. It has already been operational since March, and other municipalities have been following the example of Vienna. It gives healthcare professionals a precise overview of an epidemiological situation by storing and managing all patient data and data related to the virus, including tracking and tracing patient incident reports, in real-time. Moreover, it helps local and regional authorities take strategic decisions in the current crisis, taking into account the fact that mobility of the population makes containment of diseases harder and that the need to act quickly and effectively is essential at every level.

Audiovisual technologies

[Use of citizen engagement applications by Estonian municipalities: the Järva Vald example](#)

The Järva Vald municipality in Estonia is using their community engagement application to inform citizens regarding national and local level actions, guidelines and order to prevent and stop the spread of the coronavirus in Estonia. Engagement applications offer the possibility not only to publish targeted question cards, feedback, calendar events and social media content, but also to send infocards (incl. picture or video embedding, texts and links) with push notifications to users' mobile devices immediately. This is crucial to ensure that everyone is updated. City officials can also detect how many users have seen the shared info and when so you don't have to rely on your Facebook algorithm and homepages.



[Poland: a 1.5% surcharge on the revenue of video-on-demand platforms to help the local economy](#)

In the context of a policy package called the anti-crisis shield, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Piotr Gliński, has proposed the introduction of a 1.5% contribution fee collected from broadcasters of on-demand audiovisual media services. This is a reaction to the crisis in the Polish film world caused by the current epidemiological situation. In addition, it has been a response to the challenges posed by technological development in the audiovisual market, with the aim to favour local recovery, especially in the audio-visual sector.

The online platform most affected will be Netflix. It is Poland's most popular video streaming platform with 5.4 million users last month in a country of 38 million people. The payments are expected to boost the institute's budget by PLN 15 million in 2020, and PLN 20 million annually in coming years.

Additional useful links

EC: https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response_en

EU support for the cultural and creative sectors:

https://ec.europa.eu/culture/news/coronavirus-how-eu-responds-outbreak-support-cultural-and-creative-sectors_en; <https://creativesunite.eu/>

EU Learning Corner: https://europa.eu/learning-corner/home_en

JRC (ScienceHub): <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en>

European Parliamentary Research Service – Coronavirus – Impact and reaction (26 March 2020):

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649349/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)649349_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649349/EPRS_BRI(2020)649349_EN.pdf)

EU local news: <https://www.themayor.eu/en>

EPRS and other EP publications: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/home.html>

See also <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/priorities/eu-response-to-coronavirus>

ESPON programme: <https://www.espon.eu/collecting-experiences-and-evidence-local-and-regional-responses-covid19>

Eurocities: <https://covidnews.eurocities.eu/>

CEMR: <https://www.ccre.org/en/actualites/view/3994>

OECD New Digital Hub for COVID-19: <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/en/>

ERRIN news: <https://errin.eu/news> (primarily R&I /regional focus)

EARTO news: <https://www.earto.eu/news/> (primarily R&I)

EUA (European University Association): <https://eua.eu/news/>

Vanguard Initiative: <https://www.s3vanguardinitiative.eu/news>

Lisbon Council: <https://lisboncouncil.net/news-a-events.html> (Digital/AI/Social/R&I)

Bruegel: [The latest on COVID-19](#)

CEPS: [Research on COVID-19](#)

WHO: [Coronavirus Dashboard](#)