

Financial assistance for countries seriously affected by a major public health emergency

With much of Europe in the grip of the novel coronavirus, the European Commission announced a series of measures on 13 March 2020 to help countries cope with the socio-economic impact of the crisis. As part of this package, the Commission proposes extending the scope of the EU Solidarity Fund to include major public health emergencies, providing valuable additional support. The proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council is due to be voted during the extraordinary plenary session organised on 26 March to enable the adoption of this and two other specific measures.

Background

Open to Member States and EU candidate countries, the EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF) was established by a Council [Regulation](#) in 2002 and is funded from outside the EU budget with additional money raised by Member States. Intervening in some 87 [disasters](#) to date, the fund has allocated a total of €5.5 billion to alleviate the impact of events such as earthquakes, forest fires and flooding in 24 countries. In principle, the EUSF can currently provide funding in three cases: a **major disaster** (total direct damage exceeds €3 billion or 0.6 % of gross national income (GNI) of the country involved); a **regional disaster** (total direct damage exceeds 1.5 % of regional gross domestic product (GDP)); and in cases where a country is affected by the same disaster as a **neighbouring eligible country**. To speed up the relief effort, eligible countries are also entitled to receive advance payments, introduced under a 2014 [reform](#) of the Fund and specifically called for by a 2013 Parliament [resolution](#). As funds may only be granted on the basis of a request for aid, countries must submit an application to the European Commission within 12 weeks of the first damage, which the Commission has six weeks to consider. If approved, the Commission then suggests a specific amount of aid, which must be endorsed by Parliament and the Council.

European Commission proposal

To allow the Fund to provide the financial support needed to tackle the coronavirus crisis, the Commission [proposes](#) enlarging its scope to cover major public health emergencies, which would extend eligible operations to include assistance to the population in the event of health crises, as well as measures to limit the spread of an infectious disease. It also proposes raising the level of advance payments for individual disasters of all categories up to 25 % of the expected EUSF contribution, up to a maximum of €100 million, a significant increase on the current limits of 10 % and €30 million. As it is difficult to estimate the direct damage of major public health emergencies, the Commission proposes instead to take account of the financial burden on countries' budgets. The proposal provides that, in the case of a major public health emergency, countries would be eligible for funding when the public financial burden due to public health emergency measures exceeds €1.5 billion or 0.3 % of GNI of the country involved, i.e. half that applicable to natural disasters. In total, up to €800 million could be available under the EUSF in 2020.

European Parliament position

Aiming to ensure the measures are in place as soon as possible, the Regional Development Committee (REGI) [triggered](#) the urgent procedure under [Rule 163](#) of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, referring the proposal without amendment directly to the plenary (thus without a report from the REGI committee). With EU ambassadors [approving](#) the proposal without amendment on 18 March, Parliament stands [prepared](#) to vote on the proposal, by e-mail exceptionally, during the 26 March plenary session.

First reading without committee report (Rule 163): [2020/0044\(COD\)](#); Committee responsible: REGI.

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PE 649.345– March 2020



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