



European Committee
of the Regions

SEDEC Bulletin N°7

COVID-19 impact and response measures

09 October 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

The SEDEC commission meeting on 1 October 2020 took place in hybrid mode, as a video conference with onsite and remote participants.

The members took part in a debate with guest speaker **Jean-Eric Paquet**, Director-General for Research and Innovation, on the *Knowledge Exchange Platform*, the next framework programme for Research and Innovation – FP9 *Horizon Europe*, the *Structural Funds*, the *Research Missions* and the *European Innovation Council* (EIC).

The members also took part in an exchange of views on the opinion on the *European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience*, with rapporteur **Csaba Borboly** (RO/EPP) and on the opinion on *Youth Employment Support: a Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation*, with rapporteur **Romy Karier** (LU/EPP).

SEDEC members welcomed the Commission's recent communications on a *Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027. Resetting education and training for the digital age* and on *Achieving the European Education Area by 2025* and appointed Gillian Coughlan (IE/Renew E) and Emil Boc (RO/EPP) respectively as CoR rapporteurs for these topics. The **Digital Education Action Plan** (2021-2027) proposes a set of initiatives for high quality, inclusive and accessible digital education in Europe. It is a call for action on stronger cooperation between Member States at European level, as well as with and between stakeholders, to make education and training systems truly fit for the digital age. The communication on the **European Education Area** outlines how cooperation can further enrich the quality, inclusiveness and digital and green dimensions of Member State education systems. It sets out the means and milestones to achieve the European Education Area by 2025, supported by Europe's Recovery Plan (Next Generation EU) and the Erasmus+ Programme.



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It was also proposed that two opinions be drafted, one on the European Commission communication on *A new ERA for Research and Innovation* (rapporteur: Christophe Clergeau (FR/PES)) and one on *A Union of equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025* (rapporteur: Yoomi Renström (SV/PES)). The **European Research Area (ERA)** aims to strengthen the foundations, quality and impact of the research and innovation system in the EU and Member States. The **EU Action Plan against racism 2020-2025** sets out a number of actions to tackle racism through EU law but also using other means, working with Member States, including national law enforcement, media and civil society.

The next SEDEC commission meeting will take place on Wednesday **25 November 2020 in Brussels** (arrangements to be confirmed).

Social policy and employment

In her first [State of the Union address](#) on 16 September, the European Commission president, Ursula Von der Leyen focused on the need to **establish a framework for minimum wages**. She also mentioned her pledge to achieve stability in the social market economy.

On Tuesday 22 September, the Commissioner for Economy, Paolo Gentiloni announced on Twitter that he had notified the German Presidency of the EU Council of the conclusion of all bilateral guarantees to operationalise the European temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE).

On Wednesday 30 September in the Committee of Permanent Representatives I (Coreper I), the EU Member State' delegations were expected to approve without debate the conclusions copied to EUROPE on improving the working and living conditions of seasonal and mobile workers. These conclusions include proposals to increase transparency regarding liability in the event of subcontracting chains and to facilitate the identification of legally responsible persons and/or entities.

In a joint statement issued on Thursday 24 September, trade unions (EFBWW) and employers (FIEC) in the construction sector called on the European Commission to quickly address the introduction of a European Social Security Number (ESSN) to effectively combat undeclared work. At a high-level conference held on the same day, the social partners stressed the importance of digital technology in combating this phenomenon, which is constantly growing in the construction sector (around 20% of all activities in the whole sector) and which involves increasingly complex arrangements. DG EMPL is currently conducting an internal analysis of the subject, exploring various solutions based on national examples. Furthermore, the social partners consider that the fight against undeclared work will also be won by changing the behaviour of "customers", particularly public authorities. They therefore



propose that price alone should no longer be the sole criterion for awarding public procurement contracts; instead, the principle of best value for money should be applied.

As part of the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII and CRII+), on Wednesday 23 September the European Commission announced the approval of nine modifications to cohesion policy operational programmes in Spain for a total amount of €1.2 billion from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Objective: to help the regions cope with the consequences of the pandemic, whether in the health or education sectors, or to help SMEs get through this period [\[link\]](#).

On Monday 21 September, the European Labour Authority announced that for the first time ever it had supported a concerted inspection investigating construction companies in Belgium, Lithuania and Portugal. Inspectors tested common tools and procedures developed with the European Labour Authority, ushering in a "historic" new phase in the fight against undeclared work.

On 21 September, Eurofound published its report [Back to the Future: Policy Pointers from Platform Work Scenarios](#) which explores potential scenarios for platform work – the matching of supply and demand for paid labour through an online platform – by 2030. It draws on Eurofound's "Future scenarios of platform work" project and assesses the expected implications for the economy, labour market and society.

On 28 September, Eurofound presented its e-survey, [Living, working and COVID-19](#), which provides a snapshot of the impact of the pandemic on people's lives, with the aim of helping policymakers to bring about a balanced recovery from the crisis. Two rounds of this unique survey have been carried out to date, allowing for comparison between the first round launched on 9 April, when most Member States were in lockdown, and the second round in July, when society and economies were slowly re-opening.

Research and innovation policy

The SEDEC meeting on 1 October saw a lively and content-rich debate between the CoR members and DG RTD Dir-Gen. Jean-Eric Paquet. For more information, here is the latest [online highlight](#).

On 30 September, the College of Commissioners adopted a key communication establishing a new, competitive, open and talent-driven [European Research Area](#). During the same week, DG RTD launched a [€1 billion European Green Deal Call](#). The last and biggest call under Horizon 2020 [is now open for registration](#) and aims to boost the green and digital transitions.



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On 22-24 September, [the European Research and Innovation Days](#) gathered over 35 000 participants from 188 countries, who came together online in 146 sessions. This year in a digital format, the event brought together the entire innovation system and individuals to discuss how research and innovation policy and funding can deliver on the [European Green Deal](#), [Shaping Europe's digital future](#), the renewed [European Research Area](#) and other priorities. The CoR president, Mr Tzitzikostas opened the event with Commissioner Gabriel on 22 September, stressing the importance of regional innovation ecosystems and the potential of creating and linking 'regional' ERA Hubs.

Leuven (BE) became winner of the 2020 [European Capital of Innovation \(iCapital\) Award](#).

During the European Research and Innovation Days, [the Mission Boards presented their recommendations on EU missions](#). Their reports contain proposals to find solutions by 2030 for adapting to climate change, conquering cancer, greener cities, restoring our ocean and waters and ensuring healthy soil. In September, the EC also launched an [EU missions' call for ideas](#) that will further help us shape EU missions.

Education and Youth, Culture and Sport

In her first [State of the Union address](#) on 16 September, the European Commission president, Ursula Von der Leyen focused on the **digital aspects of education** and underlined the progress achieved in this field during the pandemic: "modern technology has allowed young people to learn remotely and millions to work from home. [...] We saw **years' worth of digital innovation and transformation** in the space of a few weeks." **Culture** was promoted in Ms Von der Leyen's address, with Next Generation EU set to kickstart a "**European renovation wave** and make our Union a leader in the circular economy. But this is not just an environmental or economic project: it needs to be a **new cultural project for Europe**." Ms Von der Leyen announced a "new **European Bauhaus** – a co-creation space where architects, artists, students, engineers, designers work together to make that happen." **Sport** was not explicitly mentioned, but the example of two "young girls playing tennis between the rooftops of Liguria, Italy" evoked the power of inspiration for Next Generation and the importance of physical activity for the wellbeing of EU citizens.

Education and Youth

On 5 October, the 18th European Week of Regions and Cities event opened. This year, the 17-day long event will be fully digital and highlight many important youth policy issues through the following seminars: "Youth policy at the local level", "European Youth Capitals: empowering young citizens in the COVID-19 pandemic", "School of Politics for Young People: lessons from Oulu, Finland",



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"Empowering Europe's vulnerable youth!", "Young generation takes over the Danube region" and "Youth for a Just Transition - preparing a toolkit for meaningful youth participation in the Just Transition Fund". See the full programme [here](#).

On 1 October, during the 4th SEDEC commission meeting, Romy Karier introduced the opinion on *Youth employment support – a bridge to jobs for the next generation*, for which she is rapporteur. She made it clear that she intends to work on two key dimensions, the first one being **partnerships** between local authorities and educational administrations, employment services and youth organisations, in order to help them identify vulnerable young people who could benefit from the Youth Guarantee scheme as early as possible. The other dimension is the exchange of good practices related to the implementation of the Youth Guarantee. To watch Ms Karier's statement, please click [here](#).

On 30 September, the European Commission published the [Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 - Resetting education and training for the digital age](#). This included input received through the EU-wide open public consultation (June-September 2020). During an online outreach event on 20 July, the European Commissioner Mariya Gabriel held discussions with several SEDEC members on their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. On 9 September, at the high-level online event on the closing of the new Digital Education Action Plan public consultation, SEDEC chair Anne Karjalainen and SEDEC member Gillian Coughlan participated in the Policy Cluster debate together with Victor Negrescu MEP.

On 30 September, the European Commission also published the [Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025](#). The communication proposes a framework for cooperation with Member States and engagement with education stakeholders, including a reporting and analysis structure with agreed education targets to encourage and track reforms. Efforts to establish the European Education Area will work in synergy with the **European Skills Agenda**, the **renewed Vocational Education and Training policy** and the **European Research Area**.

On 28 September, Eurofound published a new study, "[Living, working and COVID-19](#)". This study shows that young people are emerging as one of the lockdown's biggest victims, as they report the lowest levels of well-being, despite some improvement since the onset of the pandemic.

On 24 September, the [European Parliament](#) sent its questions to the Council of the European Union and to the European Commission regarding the proposal for a Council recommendation on *A bridge to jobs - Reinforcing the youth guarantee*, on which the Parliament will adopt a resolution on 8 October. MEPs are expected to ask Member States to mobilise more funds for the European Youth Guarantee



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for the 2021-2027 period, via an increase in the European Social Fund plus, in line with previous calls made by the Parliament. MEPs also want to prevent the Guarantee from contributing to "social dumping", "wage dumping" and "work poverty".

[EU education ministers gathered in Osnabrück](#), Germany for an informal meeting on 18 September to discuss the effects of COVID-19 on education and training in Europe. The ministers came together to develop a new foundation for improved European cooperation in the area of vocational training. A draft proposal, called the **Osnabrück Declaration**, will be presented for adoption by the Member States at the Meeting of the Education Council in November. *"We want to increase economic resilience, work together to establish a culture of lifelong learning, embed the principles of sustainability within vocational education and training, and strengthen the international dimension through cross-border mobility"* said Germany's Education Minister, Anja Karliczek.

On 1 September, a [CULT committee meeting](#) was held to present the priorities of the German Presidency in the fields of culture, education, sports and youth. Regarding youth policy, the minister Franziska Giffey said that young people had suffered greatly during the crisis and stressed that the presidency would work to engage, connect and empower them going forward. In this regard, the presidency will present a **renewed cycle of the "EU youth dialogue"** and will work for a **stronger European Solidarity Corps programme**, allowing young people to improve their life skills and competences. While there was general support for the broad aims of the German Presidency's work programme, the chair and CULT members from almost all political groups made it very clear that the MFF deal at the European Council is far from satisfactory as regards Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the Solidarity Corps.

On 30 July, the European Commission proposed [funding for five new Platforms of Centres of Vocational Excellence](#), to meet the needs of an innovative, inclusive and sustainable economy. Funded through Erasmus+ for a maximum budget of €4 million each, the platforms will be active in sectors such as green innovation and urban greening, microelectronics, and the furniture and wood sector. They will also support major European priorities such as the digital and green transitions, sustainable growth, and social fairness and inclusion.

Culture and Cultural Heritage

On 18 August 2020, the European Commission proposed to [extend 2020 European Capitals of Culture into 2021](#). **Mariya Gabriel**, European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, said: *"Culture has been badly hit by the pandemic and European Capitals of Culture are no exception. Despite the energy, enthusiasm and professionalism of their teams and partners, Rijeka and*



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Galway were unable to roll out their 2020 European Capital of Culture programmes as planned. I hope that both cities will make the most of the possibility offered to them to prolong their special year."

On 9 September, the [Tell Me About Europe Project](#) debuted in Prague. Organised by the Goethe-Institut, the project is a series of events, during which older Europeans share their memories and invite **intergenerational debate**. The project is part of the cultural programme of Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

On 19 October, ENCATC will be holding an online workshop on [How Culture Works in Practice](#), as part of its Evaluation Working Sessions. The workshop is designed for academics, researchers, consultants, European Networks funded by the Creative Europe programme and Project Leaders of Creative Europe, Erasmus + and Horizon 2020 projects, and professionals interested in evaluation and the cultural sector.

Sport

At the [CULT Committee meeting](#) on 1 September, Stephan Mayer, German Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister of the Interior, Building and Community, said that the German Presidency will work towards a genuine **EU Sports Plan**, to be presented in December 2020. He said that the Sports Plan would focus on strengthening values, bringing people from various backgrounds together, improving socio-economic aspects, particularly in the context of COVID-19, and fostering a healthier lifestyle.

Information society, artificial intelligence and audiovisual/telecommunications technologies

Artificial intelligence

[The European Institute of Innovation and Technology: Artificial intelligence has helped reduce mortality from COVID-19](#)

The use of an Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool aiding personalised COVID-19 treatment decisions has been shown to lead to a 50% reduction in COVID-19 mortality rates. The tool is the outcome of a project named "Digital Control Centre for COVID-19" from health innovation body EIT Health, and was initiated in April 2020. EIT Health was established in 2015, as a "knowledge and innovation community" (KIC) of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). The EIT is made up of various KICs each focusing on a different sector, or area, of innovation.



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Audiovisual/telecommunications technologies

[The European Audiovisual Observatory has published a round-up of COVID-19 measures](#)

On 22 September, the European Audiovisual Observatory published a round-up report of COVID-19 measures. Governments, cultural institutions and industry representatives have introduced support measures to carry the sector through the crisis, sometimes with notable differences between countries. These range from decisions by national parliaments, to support measures or a relaxing of repayment conditions and deadlines by national film agencies, for example, to media literacy campaigns by national regulatory authorities, right through to content management organisations creating new emergency funds and relaxing the requirements and deadlines linked to the distribution of royalties. At pan-European level, on 21 July 2020 EU leaders agreed on a major recovery plan for Europe and a reinforced long-term EU budget, leading the way out of the crisis and laying the groundwork for a modern and more sustainable Europe.

[Regulators will monitor the impact of COVID-19 on the media market and freedom of expression](#)

As regards potential long-term negative effects on national and European media markets resulting from the COVID-19 crisis, the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services has adopted its work plan for 2021. It includes an action group which will examine changes in European and national media markets. Particular emphasis will be placed on detecting any detrimental effects on media diversity, media pluralism, plurality of opinions and freedom of expression. The more difficult the situation is for media companies, the higher the risks of a decrease in media plurality in Europe. Awareness and intervention by media regulators in this area will therefore be more important than ever.

Smart specialisation

[JRC discusses the role of smart specialisation for economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis](#)

We need coordinated policy initiatives at international, national and regional level to mitigate the economic crisis triggered by COVID-19 and promote a swift recovery. On 17 September, the European Commission's Joint Research Centre organised a webinar on "Place-based responses to the COVID-19 economic crisis". This is part of the SMARTER 2020 Conference Webinar series: Connecting grand societal challenges with local goals in place-based innovation policy.



❖ Responses at regional and local level

Social policy and employment

Pomerania (Poland)

On Thursday 24 September, the European Commission approved the modification of the Operational Programme "Pomerania" (Poland), allowing for the redeployment of €60 million under the CRII and CRII+ investment initiatives deployed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost €22.2 million will be redirected to the health sector, including the purchase of personal and medical equipment. €20.3 million will be used to provide financial assistance to SMEs, VSEs and micro-enterprises that have been severely affected by health restrictions. Finally, €6.7 million will be reallocated to improving working conditions, particularly in long-term care facilities.

Research and innovation

Glasgow (UK)

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, [Glasgow City region](#) has capitalised on its strengths as a city of science and innovation. Activities include researching vaccines, helping to understand more about how the virus works, designing and developing protective equipment for health workers, and utilising new technologies. You can [read more here](#).

Warsaw – Open Innovation (gastronomy and food sector)

The [city of Warsaw](#) is using the Living Lab concept to co-create solutions for the gastronomy sector. With restaurants and bars hit hard by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the local government has invited a number of experts: entrepreneurs, journalists and city officers from various departments. In a pilot project, they aim to identify the most suitable co-creation method at municipal level and to tackle the crisis facing the gastronomy sector. They will produce a solution in September.

Nice – Mapping Positive Impacts

The Côte d'Azur University, together with the city, launched the "Open Map of the Global Pause", [a project](#) collecting positive phenomena that have occurred throughout the world since the beginning of the crisis. Open Map has already collected more than 355 contributions from all over the world. These include natural phenomena, innovations, art and culture, solidarity initiatives, research and some unusual events. The city plans to use the map as an educational tool in the future. Read more [here](#) (in French) and [contribute to the map](#).

1. Smart Solutions For A Simpler City Life
2. Telelink City [project](#) offers to partner with global and local institutions to efficiently integrate this innovation into your city.



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Although smart solutions have already been implemented in many cities, it seems that not many people notice their existence. You might argue that this is the whole point – improving life in an unobtrusive (subtle) way.

However, since future developments often rely on public approval before they are rolled out, it is important to know and communicate the benefits of smart solutions to the public.

Education and Youth, Culture and Sport

During the [18th European Week of Regions and Cities](#), a number of events are being held on the topics of education, culture and cultural heritage and sport.

- [Europass and skills intelligence - delivering skills trends for job seekers across the EU](#), Tue 6, October 2020, 16:30 – 18:00 CET
- [Centres of Vocational Excellence](#), Wed 14 October, 09:30 – 10:30 CET
- [Culture to regenerate remote areas](#), Tue 6 October, 11:30 – 13:00 CET
- [Cultural and Creative Regional Ecosystems \(CCRE-S3\)](#), Wed 14 October, 16:30 – 18:00 CET
- [Promoting greener sport in our regions](#), Wed 7 October, 11:30 – 13:00 CET
- [Unlocking EUR 3 billion for cycling from EU funds](#), Tue 13 October, 16:30 – 18:00 CET

Education and Youth

Düsseldorf, Germany

Düsseldorf opened [kindergartens and daycare facilities](#) regularly again on 8 June. In cooperation with the youth and health departments, the virology division of Düsseldorf university hospital will conduct a clinical model study in local kindergartens. This is the first study of this size and concept in Germany. 5 000 children and childcare workers will be regularly examined and tested for COVID-19 in order to obtain results concerning the spread of the virus among children.

Rotterdam, Netherlands

Rotterdam is investing [€2.4 million in schoolchildren and €20 million in homeless services](#). The money for schoolchildren helped provide 6 000 children from disadvantaged families and areas with extra classes and courses during the summer so that they do not fall behind. Homeless services received investment in independent housing, counselling, advice and providing better living conditions.



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On 23 September, [Pamplona City Council](#) invited 23 youth associations to take part in a debate on the effects of COVID-19 on young people. Through this initiative, Pamplona City Council wants to establish mechanisms to sound out young people on their views, in addition to receiving feedback from them on the implementation and evaluation of the various actions under the Municipal Youth Plan.

On 12 September, [the community of Madrid and municipalities in the region](#) started the "*protect yourself, protect us*" campaign. The objective of this initiative is to encourage young people in the region to behave responsibly and comply with the guidelines issued by health authorities. With this campaign, the community of Madrid intends to offer better care to young people and to highlight the importance of working with institutions, considering that the proximity of city councils and their involvement in working with young people are a key factor in the development of these awareness-raising activities.

On 21 Augustus, [the city of Strasbourg](#) and the Prefecture of Bas-Rhin decided to conduct a targeted COVID-19 testing operation on young people aged 20 to 29. Over several weeks, young people were able to get tested for free and without a prescription in a tent placed in Strasbourg city centre.

Culture and Cultural Heritage

Lublin, Poland

A best practice contest is being organised during the [Cross-Border Cooperation Congress Lublin 2020](#), with the winners announced on 9 October. The contest promotes the best solutions across Europe and the Eastern Partnership countries, which may be an inspiration to others. The contest included **Culture and tourism**: solutions which allow for continuity of activities and offer the recipients services and products which take account of needs during the pandemic.

Bamberg, Germany

The city of Bamberg launched [Köpfe für Kultur](#), a project aimed at preserving its lively cultural scene through a donation campaign. As artists have been unable to perform in recent months and so have run into financial problems, local residents were encouraged to donate and thus support artists for projects in an unbureaucratic way. The portraits of participants are shown in a digital gallery. Thanks to the donation initiative, the [NACHSOMMER an der ERBA-Spitze](#) festival was able to take place from 17 to 27 September.



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The 2020 Malta Book Festival – Virtual Edition

The [2020 Malta Book Festival](#) – virtual edition is being organised by the National Book Council, and this year a special online edition will take place from 11 to 15 November. All events for adults and children will be streamed free of charge on the [Facebook page](#). Even in this new format, the organisers hope to convey the same spirit of exchange among a growing book-loving community.

Sport

Lille, France

Lille Metropole has implemented temporary cycle lanes to meet the needs of its increasing numbers of users. Cycling has increased considerably within the Lille Metropole area over the last two months, with a 60% increase compared to the pre-COVID-19 period. Moreover, Lille Metropole launched the third [Metropolitan Cycling Challenge](#) in June, inspired by the European cycling challenge organised until 2017.

Additional useful links

European Institute of Innovation & Technology: <https://eit.europa.eu/our-activities/covid-19-response>

UNESCO: <https://en.unesco.org/covid19>

Association of European Regions: <https://aer.eu/covid19/>

European Research Council:

https://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/magitems/ERC_actions_on_Covid-19.pdf

European Medicines Agency: <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/human-regulatory/overview/public-health-threats/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/covid-19-whats-new>

European Commission: 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 (Science Hub): <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en>

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>



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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](#)