

The EU's response to coronavirus in its neighbourhood and beyond

SUMMARY

The true extent of the evolving coronavirus pandemic within the EU and across the world is still unclear, and the magnitude of the consequences is not known either. What is clear, however, is that the healthcare systems of many countries across the world are underfunded, and that even developed countries are severely challenged by the health crisis.

Moreover, the socio-economic impact of the crisis across the world will likely be grave, while the multiple crises related to the pandemic – including the global infodemic – may have lasting effects on the global geopolitical balance.

Against this backdrop, on 8 April 2020 the European Commission and the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) presented a proposal for a strong and targeted EU response to help partner countries cope with the pandemic, as outlined in a joint communication. In its response, the EU is adopting a 'Team Europe' approach, combining resources from the EU, its Member States and financial institutions.

The collective package of €15.6 billion is to help here and now, but also has a longer-term perspective. It will focus on addressing the pressing health crisis and resulting humanitarian needs, bolstering partner countries' health, water and sanitation systems and their research and preparedness capacities to deal with the pandemic, as well as mitigating the impact on societies and economies. This should also help to reduce the risk of destabilisation.

The EU's financial support for the countries covered by European Neighbourhood Policy will amount to €3.07 billion: €2.1 billion for the southern neighbourhood, and €962 million for the eastern neighbourhood. Moreover, €800 million will support the six western Balkan countries and Turkey.

As a long-standing major international aid contributor, the EU will promote and lead a coordinated multilateral response, together with the United Nations (UN), international financial institutions, and the G7 and the G20.



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The EU's global response to the coronavirus outbreak

While the true extent of the evolving pandemic is still unclear, and the magnitude of the consequences is also unknown, it is already clear that many countries' healthcare systems are underfunded, that even developed countries are severely challenged and that millions of people are suffering as a consequence. Moreover, the socio-economic impact of the crisis around the world is expected to be grave and it is evident that the health crisis and the accompanying (dis)information crisis may have lasting effects on the global geopolitical balance.

Against this backdrop, the EU is stepping up its global response to the evolving multiple crises. To help rise to the immediate challenges, on 8 April 2020 the European Commission and the High Representative [presented](#) a joint communication setting out a strong and targeted EU global response to the pandemic, designed to help partner countries cope.

The collective package will focus on addressing pressing short-term needs, both humanitarian and in the health sector, bolstering partner countries' health, water and sanitation systems and their research and preparedness capacities to deal with the pandemic, as well as on mitigating the impact on societies and economies, with a view to reducing the risk of destabilisation.

The 'Team Europe' approach combines resources from the EU, its Member States and financial institutions, including the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The overall package amounts to over €20 billion. The Commission and the European Investment Bank have already pledged more than €15.6 billion from existing programmes. The package will help the most vulnerable countries in Africa and in the EU's neighbourhood, as well as in Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean. The first packages are already being implemented in the immediate neighbourhood: in eastern and southern partner countries and in the western Balkans.

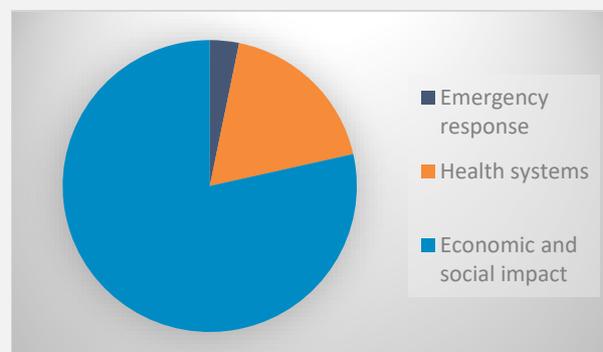
The EU is a long-standing major international aid contributor. It supports and promotes a coordinated multilateral response, with the United Nations, international financial institutions and the G7 and the G20. The EU's global response to COVID-19 builds on the EU's strategic objectives stemming from its international commitments, e.g. vis-à-vis the environment and climate, in line with the [European Green Deal](#) and the [digital agenda](#).

The pandemic has unleashed a global '[battle of narratives](#)', in which non-democratic state actors such as China and Russia are engaging in global information campaigns to influence the global

The COVID-19 response package

Of the overall package of €15.6 billion, €3.25 billion is for Africa, with €2.06 billion for sub-Saharan Africa and €1.19 billion for the north African EU neighbourhood countries. The EU is allocating a total of €3.07 billion for the countries covered by [European Neighbourhood policy](#): €2.1 billion for the south (including the above-mentioned €1.19 billion) and €962 million for the eastern partner countries. Moreover, €800 million will support the western Balkans and Turkey. The overall package entails another €1.42 billion in guarantees for Africa and the neighbourhood from the European Fund for Sustainable Development.

The EU will support Asia and the Pacific with €1.22 billion. €291 million will go to the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific region, €918 million to support the EU's partners in Latin America and the Caribbean and €111 million to support overseas countries and territories.



In terms of the thematic breakdown of the funds, €502 million is for the urgent, short-term emergency response; €2.8 billion is to support research, health and water systems in partner countries and €12.28 billion is to address the economic and social consequences.

Source: [European Commission](#).

narrative about the pandemic. In particular, the Chinese Communist Party's information suppression and disinformation campaigns in combination with highly visible, staged global health assistance, appear to seek to convey the message that authoritarian nationalism is the most viable answer to the pandemic, and that societies must choose between security and freedom. Local European proxies have welcomed Chinese and Russian aid, while downplaying or ignoring EU efforts.

Against this backdrop, the joint communication underlines the EU's continued commitment to promoting and upholding good governance, human rights, the rule of law, gender equality and non-discrimination, as well as fundamental values and humanitarian principles. The communication specifically reiterates that the 'extraordinary measures required to contain the pandemic **must not undermine the fundamental values and principles of our open and democratic societies**'.

The 'Team Europe' approach

As set out in the [joint communication](#), the 'Team Europe' approach provides for a joined-up strategy for the EU's external response to the global coronavirus crisis, based on four pillars:

Team Europe priorities: these are to (i) respond to the immediate health crisis and humanitarian needs; (ii) boost health, water and sanitation systems, and partner countries' research capacities to address the pandemic; and (iii) tackle the immediate socio-economic impact.

Team Europe packages: these will be developed in coordination with implementing partners (including the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and European development finance institutions, Member States' development agencies and technical assistance providers, as well as international financial institutions) to create a coherent financial package for each partner country in need.

Team Europe for Global Preparedness: this pillar involves support for the [Global Preparedness Monitoring Board](#), which has set the global fundraising goal at €7.5 billion.

Team Europe for global coordination and multilateralism: the plan here is that the EU will use its position as a global player and major international aid contributor to promote a coordinated global response, notably in the framework of the G7, the G20 and UN-led international response, raising the profile of EU support for its partners.

Examples of the EU's COVID-19-related support beyond the neighbourhood

In addition to its €102 million contribution to the WHO-led Universal Health Coverage Partnership, the EU will mobilise another €41.5 million to strengthen sustainable health security preparedness and health systems. This includes €25 million in new funding from the European Development Fund reserve.

The EU has mobilised €10 million for Ethiopia's COVID-19 outbreak preparedness and response plan. The funds will help Ethiopia increase the number of treatment centres, diagnostic laboratories with COVID-19 diagnostic equipment and test kits. In Nigeria, the EU will give €50 million to help the UN Development Programme implement the UN's COVID-19 response plan. For Sudan, the EU has raised €10 million to ensure access to clean water and hygiene as well as to raise awareness about the virus.

In Venezuela and the region, the EU is giving €9 million to the Pan-American Health Organisation and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent to help prepare the response to COVID-19.

In the Caribbean, the EU has offered €8 million in regional support to the Caribbean Public Health Agency CARPHA to cover the countries' most urgent needs regarding outbreak control operations.

Support for the neighbourhood and pre-accession countries

The EU is working with its immediate neighbours to advance stabilisation, security and prosperity, in line with the [Global Strategy for the European Union's foreign and security policy](#). [European Neighbourhood Policy](#) (ENP) – first launched in 2004 and revised most recently in 2015 – governs the EU's relations with 16 eastern and southern neighbours: to the east, Armenia, Azerbaijan,

Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine; and to the south, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria and Tunisia. In addition to the above-mentioned goals, the ENP was created to avoid new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours.

The EU's proposed financial support for its neighbourhood totals €3.07 billion for the whole neighbourhood: €2.1 billion for the south; €962 million for the eastern partner countries and €800 million for the western Balkans and Turkey. Among other concrete measures, the EU has signed a new [Initiative for Health Security](#) with the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) amounting to €9 million. It covers all 23 neighbourhood and enlargement countries and focuses on capacity-building for epidemiologists and front-line health staff in partner countries, to boost preparedness for the outbreak and its consequences.

Support for the eastern neighbourhood

As part of its global response to the coronavirus outbreak, the EU has mobilised a total of €962 million for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine (Figure 1). Within the Team Europe, the EU is [organising](#) an emergency support package of over €80 million for immediate needs in these six countries. In cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO), the EU is preparing a €30 million programme to jointly purchase and safeguard the supply and distribution of medical devices and personal equipment, including ventilators, laboratory kits, masks and safety suits. The Commission will redirect up to €700 million from already existing instruments to help address the socio-economic impact of the coronavirus crisis.

Figure 1 – EU assistance to cover immediate, short- and medium-term needs



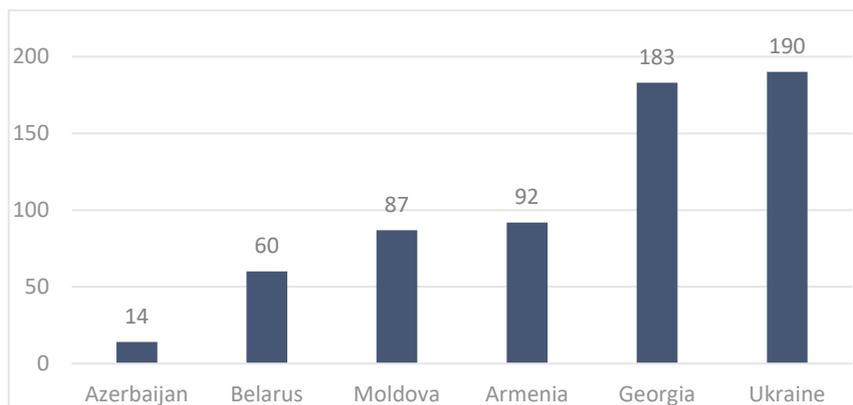
Source: [European Commission](#).

The EU has mobilised more than €11.3 million in small grants of up to €60 000 for civil society organisations to address immediate needs, such as supporting local schools with distance learning. Moreover, an 'eastern partnership solidarity programme' supporting civil society and local organisations will help the people worst affected.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the region will benefit from a new €100 million support programme. Existing funding instruments, including the [European Fund for Sustainable Development](#) (EFSD), will be redirected to mitigate the pandemic's socio-economic impact.

In addition, current EU bilateral programmes are already providing support on the ground. For example, in Ukraine, the EU has supplied the Emergency Medical Care Centre of Donetsk Oblast with 100 sets of personal protective equipment as well as more than 70 litres of highly concentrated antiseptic liquid. A Georgian medical textiles producer was able to make 40 000 medical gowns within a week, after a micro-grant provided by the EU enabled the purchase of 12 additional sewing machines. In Armenia, with EU support, more than 3 000 vulnerable households with elderly people and people with disabilities are to receive humanitarian aid packages.

Figure 2 – EU support for individual eastern partnership countries, in € million



Source: [European Commission](#).

Special focus on Ukraine

Ukraine is a priority country for the European Union. Since the 2013-2014 Euromaidan revolution and Russia's launch of its undeclared [hybrid war](#) against Ukraine, including its illegal annexation of [Crimea](#), the EU has stepped up its [support](#) for the country significantly. In the face of the growing COVID-19 pandemic, the EU is continuing its support. An initial [package](#) for Ukraine, of approximately €80 million, envisages the following:

Support for the Ukrainian health system – This includes a financial contribution to the WHO's work in Ukraine. Out of €30 million for the entire EaP region, the largest part is set aside for Ukraine. It will offer possibilities to purchase necessary medical supplies and equipment, and to boost the health system's capacity to tackle the outbreak. Ukraine will also benefit from the new EU Initiative for health security (see above). There are ongoing efforts to boost the Ukrainian health ministry's crisis management mechanisms.

Support for Ukraine's economy, notably small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – Liquidity will be provided, including via international financial institutions (IFIs). The EU is already working with IFIs and financing institutions from EU Member States to speed up the uptake and reinforcement of existing credit lines and support programmes for SMEs and the self-employed. The launch of a new SME support programme (€20 million) will be accelerated. There will be €25 million in additional funding for small farms.

Support for the people worst affected by the crisis, in cooperation with civic partners – In the first round, some €2 million from regional and bilateral instruments will be mobilised for a social relief package, including protection of vulnerable groups, transition to online education and action to combat disinformation. Special focus will be on conflict-affected areas in eastern Ukraine where humanitarian and early recovery partners are working on COVID-19 emergency responses. This includes buying protective suits for doctors, supply of disinfectants, and assisting volunteers who deliver food and medicines to the elderly.

Further funding under the 2020 budget will be added later this year, responding to evolving needs. The COVID-19 help comes in addition to the €5.2 million package recently announced in response to the conflict in Ukraine's eastern regions and the destabilisation of the Sea of Azov region.

Support for the western Balkans and Turkey

The EU package for western Balkans and Turkey is worth €800 million. This consists of the packages [already announced](#) of over €410 million for the western Balkans (see below) and €90 million for Turkey for the Facility for Refugees, a coordination mechanism set up in November 2015 that pools funds from existing EU budget instruments and Member States. Furthermore, an additional [€290 million](#) is envisaged to support the socio-economic recovery of the entire western Balkan region.

On 30 March, the EU announced a package of [over €410 million](#) in reallocated bilateral financial assistance to the **western Balkans**: EU candidate countries Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, and potential candidates Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. The package is divided

into [two parts](#): funds allocated to immediate support for the health sector (€38 million) and funds envisaged for social and economic recovery support (€374 million).

The first part supports the supply of medical devices and personal equipment, including ambulances, ventilators, laboratory kits, digital mobile x-ray devices, intensive care equipment, personal protective equipment (masks, goggles, gowns and safety suits) and hospital beds. The second, much bigger, part is aimed at mitigating the socio-economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic. This will be done through support to the private sector, increased social protection, with specific attention to vulnerable groups, and by strengthening resilience in the public health sector.

The biggest beneficiary is Serbia (see box below), which should receive €93.4 million in total from this package, followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina (€80.5 million), Kosovo (€68 million), North Macedonia (€66 million), Montenegro (€53 million) and Albania (€50.7 million). The EU has also invited the **western Balkan countries** to join its joint procurement agreement.

The **western Balkan countries** will also benefit from the EU's new health security initiative (see above). They are already receiving support from the EU's [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control \(ECDC\)](#), which is sharing its coronavirus-related guidance and assessments with them.

Countries involved in EU accession negotiations may also receive financial assistance from the [EU Solidarity Fund](#) (EUSF). The EUSF was [adjusted](#) following the European Parliament's March 2020 plenary session and now also covers [major public health emergencies](#).

Serbia, North Macedonia and Montenegro, together with Turkey, Iceland, Norway and all the EU Member States belong to [rescEU](#), a reserve of capacities to fight disasters that is part of the [EU civil protection mechanism](#). On top of existing reserves – including a medical team trained to set up a field hospital, medical evacuation capacities and firefighting planes and helicopters – arrangements are being made for a [stockpile of medical equipment](#), such as ventilators and protective masks.

Special focus on Serbia

Support for Serbia totals [€93.4 million](#) and consists of immediate support for the health sector (€15 million) and social and economic recovery support (€78.4 million).

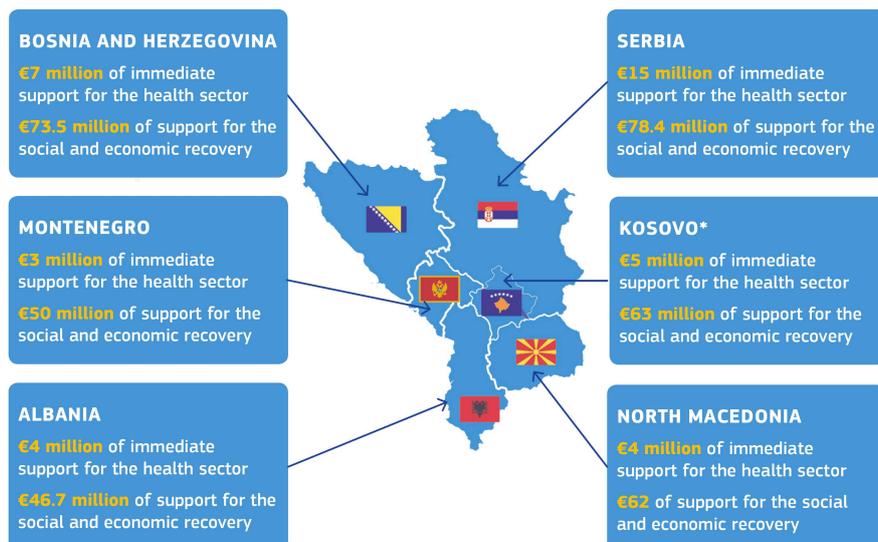
[Five cargo planes](#) with medical equipment purchased by Serbia landed in the country enabling the rapid delivery of 280 tonnes of emergency medical supplies. The costs of the flights were covered in full by the EU from the funds for immediate support for the health sector.

A grant agreement with the UN Office of Project Services – UNOPS – worth [€4.9 million](#) was signed on 3 April. This grant will enable the purchase of ventilators, intensive care monitors, contactless thermometers, tests and protective and laboratory equipment.

Over the past 20 years the EU has delivered [€200 million in grants and €250 million in loans](#) to the health sector in Serbia. Furthermore, [almost](#) €2 billion in non-refundable grants has supported the modernisation of Serbia since the beginning of accession talks six years ago. These [investments](#) are helping Serbia to fight COVID-19 now. The money has allowed the reconstruction and construction of 20 large hospitals, including those that are now proving crucial in the fight against COVID-19. The EU has provided hospitals, [laboratories](#) and institutes of public health with equipment. Moreover, the EU has funded 252 emergency medical vehicles for health centres around Serbia, of which 122 were delivered with ventilators, which are key in the treatment of COVID-19 patients. The EU donation to the last project alone was worth €8.7 million.

Various EU-funded programmes are also supporting resilience [and](#) organisation in Serbian society in the emergency context. This includes social assistance for [elderly people](#), support for [distance learning](#), and the [3D printing](#) of face shields for medical workers using machines purchased in part through various EU-funded projects.

Figure 3 – Funds for western Balkan countries announced on 30 March 2020



* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

Source: [European Commission](#).

Support for the southern neighbourhood

In the southern neighbourhood – Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia – the EU is redirecting [funding of €2.1 billion](#), at regional and country levels, and for refugees and migrants, to alleviate the pandemic's health-related and socio-economic impact. The Commission [lists](#) various measures taken in all but two of the above-mentioned countries: at the time of writing, Algeria and Israel had not officially requested any additional EU support.

Figure 4 – Division of €2.1 billion for the southern neighbourhood



Source: [European Commission](#).

Funds for the health sector will support continuity of critical health care in the crisis, provide the most necessary protective equipment, specific training and technical assistance in hospitals. Funds addressing socio-economic impact will be allocated, inter alia to support SMEs, deliver trade facilitation and provide more financing in local currency, provide support for incomes and social protection, especially for the most vulnerable. At the same time the EU is reorienting its cooperation programmes to support the budgets of partner countries directly, to help them face the social and fiscal costs of the crisis. This includes €250 million in liquidity for the Tunisian treasury, as well as backing for the Moroccan government, with the reallocation of €150 million specifically dedicated to the needs of the Moroccan Special COVID-19 Pandemic Management Fund. This aid is important both to fight COVID-19 and to prevent destabilisation of the Mediterranean region.

As part of its immediate response, the EU has allocated almost [€240 million](#) for strengthening resilience in neighbouring countries hosting Syrian refugees, namely Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. These resources will be channelled via the [EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis](#) (the 'Madad' trust fund), which already benefits both the local population and refugees. The additional funding will be allocated as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Resilience funding through the Madad trust fund

Amount	Country	Scope	Purpose
€100 million	Lebanon	Resilience / social safety net	Strengthening resilience of vulnerable local households and Syrian refugees Establishing sustainable social safety nets
€57.5 million	Lebanon	Education	Strengthening the public education system to deliver inclusive and quality education for vulnerable local and Syrian refugee children
€10.5 million	Lebanon	Child protection systems	Supporting high quality, sustainable child protection systems, policy and services for boys, girls and women
€27.5 million	Jordan	Education	Providing for inclusive, equitable and quality education for Syrians in refugee camps
€22 million	Jordan	Health	Improving the public health system, including prevention and management of diseases, in particular through primary health care
€11 million	Jordan	Women's empowerment	Empowering local and refugee women and improving their access to livelihood opportunities
€10 million	Iraq	Living conditions / peacebuilding support	Improving the living and housing conditions of vulnerable returnees and supporting peacebuilding in western Ninewa in Iraq

Source: [European Commission](#).

Along with the above-mentioned funds, the Madad trust fund exceeds €2 billion. These funds were allocated to Lebanon (over €900 million), Jordan (over €500 million), Turkey (over €500 million) and Iraq (over €160 million). The projects already completed are improving the situation in the region, with [activities](#) ranging from vaccination programmes, medical examinations, provision of essential medicines and health education to building and extending the [medical emergency infrastructure](#).

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