



European Committee
of the Regions

SEDEC Bulletin N°9

COVID-19 impact and response measures

26 February 2021



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 produces 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

On 17 February, the SEDEC commission held its [first meeting](#) of 2021.

The main point on the agenda was the draft opinion on the implementation of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) from a local and regional perspective. Responding to a referral by the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU, the opinion will stress the pillar's central role in Europe's recovery and adaptation to the green, digital and demographic transitions. It is scheduled for adoption in the May plenary session, just days before the [Social Summit](#) in Porto (7-8 May 2021).

SEDEC members also discussed the European Commission's [proposal for a draft directive](#) which aims to ensure adequate minimum wages for all workers in the EU, this being one of the 20 principles of the Social Pillar. **Peter Kaiser** (AT/PES), governor of Carinthia and rapporteur for the CoR [draft opinion](#), said: "*Low-wage earners, especially young people, the low-skilled and the precariously employed, have been hit particularly hard by the coronavirus crisis, which also has a negative impact on wages. Therefore, a European framework for minimum wages is to be supported, in order to ensure better protection of workers in the future, strengthen social cohesion and prevent in-work poverty, as well as brain-drain, from regions with particularly low wages.*"

Emil Boc (RO/EPP), Mayor of Cluj-Napoca, presented his [draft opinion](#) on the [European Education Area](#) that the European Commission would like the European Union and Member States to achieve by 2025. The opinion draws attention to the need to identify regional education needs and reduce current education disparities between rural and urban areas. "*The European Education Area is the key to better jobs that will also be better paid in the EU. It is the key to reducing intolerance, improving acceptance and strengthening the European identity. It will make Europe stronger from a bottom-up perspective and, in the end, the European Education Area is the key to better democracy in the entire European Union*", said Mr Boc. Both opinions will be adopted at the next CoR plenary session, on 17-19 March.

Two other draft opinions were presented for adoption at the SEDEC meeting on 17 February, which took place on a fully digital basis due to the Covid-19 pandemic:



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[A Union of Equality: EU Action Plan against racism 2020-2025](#)

Rapporteur **Yoomi Renström** (SE/PES), Member of Ovanåker Municipal Council, said: "*Local and regional authorities play a crucial role in upholding European values and are on the front line when it comes to tackling racism and hate crime, protecting vulnerable groups and minorities, and promoting social cohesion. This is why they must be fully recognised as strategic partners in the fight against racism. Moreover, these authorities are also key to elaborating local and regional action plans, which, in addition to the national ones, can help address structural racism by means of a place-based approach, allowing for the design and implementation of measures adapted to the reality on the ground*".

[Media in the Digital Decade: An Action Plan](#)

Rapporteur **Jan Trei** (EE/EPP), Member of Viimsi Rural Municipality Council, underlined: "*The COVID-19 crisis highlights very clearly the need for a strong press as an institution which informs society with balanced, fact-based information and enables open debate. At the same time, the economic recession caused by the crisis has endangered the ability of the media to play a responsible role. In order to maintain a strong, high-quality press at all levels, support measures are needed, in particular to ensure the survival of local and regional media companies. Particular attention must be paid to the situation of small countries, where, due to the small size of the market, the resources for local and regional media to exist are limited.*"

Members also adopted the SEDEC Commission's [2021 Work Programme](#) and appointed **Daniela Ballico** (IT/ECR), Mayor of Ciampino, as rapporteur-general for an opinion on a Union of Equality: Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030.

Social policy and employment

The Portuguese Council presidency has asked the CoR's [SEDEC Commission](#) to prepare an opinion on the implementation of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) from a local and regional perspective. The opinion will stress the pillar's central role in Europe's recovery and adaptation to the green, digital and demographic transitions. It is scheduled for adoption in the May plenary session, just days before the [Social Summit](#) in Oporto. For this reason, an exploratory debate was held at the SEDEC meeting on 17 February 2021.

Gabriel Bastos, Secretary of State for Social Security in Portugal's government, who attended the meeting, said: "Given the CoR's proximity to citizens and the understanding of the reality on the



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ground, its contribution and input will be the key to realising how we should implement the European Pillar of Social Rights and how to modulate and fine-tune social policies."

The Director-General of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, **Joost Korte**, who also attended the meeting, stressed that the Pillar of Social Rights must be at the heart of the EU's coordinated recovery efforts and accompany the digital and green transitions. He confirmed that the Action Plan would include quantifiable targets for 2030 for the Member States within the European Semester and through an improved Social Scoreboard.

Anne Karjalainen, Chair of the SEDEC Commission and rapporteur for the upcoming opinion, pointed out that: "The European Pillar of Social Rights must become part of the DNA of the European Union, to combat social injustice, build up resilience to crises and help people get through the green and digital transitions. It is high time we put it into practice in a coordinated manner throughout the Union. The Action Plan for the implementation of the Pillar should be clear and ambitious, with binding targets to effectively monitor progress. It should also fully acknowledge the role of local and regional authorities in delivering the principles of the Pillar on the ground, ensuring equity and inclusion".

There is going to be a flurry of activity from the European Commission when it comes to social and employment policies in the coming days: on 24 February the Commission is going to publish the communication on "**Improving the working conditions of platform workers**", which will launch a two-stage consultation on the topic. On 3 March the Commission will publish the communication on the "**Action plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights**" – following the feedback received last year from various stakeholders, including the CoR opinion on a "Strong social Europe for Just Transitions" (rapporteur Anne Karjalainen, FI/PES). On the same day, the Commission will publish its "**Strategy on the rights of persons with disabilities**" – SEDEC is in the process of adopting an opinion on this topic.

The REGI Committee of the European Parliament is in the process of adopting the report on "**Reversing demographic trends in the EU using cohesion policy instruments**" (rapporteur Daniel Buda, RO/EPP). The draft opinion was presented at the REGI Committee meeting on 1 February 2021, attended by CoR member János Ádám Karácsony (HU/EPP), rapporteur for the opinion on "Demographic change: proposals on measuring and tackling its negative effects in the EU regions". The CoR has proposed some amendments that have been submitted for the adoption of the report (the vote will probably take place on 16 March 2021).

The Joint Research Centre (JRC) published its report on [The Demographic Landscape of EU territories](#) on 11 February 2021.



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The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) announced the 23 winners of its [Civil Solidarity Prize](#), a one-off contest launched as an alternative to the annual EESC Civil Society Prize to reward not-for-profit initiatives carried out by individuals, civil society organisations and private companies to tackle the COVID-19 crisis and its manifold consequences.

Research and innovation policy

On 4 February, Mariya Gabriel, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, in a debate held at the CoR's Plenary Session, announced the launch of the **ERA Forum for Transition**, a platform freshly created in the framework of the renewed [European Research Area](#) initiative, with the aim of developing **governance of the ERA** and the upcoming **Pact for Research and Innovation**. On this occasion, the Commissioner also [confirmed](#) the CoR's participation in the Forum, which is primarily made up of a group of experts from Member States.

Trilogue negotiations have now been concluded and a political agreement reached on the legal basis and the new [Strategic Innovation Agenda 2021 - 2027](#) of the **European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)**. The proposals adopted will align the EIT with [Horizon Europe](#), the EU's research and innovation programme for 2021-2027. With a budget of nearly EUR 3 billion, representing a 25% increase over the previous funding period, the EIT will drive the **recovery of the economy**, as well as the **green and digital transition** to build a more **sustainable and resilient society**. With its new strategy, the EIT will place increased emphasis on its regional dimension and scale up its collaboration with the European Innovation Council (EIC), which will help boost Europe's overall innovation capacity.

Education and Youth, Culture and Sport

Education and Youth

On 25 February, the **PASCAL Observatory** will be holding a webinar on [The Role of Universities in Innovation and Regional Development](#) - **Implications for Regional Development, Innovation and Higher Education Policy**. The webinar will include a presentation of the results of the RUNIN Marie Curie network on the Role of Universities in Regional Innovation, as well as a panel discussion on the implications for policy.



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On 18 February, Eurocities published a study on [Fighting child poverty in European cities: Lessons from cities for the EU Child Guarantee](#). The study presents fresh new evidence on the local situation of child poverty on the ground, covering 35 cities across 20 EU Member States, with data collected in the second half of 2020 – timely for reflecting the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Based on evidence from their research, Eurocities calls for support for local Child Guarantee schemes to boost local level social investment in children and to involve cities as key partners in developing and delivering the Child Guarantee. All the policy recommendations can be found [here](#).

On 15 February, Mariya Gabriel, EU Commissioner in charge of innovation, research, culture, education and youth, announced that, after a year lost because of the pandemic, the "DiscoverEU" programme would be relaunched in a mega-round that would enable up to 60 000 young people to explore Europe by train. The programme is expected to open for applications in October, with selected participants able to travel between March 2022 and March 2023 for a period of 30 days.

On 10 February, applications opened for the [European Young Leaders Programme 2022 \(EYL 2022\)](#). Each year, this event brings together 40 of the brightest European young leaders and involves them in initiatives aimed at shaping Europe's future. The initiative is organised by the "Friends of Europe" think tank, and provides the possibility of nominating candidates between **30 and 40 years old** that have proven track records as established leaders in their fields of activity. The deadline for application: **15 March 2021**. [More information here](#).

On 3 February, on the first day of the plenary session of the European Committee of the Regions, Mrs Romy Karier presented her opinion on "Youth Employment Support, a bridge to jobs for the next generation". She insisted that without a real commitment to increasing support for young people, the consequences would likely be dramatic and might extend beyond the pandemic crisis. She called for unity to prevent a new generation being lost. The opinion, which calls for the protection of young Europeans' rights to work, fair remuneration and access to social protection as part of the recovery, was adopted unanimously by the European Committee of the Regions.

On 3 February also, the **UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)** presented a webinar on [how prison libraries can support the rehabilitation of the incarcerated worldwide](#) (approximately 11 million). The webinar gave a global overview of the possible impact and transformational potential of providing prison library services and reading-based activities to inmates, while regional examples highlighted experiences from various countries.



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On 24 and 25 January, UNESCO learning cities from around the world celebrated the [International Day of Education](#) on the theme 'Recover and Revitalize Education for the COVID-19 Generation', with a focus on stepping up collaboration and international solidarity to place education and lifelong learning at the centre of the recovery.

EURASHE, in cooperation with the independent group of experts Friends of Smart Specialisation, organised the online event "[Smart UAS in Smart Regions: increasing the strategic cooperation between Professional Higher Education and regions in Europe](#)" on December 2, 2020.

The 2021 EUA Annual Conference on "[Universities 2030: From vision to reality](#)" will take place online on 22-23 April. To contribute to this debate, the EUA has developed a vision of open, engaged and autonomous European universities, outlined in the publication on "[Universities without walls – A vision for 2030](#)".

Culture and Cultural Heritage

During the **Plenary Session** on 4 February, in a debate with **Commissioner Mariya Gabriel**, CoR members underlined the strong **contribution of culture and cultural heritage to local and regional development and to European values, identities and citizenship**. They argued that art and culture should have a more prominent role in the debate on the future of the EU. Ms Gabriel assured the audience that "with our joint support, we will make sure that culture can and will play a key role in building a greener, more vibrant and more resilient Europe."

After the debate, CoR rapporteur **Giuseppe Varacalli** (IT/Renew E) presented his [opinion on the Restart of Cultural and Creative Sectors](#). The report calls for steps to be taken to ensure that **EU funds** reach all parts of the culture and creative sector and all those who are involved in developing it.

On 11 February, **Pearle*** launched a new edition of the [Map of Europe](#), presenting updates on the re-opening of venues and live cultural events. Based on the information provided by Pearle* members, the map shows the different situations from country to country, with some countries allowing performances for smaller audiences, others allowing rehearsals, whilst in many countries live performances remain closed until further notice.

On 1 February, the **European Investment Fund (EIF)** signed a guarantee agreement with Danish alternative finance provider REinvent Finance. The alternative investment fund manager will provide [new financing for operators in the Nordic film and TV series industry](#) to improve access to finance for a category under pressure due to COVID-19. The guarantee agreement is backed by the European



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Commission under the Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Facility (CCS GF) and the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI).

In January and February, the **UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning** held three virtual workshops to support 12 countries from Africa and the Arab region in action research in [literacy assessment and monitoring](#).

EURASHE, with the support of the **Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU**, is organising the 30th Annual Conference on "[Professional Higher Education for Sustainable Development: Creating a Change that Endures](#)" on 20-21 May 2021. The virtual event will include various speakers from European institutions, higher education leaders and business representatives.

EURASHE, together with its partners from the [Recognition of Prior Learning](#) in practice (RPLip) project, will organise the final virtual conference of the project on 16 March 2021 from 9.30 a.m. to 2.45 p.m. CET on Zoom.

The **OECD** is organising a series of webinars on [Cultural and Creative Sectors and Local Development](#). The project, part of the **European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage**, aims to provide evidence and guidance on ways to maximise the economic and social value of cultural heritage and support the emergence of the creative economy. On 25-26 February the topic will be **SME support ecosystems for Cultural and Creative Sectors**, and in March it will be **Innovation in public and private investment in arts and culture**. Materials from previous webinars are available on the project's webpage.

Sport

According to the [European Parliamentary Research Service](#), despite the cancellation of major sports competitions at all levels, research reveals that COVID-19-related restrictions have only increased the appeal of outdoor activities and made initiatives such as the **European Week of Sport** more necessary than ever. Although there have been major job and revenue losses in the sports industries, the **EU Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) and the CRII+** have proved invaluable in addressing the situation.



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On 26 January, **EuropeActive** and its national association partners came together for the first [European Fitness Association Forum \(EFAF\) round table of 2021](#). During the session, participants looked at the year ahead and the opportunities for the sector in terms of physical activity promotion campaigns, the value of standards and the implementation of national registers for exercise professionals.

On 14 January, **EuropeActive** hosted the online kick-off meeting of the [Active Ageing Communities \(AAC\) project](#). The EU funded project aims to create active communities by addressing the mental, social and socio-economic barriers to physical activity for older people in order to combat inactivity and social isolation.

Under the SHARE initiative (https://ec.europa.eu/sport/share-initiative_en), a series of thematic webinars will be organised throughout 2021. The first webinar is scheduled for **late March 2021** and will focus on the Active Development concept which was covered in one of the SHARE research papers (<https://keanet.eu/wp-content/uploads/SHARE-Active-Development-FINAL.pdf>). The concept of Active Development encompasses the process of integrating the promotion of sport and physical activity into economic and social development strategies at local and regional levels, as well as into smart specialisation strategies. This also becomes relevant in view of the upcoming negotiation process on the Partnership Agreements and Programmes in the context of EU Cohesion Policy and its funding mechanisms. The webinar will be attended by representatives of local and regional authorities, regional offices in Brussels, DG REGIO national desks, the European Parliament 'Sports Group' and the Council Working Parties on Sport & Structural Measures.

Information society, artificial intelligence and audiovisual/telecommunications technologies

Information society

['Destination Earth' will contribute to the European Commission's Green Deal and Digital Strategy](#)

This has been conceived as a federated cloud-based modelling and simulation platform, providing access to data, advanced computing infrastructure (including high performance computing), software, artificial intelligence applications and analytics. It will integrate digital twins – digital replicas of various aspects of the Earth system. Initially, DestinE will serve public authorities. DestinE will be implemented gradually over the next 7-10 years, starting in 2021. The operational core platform, the digital twins and services are scheduled to be developed as part of the Digital Europe programme, whilst Horizon Europe will provide research and innovation opportunities. Synergies with other EU programmes, such as the Space Programme, are also planned.



[STOA workshop on the use of AI, big data and space technologies in territorial management](#)

On 23 February 2021, the European Parliament organised a STOA workshop together with the Portuguese EU presidency on the use of AI, big data and space technologies in territorial management. The participants presented and discussed projects that use artificial intelligence (AI), big data and space technologies in territorial management, demonstrating how the EU, Member States and local authorities can better monitor and manage climate change, for example, anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions and changes in the oceans' composition and interaction with the atmosphere and the quality dynamics of urban environments. STOA is the Panel for the Future of Science and Technology.

Artificial intelligence

[JRC report on cybersecurity issues with artificial intelligence in autonomous vehicles](#)

A report by the JRC and the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) looks at cybersecurity risks connected to artificial intelligence (AI) in autonomous vehicles and provides recommendations for mitigating them. This is important for those local and regional authorities that have already been involved in pilot projects testing driverless vehicles as an element of their smart mobility strategies.

[The Europeana Network Association's 2021 work plan on AI for cultural heritage dissemination](#)

In 2021, EuropeanaTech, the R&D community within the Europeana Network Association, will bolster its role as an intermediary knowledge-sharing body of digital cultural heritage experts, with considerable focus on growing innovative technologies related to AI and 3D presentation of digital cultural heritage. Reflecting its public service role, Europeana will develop and use cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence, e-translation and machine learning in line with the European Commission's Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI. EuropeanaTech has started an inventory of national AI investment across the EU27 to see how much investment there is in the cultural and creative industries.

[The European Disability Forum proposes 'red lines' for the use of Artificial Intelligence](#)

The EDF has joined other organisations sending an open letter to the European Commission calling for the introduction of red lines in the upcoming European Commission proposal on Artificial Intelligence. There have been several examples where AI technologies have been used in a way that resulted in discrimination against people with disabilities in different spheres of life. For example, Austria's employment agency was criticised for rolling out a sorting algorithm that gave lower scores to women and people with disabilities, thereby reducing their chances of finding work. HireVue, an AI-powered video-interviewing system used by large firms such as Goldman Sachs and Unilever, was found to massively discriminate against many people with disabilities who have facial expressions and voices



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that are outside the 'norm'. This affected, amongst others, deaf, blind and deaf-blind people, as well as those with speech impairments and people who have survived a stroke. There have also been cases of discriminatory use of AI technologies against people with disabilities by state and private entities in the allocation of social benefits and access to education.

Audiovisual/telecommunications technologies

[The CoR SEDEC commission has adopted its draft opinion on the European Commission's Media Action Plan](#)

In rapporteur Jan Trei's (ET/EPP) draft opinion, adopted on 17 February 2021, the CoR SEDEC commission called on the European Commission, in the context of future European news media forums and initiatives on prospects for the European media sector, to pay particular attention to ensuring the widest possible representation and involvement of local and regional media. The CoR stressed, in particular, the crucial importance of promoting small and medium-sized enterprises in the audiovisual and media sectors; the CoR called for them to be consulted and included in the further development of initiatives such as the MEDIA market gateway and creative innovation labs to support start-ups and scale-ups. The CoR will adopt its opinion at its Plenary Session on 5-6 May 2021.

[The European Audiovisual Observatory: report on "Artificial intelligence in the audiovisual sector"](#)

The European Audiovisual Observatory, operating under the aegis of the Council of Europe, has published a report on "Artificial intelligence in the audiovisual sector". The report has found that, in the audiovisual industry, as in other sectors, the increasing use of artificial intelligence is likely to herald a paradigm shift, as it can transform the entire value chain: from content production, programming and advertising to consumer expectations and behaviour due to the abundance of offers and devices and the personalisation of content. On the dark side, though, AI can contribute to the proliferation of "fake news", and it raises issues regarding users' right to information, media diversity and pluralism, and data protection, to name but a few.

[The European University institute has published its latest report on media pluralism](#)

The media ecosystem has rapidly evolved in recent years. Significant changes have been observed in the way that the news has been produced, disseminated and consumed. Technological advancements have created new opportunities and prompted new sources of risk. The risks include a lack of transparency in algorithm-driven news intermediaries; the increasing importance of private technological companies in governing communication online; the polarisation of the public debate; and the decreasing sustainability of the legacy news media and journalism. Recently, these issues have been high on the agenda of public discussions and of policy-making both in the EU and worldwide.



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Smart specialisation

[Survey: How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected RIS3 management and activities?](#)

The Territorial Development Unit of the Joint Research Centre (JRC) has developed a survey aimed at understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on RIS3 management and activities. The institutions in charge of the design and implementation of regional and national RIS3 are sent the link to the survey and encouraged to take part in it. For any questions, the official responsible may be contacted by e-mail: Inmaculada.PERIANEZ-FORTE@ec.europa.eu.

[STOA Workshop: Exploring synergies between Horizon Europe and regional policy \(online event\)](#)

On 2 February 2021, the online workshop was convened by Christian Ehler, MEP and STOA First Vice-Chair. STOA is the Panel for the Future of Science and Technology. The workshop explored synergies between Horizon Europe and regional policy instruments. Horizon Europe focuses on tackling major societal challenges, maximising the competitiveness impact of research and innovation and raising and spreading levels of excellence in the research base. ESIFs place a strong emphasis on governance via the smart specialisation process and the definition of clear objectives as regards building knowledge and innovation capacity. Regions are at the forefront of the challenge implementing an appropriate mix of research, innovation and regional development policies – they can make use of new administrative rules aimed at better synergies.

❖ Responses at regional and local level

Social policy and employment

Ghent, Belgium

Ghent has launched an ambitious programme targeting children and young people, aimed at reducing poverty and in particular addressing the issue of homelessness. It is estimated that one in five children in Ghent is born into a deprived family – this programme attempts to put an end to that. The city has even sought to engage young people through polls on Instagram: more than 50 000 youngsters were involved in the "We are the city" campaign, which hopes to propel Ghent towards becoming European Youth Capital 2024.



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Research and innovation

Bratislava, Budapest, Prague and Warsaw

The Mayors of Bratislava, Budapest, Prague and Warsaw issued a joint statement on 15 February, demanding that their cities be properly involved in the **national recovery and resilience plans**. They shared their **disagreement with** the unwillingness of their **national governments** to engage in real dialogue with local authorities about the distribution of European funds aimed at shaking off the effects of the pandemic. The four mayors, who in December 2019 signed the [Free Cities Pact](#), are now expressing their concern about the prospects for recovery from the pandemic, and in particular about the national recovery and resilience plans.

Budapest, Hungary

The Municipality of Budapest, besides offering [free Covid-19 testing](#) for its inhabitants, has made its **software** enabling registrations for rapid testing **open source**, making it available free of charge to other municipalities already facing budgetary difficulties. The Metropolitan Municipality is thus joining in with international practice aimed at transparency and accountability. It is providing a good example of innovative and cooperative leadership in smart cities.

Education and Youth, Culture and Sport

Murcia, Spain

From 23 February to 27 March, Murcia City Council, Spain, will step up its online training strategy for youth during the COVID-19 pandemic, by providing free, open and entirely digital training for young people and professionals working in the field of youth and youth associations.

Nancy, France

On 3 February, the Nancy municipal credit bank set up "emergency loan" arrangements, which allow young people to pledge an object belonging to them, even one of low value, in exchange for 200 euros. The aim of the initiative is to counter the precariousness of young people and students that has been accentuated by the coronavirus crisis.

Lublin, Poland

The city of Lublin has opened [Bioteka](#) – an innovative "green" library. Currently, Bioteka stores over 35 000 copies of printed books, audiobooks, films and music. Some copies are for people with visual impairments, with books written in braille and the possibility of recording materials on special devices



called "readers". Apart from the main library rooms, there are also workshop rooms, a games room and a computer room.

Nice, France

The City of Nice has entered into a three-year 2019-2021 framework agreement with the Ministries of National Education and Culture to develop [Artistic and Cultural Education in schools in Nice](#). The City of Nice is thus offering, both during and outside school hours, a wide range of cultural opportunities for young people: museum visits, heritage visits, opera shows, etc. This plan is aimed at kindergarten and elementary school pupils in public and private schools in Nice.

Brussels, Belgium

On 21 January, the government of the Brussels-Capital Region approved a [new package of aid measures](#) aimed at the economic sectors most affected by the crisis, with a total amount of nearly EUR 74 million. It concerns the following four sectors: restaurants and cafes, as well as their main suppliers; tourist accommodation, including hotels and guest houses; companies active in events, culture and tourism; and nightclubs.

Venice, Italy

The [Groove Season by Cultura Venezia](#) restarts online as of 26 February, for a month of streaming concerts reaching music lovers directly at home. Concerts will be broadcast every Friday evening at 9 p.m., via livestreaming on dedicated YouTube and Facebook channels.

Malta

[Festivals Malta](#) has come up with a list of initiatives to keep the carnival spirit alive. One such initiative is the [Carnival Costumes Exhibition](#), which Festivals Malta is organising in collaboration with [Spazju Kreattiv](#). The exhibition features a number of elaborate costumes, designed by 12 carnival participants. It is the first time such an exhibition is being held and gives visitors the chance to admire the craftsmanship behind these creations. The costumes, which have been specifically designed for this year's event, will be on display until 7 March: www.facebook.com/karnivaltamalta.

Sofia, Bulgaria

Sofia Municipality will be financing 141 projects as part of its 2021 municipal "Culture" programme. For this year's Sofia Culture Programme, a record 550 proposals were submitted, which were evaluated by committees consisting of external experts in the different arts.



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Bologna, Italy

The Mayor of Bologna signed a decree that allows the use of indoor sports facilities, including school gyms, from 1 February. The decree remains in force until 5 March and also introduces a mandatory PCR test for operators and athletes.

Smart specialisation

[Fostering environmental-oriented activities through S3 – Results from the call for contributions](#)

'Interregional cooperation on circular bio-economy in the Baltic Sea Region', 'Eco-innovation towards a circular economy in the Basque Country, Spain', 'Green transition in Ii Municipality, Oulu Region, Finland', and 'Direct citizen participation in green energy transition, Hauts-de-France' have been mentioned as inspiring recent implementation examples of Smart Specialisation. 10 cases in total have been selected within the framework of the call by the JRC S3 Platform on 'Fostering the implementation of environmental-oriented activities through Smart Specialisation'.

Additional useful links

Horizon: the EU Research & Innovation magazine: <https://horizon-magazine.eu/>

Portail de la Recherche et des Technologies en Wallonie: <https://recherche-technologie.wallonie.be/>

Innoviris.brussels: <https://innoviris.brussels/fr>

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/>

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>



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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/newsandevents/> (Digital/AI/Social/R&I)
Bruegel: [The latest on COVID-19](#)
CEPS: [Research on COVID-19](#)
WHO: [Coronavirus Dashboard](#)